

## **Carpocratism Philosophical Magic**

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### **Abstract**

This paper deals with the “magic” of the Carpocratians, who, according to Irenaeus of Lyon, believed in the Platonic tripartite nature of the soul. The Carpocratian approach to philosophical magic is probably derived from Neoplatonic ideas popular during the first centuries of the Common Era. The Carpocratians, a second-century Christian Gnostic group, believed Yeshua was a soul personality like all other people, but because of his “spiritualization,” he reached the state of the “philosophical magician.” He did not lose his memory while “staying with his Father” (while he was in the eternal sphere before his next incarnation) and, according to Irenaeus, despised the creators (angels) of the world during the ascension of the soul, a Hermetic and Neoplatonic notion. In addition, as the Christ, Yeshua overcame all emotions and passions. That is, according to the Neoplatonic tripartite nature of the soul, he overcame the emotional part of himself in favor of the spirit. This ascent gave him magical abilities such as healing and prophecy. The Carpocratians believed that each soul can achieve what Christ achieved. Ceremonial and heavenly magic was practiced by the Carpocratians, but their main goal was to achieve the complete spiritualization of the soul or the attainment of Christ Consciousness. To analyze Carpocratian magic, it is useful to use the theories of other magicians like Agrippa von Nettesheim or Iamblichus, because their ideas improve our limited understanding of the text by the Early Church Writer Irenaeus whose basic interest in the Carpocratians was heresiology. Finally, this analysis of how magic was applied by the Carpocratians could contribute to a better understanding of their philosophy.

Keywords: Gnosticism, Irenaeus, Iamblichus, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Magic, Carpocrates, Carpocratians

### **La magie philosophique des Carpocratians**

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#### **Résumé**

Cet article traite de la « magie » des Carpocratians, qui, selon Irénée de Lyon, croyaient en la nature tripartite platonicienne de l'âme. L'approche carpocratienne de la magie philosophique est probablement dérivée de concepts néoplatoniciens populaires au cours des premiers siècles de notre ère. Les Carpocratians, un groupe gnostique chrétien du deuxième siècle, supposaient que Yeshoua était une personnalité animique tout comme tous les autres humains, mais qu'à cause de sa « spiritualisation », il avait atteint un état de « magicien philosophique ». Il n'aurait pas perdu sa mémoire en « restant auprès de son Père » (alors qu'il était dans la sphère éternelle avant son

incarnation) et, selon Irénée, il méprisait les créateurs (anges) du monde lors de l'ascension de l'âme, ce qui est une notion Hermétique et Néoplatonicienne.

De plus, étant le Christ, Yeshoua fut en mesure de surmonter toutes les émotions et les passions. Autrement dit, selon la nature tripartite néoplatonicienne de l'âme, il put surmonter sa propre sphère émotionnelle en faveur de la spirituelle. Cette ascension lui octroya des capacités magiques telles la guérison et la prophétie. Les Carpocratians croyaient que chaque âme peut réaliser ce que le Christ a accompli. Ils pratiquaient la magie cérémonielle et céleste, mais leur but principal était d'atteindre la spiritualisation complète de l'âme, à savoir l'obtention de la Conscience Christique.

Pour analyser la magie carpocratienne, il est utile de recourir aux théories d'autres magiciens comme Agrippa de Nettesheim ou Jamblique, car leurs idées améliorent notre compréhension limitée du texte d'Irénée, un écrivain de l'Église primitive, dont l'intérêt fondamental pour les Carpocratians était l'hérésiologie. Enfin, cette analyse de la façon dont les Carpocratians affrontaient la magie pourrait contribuer à une meilleure compréhension de leur philosophie.

Mots-clés : Gnosticisme, Irénée, Jamblique, Agrippa de Nettesheim, Magie, Carpocrate, Carpocratians.

## **Magia Filosófica de Carpocratiana**

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### **Resumen**

Este artículo trata de la "magia" de los Carpocratianos, quienes, según Ireneo de Lyon, creían en la naturaleza tripartita Platónica del alma. El enfoque Carpocratiano de la magia filosófica probablemente se deriva de las ideas Neoplatónicas populares durante los primeros siglos de la Era Común. Los Carpocratianos, un grupo Gnóstico Cristiano del siglo II, creían que Yeshua era una personalidad del alma como todas las demás personas, pero debido a su "espiritualización", alcanzó el estado del "mago filosófico". No perdió la memoria mientras "permanecía con su Padre" (mientras estaba en la esfera eterna antes de su próxima encarnación) y según Ireneo, despreció a los creadores (ángeles) del mundo durante la ascensión del alma, una noción Hermética y Neoplatónica. Además, como el Cristo, Yeshua superó todas las emociones y pasiones. Es decir, según la naturaleza tripartita Neoplatónica del alma, superó la parte emocional de sí mismo a favor del espíritu. Este ascenso le dio habilidades mágicas como curación y profecía. Los Carpocratianos creían que cada alma puede lograr lo que Cristo logró. Los Carpocratianos practicaban la magia ceremonial y celestial, pero su objetivo principal era lograr la espiritualización completa del alma o el logro de la Conciencia Crística. Para analizar la magia Carpocratiana, es útil utilizar las teorías de otros magos como Agrippa von Nettesheim o Iamblichus, porque sus ideas mejoran nuestra comprensión limitada del texto del escritor de la Iglesia Primitiva Ireneo, cuyo interés básico en los Carpocratianos era la Herejología. Finalmente, este análisis de cómo la magia fue aplicada por los Carpocratianos podría contribuir a una mejor comprensión de su filosofía.

Palabras clave: Gnosticismo, Ireneo, Iamblichus, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Magia, Carpócrates, Carpocratianos

## **Magia Filosófica do Carpocracianismo**

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### **Resumo**

Este artigo trata da “magia” dos Carpocracianos (ou Carpocratas), que, de acordo com Irineu de Lyon, acreditavam na teoria platônica da natureza tripartite da alma. A abordagem carpocraciana da magia filosófica é provavelmente derivada de ideias neoplatônicas populares durante os primeiros séculos da Era Comum. O Carpocracianismo, formado por um grupo gnóstico cristão do segundo século, acreditava que Yeshua era uma personalidade-alma como todas as outras pessoas, mas devido a sua “espiritualização”, atingiu o estado de “mago filosófico”. Ele não perdeu a memória enquanto “ficava com seu Pai” (enquanto estava na esfera eterna antes de sua próxima encarnação) e, de acordo com Irineu, desprezou os criadores (anjos) do mundo durante a ascensão da alma, uma noção hermética e neoplatônica. Além disso, sendo o Cristo, Yeshua superou todas as emoções e paixões. Ou seja, de acordo com a teoria neoplatônica da natureza tripartite da alma, ele superou a parte emocional de si mesmo em favor do espírito. Essa ascensão lhe deu habilidades mágicas, como cura e profecia. Os Carpocracianos acreditavam que toda alma poderia alcançar o que Cristo alcançou. A magia cerimonial e celestial era praticada pelos Carpocracianos, mas seu principal objetivo era alcançar a espiritualização completa da alma ou a obtenção da Consciência Crística. Para analisar a magia Carpocraciana, é útil valer-se das teorias de outros magos como Agrippa von Nettesheim ou Jâmblico, porque suas ideias aperfeiçoam nossa compreensão limitada do texto do Escritor da Igreja Primitiva Irineu, cujo interesse básico nos Carpocracianos era a heresiologia. Finalmente, essa análise de como a magia foi aplicada pelos Carpocracianos poderia contribuir para uma melhor compreensão de sua filosofia.

Palavras-chave: Gnosticismo, Irineu, Jâmblico, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Magia, Carpócrates, Carpocracianos

## **Die Magie der Karpokratianische Philosophie**

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### **Zusammenfassung**

Diese Abhandlung ergründet die „Magie“ der Karpokratianen. Gemäß Irenäus von Lyon glaubten sie in der Dreiteilung der Seele. Die Annäherung der Karpokratianischen Philosophie zur philosophischen Magie beruht vermutlich auf das neoplatonische Konzept, das während des 1. Jahrhunderts unserer Zeitrechnung sehr populär war. Die Karpokratianen waren eine gnostisch-christliche Gemeinschaft aus dem zweiten Jahrhundert und glaubten, dass Joschuah eine gewöhnliche menschliche Seelenpersönlichkeit war. Seine „Vergeistigung“ erlaubte ihm aber die Ebene des „philosophischen Magiers“ zu erreichen. „Wenn er bei seinem Vater verweilte“ (während seinem Aufenthalt in der Dimension der Ewigkeit, bevor er sich wieder

inkarnieren sollte) blieb sein Gedächtnis intakt. Gemäß Irenäus hat er beim Aufsteigen der Seele die Erbauer (Engel) der Welt, ein hermetischer und neoplatonischer Begriff, verachtet. Ferner hat Josuah als Christus alle Emotionen und Leidenschaften überwunden. Dies bedeutet, dass er, im Sinne der neoplatonischen Dreiteilung der Seele, den emotionalen Teil zu Gunsten des Geistes überwand. Dieser Aufstieg verlieh ihm magische Fähigkeiten wie Heilen und Prophezeien. Die Karpokratianen glaubten, dass jede Seele das was Christus erreicht hat auch erreichen könnte. Die Karpokratianen praktizierten zeremonielle und himmlische Magie. Dennoch war ihr Hauptziel, die komplette Spiritualisierung der Seele oder das Christus Bewusstsein zu erlangen. Die Theorien anderer Magier wie Agrippa von Nettesheim oder Iamblichus helfen uns die Magie der Karpokratianen besser zu verstehen. So erlauben ihre Ideen uns, die Texte des frühchristlichen Autors Irenäus, der sich grundsätzlich für die Häresie bei den Karpokratianer interessierte, besser zu verstehen. Schließlich könnte die Philosophie der Karpokratianer durch diese Analyse ihrer angewandten Magie besser verstanden werden.

Schlüsselwörter: Gnostizismus, Irenäus, Iambichus, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Magie, Karpokratius, Karpokratianen

## Introduction

We know that the Carpocratians lived in the second and third century of the Common Era. From the writings of the Early Church Writer Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 130 - 200 CE), it is not exactly possible to deduce the location of where the Carpocratians lived. However, we have some indications. Clement of Alexandria (150 - 215 CE),<sup>1</sup> who wrote about Epiphanes, the son of Carpocrates, told us a little more about their origins. Carpocrates' mother's name was Alexandria, and she came from Kefalonia in Greece. Clement said of Carpocrates that he descended from the area of Alexandria in Egypt, perhaps in reference to the hermetic and gnostic aspects of Carpocratian philosophy. Epiphanes lived in "Same" (Samos Kefalonia) and was worshiped there as "Divine." Clement also spoke of the books of Epiphanes, "which are available." It was said that Epiphanes was introduced to Platonic philosophy by his father Carpocrates, and that his philosophy was derived from the so-called "monadic gnosis" (direct Knowledge of the One or Divine derived by some early Christian sects from Greek philosophy). The sect of the Carpocratians developed out of this belief in the human capacity to experience monadic gnosis.

Women were by no means excluded from the philosophical or social life of the Carpocratians. Irenaeus mentions Marcellina.<sup>2</sup> She was a representative of the Carpocratian philosophy and came to Rome during the Roman episcopate of Anicetus (from 154 - 167 CE) and spread the teachings of the Carpocratians there. According to Clement, the Carpocratian way of life was shaped entirely by libertinism and antinomianism (a view that rejects moral, religious or social laws and suggests that goodness flows naturally from Within). Marcellina's "philosophy of free love," if we believe Clement of Alexandria, was very far from the social norms of the time.<sup>3</sup>

To better understand the Carpocratian philosophy, it is helpful to know something of how "magic" was understood in that time period. Many ancient texts discuss the concept of magic. For example, in one of the most extensive studies of magic and Gnosticism carried out by Attilio Mastrocinque,<sup>4</sup> he posits that the Gnostics borrowed the term magic from the Chaldeans,<sup>5</sup> who

assumed divinities had an influence on religious rites. The concept of magic was related to theurgy (θεουργία), thus religious rites were performed by theurgical practitioners called “magicians.” In Neoplatonism, the theurgical point of view was represented most prominently by Iamblichus (ca. 242 - ca. 325 CE). An important difference between Iamblichus and Plotinus (ca. 204 - 270 CE) was that, according to Iamblichus, the human mind was incarnate in the human body rather than transcendent.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Plotinus and Porphyry (ca. 234 – ca. 305 CE) were representatives of a philosophical magic, meaning that they believed that people must advance to gain knowledge of the divine spirit before they can develop magical abilities. That means the soul had to overcome its passions. Healing and prophesy were not as important to Plotinus and Porphyry as to Iamblichus, for example, because their main focus was the ascent to Divinity. For Iamblichus, the ascent of the soul was not possible without spirit-beings because the spirit descends into the body.



Figure 1. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Theodor de Bry, 1645 (National Library of Medicine).

Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486 - 1535) was another representative of a philosophical magic. Like Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus, he assumed the tripartite division of the soul (*mens, anima, corpus* – soul, mind, body). He made a distinction between natural, celestial, and ceremonial magic in the first chapter of *De Occulta Philosophia*: “*quorum primus contineat Magiam naturalem, alter coelestem, tertius ceremonialem*” (*How Magicians Collect Virtues from the Three-fold World is Declared in these Three Books*).<sup>7</sup> However, ultimately Agrippa was more closely aligned with Plotinus and Porphyry, believing that in order to attain magical skills, people had to become completely spiritualized. For Agrippa, philosophical magic is the highest possible magic that can be achieved. In this state, people not only see things in our world that were in the past and are now, but also receive prophecies about things that will be (mantic abilities).<sup>8</sup> The prerequisite for this achievement, however, is that the person has become “completely spiritual.”<sup>9</sup> Such a spiritualized person could heal the sick and bring the dead to life. However, if such persons have not previously submitted to “purification” (κάθαρσις), then they

draw themselves toward judgment.<sup>10</sup> For Agrippa, this philosophical magic is above ceremonial magic, because it does not require any outside influence on people. People know through their minds and can thereby recognize magical things.

This paper aims to examine the magic of the Carpocratians compared with the philosophical and Chaldean concepts of magic. Mastrocinque did not study the magic of the Carpocratians (who were considered Gnostics) in detail. Above all, he did not use the term “philosophical magic”<sup>11</sup> as it was applied by Agrippa in his work. This paper attempts to close this gap in relation to the aforementioned Gnostics. It is not the aim of this paper to discover whether the Carpocratians were the founders of philosophical and theurgical magic or by whom they were influenced in this regard. Agrippa lived, of course, in a later time than the Gnostics, and this paper is not about his conceptual influence but about the equivalence of content. Although we have only very fragmentary references from the Early Church Writers on the Carpocratians, conclusions can be drawn from the very few sources about them that have so far not been drawn from the existing literature. Another aim of this paper is to make an important contribution to the overall understanding of Carpocratian magic and to stimulate further discussions on the philosophy of Carpocratian gnosis.

### **Magic in Neoplatonism**

Magic, as defined here, can be said to start with Pythagoras, the philosopher. Burkert<sup>12</sup> argued that Pythagoras was actually a “magician” who gave people direct contact with divine forces. The teachings of Pythagoras were studied by Iamblichus and Porphyry.<sup>13</sup> Iamblichus<sup>14</sup> also wrote a biography about Pythagoras. There is also no doubt that Pythagoras, like Iamblichus, believed in the reincarnation of souls (μετεμψύχωση). The purification (κάθαρσις) of the soul was one of the main focuses in the life and teachings of Pythagoras. For Pythagoras, however, direct contact with demons and divinities was a prerequisite for prophetic gifts. Music therapy was one of the healing methods used by Pythagoras, which he believed would bring one’s original psychic powers into harmony.<sup>15</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, for example, wrote that the Carpocratians considered Pythagoras to be a great philosopher and magician.<sup>16</sup>

Iamblichus, who had a very precise definition of magic and mantic, lived in a later era than the Carpocratians. Both Iamblichus and Porphyry, like Plotinus, believed in the Platonic tripartite division of the soul into spirit (νοῦς), soul (ψυχή), and body (σώμα). To them, the spirit was that part of the soul that was always connected to the Divine. For Iamblichus, in contrast to Plotinus and Porphyry, spirit and soul would sink entirely into the body. In the work of Plotinus and Porphyry, the mind remained in transcendence.<sup>17</sup> This explains why Iamblichus emphasized the importance of the mantic more than his Neoplatonic predecessors, because mantic ability also did not have its origin in the mental disposition of the person. When predicting things, supernatural divinities would input something into a person from outside that person, and the person would not have been able to grasp that in the process of becoming. Such inspirations (ἐμπνευση) serve the true knowledge (διαπίστωση) of the person.

For Iamblichus, magic (μαγεία) is a broader term than mantic (μαντική). According to Iamblichus,<sup>18</sup> the spiritual soul can do even more. When the soul “lifts up its thoughts of material creation to the divinities,” then it gains the ability to “see” all things of the past and future (the

mantic arts). It then even gains influence on its position in world events. That is, there is room for improvement. In addition, the spiritual soul can heal sick bodies through knowledge of the dream vision. The spiritual soul can also share inventions of the arts. The latter two things are solely attributable to magic. One could interpret being mantic as a sub-concept of magic. The requirements for magic and being mantic are the same for Iamblichus. If the spirit soul succeeds in connecting with the intelligible divinities, then it receives knowledge through which it recognizes the prophecies “of the divine dream vision (θείων ὄνειρον).”<sup>19</sup> Iamblichus distinguishes between divinities and “beings that are not corporeal in themselves.” The spirit soul<sup>20</sup> can grasp both beings. Through this knowledge the soul succeeds in the prophecy about the dream vision. With this form of the mantic, Iamblichus explains how it was possible that the whole army of Alexander (356 - 323 BCE) could be saved through a dream vision, since the army should have been destroyed during the night, according to the philosopher.<sup>21</sup> This example explains the benefits of dream revelations. The difference in magic between Iamblichus and Agrippa von Nettesheim is only marginal because both see the possibility of using ceremonial magic for humans. Agrippa emphasizes, in contrast to Iamblichus, the possibility of spiritual vision (intuition), which leads to “philosophical magic,” where a person can develop magical abilities independently of spiritual beings.

### **Carpocrates and His Scholars**

The magic of the Carpocratians hardly received a mention in the great works on the history of magic. Thorndyke, who wrote the *History of Magic* in several volumes, dedicates only a single paragraph to the Carpocratians and did not clearly establish the existence of Carpocrates.<sup>22</sup> The problem is that the teachings of the Carpocratians are very fragmentary in the writings of Irenaeus and Hippolytus of Rome. But even from the fragmentary explanations of the Early Church Writers, logical conclusions can be drawn about the Carpocratian understanding of magic. This paper attempts to decipher what Carpocratian magic is from the writings of those early texts.

The existence of Carpocrates is not clearly established. Origen refers in *Contra Celsum* to the “Harpocratians.”<sup>23</sup> There are also speculations that the name Harpocratians derives from the Hellenistic Egyptian divinity Horus Harpocrates, and some believe this is why the Gnostic community called themselves Harpocratians. The ancient Egyptian Horus represented the son of Osiris and Isis. In Greco-Roman times this Harpocrates became the sun god, who played a major role in magic.<sup>24</sup> In *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus also does not comment on the person of Carpocrates because, similar to other Gnostic tendencies, the Carpocratians believed in an ungenerated father and that the world was created by angels who are “much lower than the ungenerated Father.”<sup>25</sup> In Christology, this differs significantly from the Basilidians and Valentinians. For the Carpocratians, Christ’s soul is equal to all other people’s souls, only more just. Irenaeus is relatively neutral in his portrayal of the concept of Divinity, Cosmogony, and the Christology of the Carpocratians, considering his heresiological interests. According to Irenaeus, Christ did not lose his memory of himself during his stay with the Father, and after his death, his soul came through the creators of the world and ascended to the Father. Winrich Löhr<sup>26</sup> discussed the meaning of Irenaeus concerning “Christ did not lose his memory during his stay with the Father. . . .” He compared this utterance with the description of the soul of Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. Socrates used a metaphor to explain: “For those that are called immortal, when they

reach the top, pass outside and take their place on the outer surface of the heaven, and when they have taken their stand, the revolution carries them round and they behold the things outside of the heaven.”<sup>27</sup> It follows the thesis of Löhr that the Carpocratians believed in this Platonic metaphor. Perhaps, Yeshua “saw the Father” before his next incarnation on earth and did not forget this vision while incarnated on earth.

Then follows a passage in Irenaeus that directly relates to our topic of magic. At 25.1, he writes: “They further declare, that the soul of Yeshua, although educated in the practices of the Jews, regarded these with contempt, and that for this reason he was endowed with faculties, by means of which he destroyed those passions which dwelt in people as a punishment [for their sins].”<sup>28</sup> This antisemitic statement shows that the Carpocratians were not representatives of the Jewish Torah. They did not believe in original sin in the sense of the Torah.

It is essential for our understanding of Carpocratian philosophy that they believed other souls can be like Christ in that he overcame the passions as a soul. His soul made the ascent to the Divine Source. The Neoplatonic tripartite division of the soul is nowhere explicitly mentioned by Irenaeus and the other Early Church Writers, but the overcoming of passions symbolizes the spiritual part of the soul because the soul, as the second part of the tripartite division, is connected to the passions. This logical conclusion is likely correct, as it was also the basis for Carpocratian magic, which again is not explained in more detail by those Early Church Writers.

Because it was important in the ascension of the soul that it despises the world creators (angels), whoever goes beyond Yeshua in contempt for the latter could also surpass him.<sup>29</sup> This leaves little scope for ceremonial and celestial magic since perfection can be achieved through philosophical magic. Communication with spiritual beings, according to Iamblichus, was not the end goal, because the ascension of the soul was connected with the contempt of these beings. This does not mean that the Carpocratians did not believe in magic in the sense of Iamblichus, but rather they believed that perfection takes place in the ascent of the soul to the spirit. The religious philosophy of the Carpocratians was not completely Christian but also a mixture of Pythagoras and Plato.

The comment by Manucci, “*Confer doctrinam Platonis de praesistentia animarum et de scientia innata in eis,*” is also interesting (“Compare Plato's doctrine of the pre-existence of souls and of the knowledge that is innate in them”).<sup>30</sup> Of course, Irenaeus's writings implied that Carpocrates and his disciples started their philosophy from the Platonic pre-existence of the soul. The Neoplatonic assumption of the tripartite division of the soul into spirit (νοῦς), soul (ψυχή), and body (σῶμα) seems imperative in this context. The passions or emotions (*passiones*) belong to the soul, and this is what Christ overcame. However, for Carpocratians, the mind was the immortal part that has always existed or was pre-existent, and to be the Christ meant to be a healer and prophet. Concerning the theory of the tripartite division of the soul for the Carpocratians, there is an interesting parallel to the apostle Paul. Paul says in Gal. 5:24: “But those who stand with the Mashiah Yeshua have crucified the flesh with passions and desires.” And in Gal. 5:16: “I tell you, walk in spirit and don't yield to longing of the flesh.” In 1 Thes. 5:23 Paul mentions the tripartite division of the soul explicitly: “May the true God [Divinity] of peace sanctify you completely, and may all your soul and spirit and body be blameless for the *Parousia* [Second Coming] of our lord Yeshua Mashiah.” It is thus likely that the Carpocratians



interpreted the mentioned quotations of Paul in the sense of the Neoplatonic tripartite division of the soul. Of course, the Carpocratians lived earlier than Plotinus and his followers. It is beyond the scope of this paper to establish that the theory of the tripartite division of the soul already existed in earlier Platonic philosophy nor is it possible to go further into detail concerning Paul's theory of the tripartite nature of the soul.

### **Reincarnation and Magical Abilities**

In Irenaeus *Contra Haereses* 25.4 there is a reference to the teaching of reincarnation. In the concept of reincarnation, the soul wanders through time via the body and has to go through every action, and only when all actions have been completed is the soul free from incarnations (*transmigrationes*). Irenaeus quotes a parable from Yeshua<sup>31</sup>: “As you go with your opponent to the magistrate, try on the way there to reconcile with him, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the bailiff and the bailiff throw you in jail. I tell you, you will never get out of there until you pay back the last penny.”<sup>32</sup> This parable could be interpreted as the soul's inability to rid itself of the power of the angel (*potestate angelorum*) who made the world. However, when the soul frees itself by having paid off every debt (*reddentes debita*), then the ascent to the spirit or to the Divine is complete.<sup>33</sup> In the case of Yeshua, his soul “remembered” the highest form, the spirit part of the soul. When the soul has reached this state, it no longer has to “wander through the body.”<sup>34</sup>

At this point, the similarity with Agrippa's thesis should be pointed out, according to which the soul rises to spirit through purification (*kartharsis*) and thereby acquires magical abilities. We can then fully agree with Mead<sup>35</sup> that Irenaeus misunderstood the message that the soul must “go through all actions.” Because if the soul had to go through all actions, then every person would have to sink into ineffable horrors. Leisegang<sup>36</sup> shows the obvious similarity of the Carpocratian doctrine with the natural philosophical view of Agrippa von Nettesheim and Paracelsus (1493 - 1541 CE). For both, there is no death, and all dying is rebirth. It follows from what has already been said that the soul that has come to the spiritual state has magical abilities. From the point of view of the Carpocratians, this also means that they despise the rulers of the world (the angels). The emphasis on contempt is not explicitly represented by Agrippa or Iamblichus.

One question is whether the doctrine of justice advocated by the Carpocratians fits in with the doctrine of reincarnation. With regard to justice, the Carpocratians advocate a doctrine that only human law created sin. Irenaeus interpreted this Libertine doctrine of the Carpocratians as follows: “We are saved, indeed, by means of faith and love; but all other things, while in their nature indifferent, are reckoned by the opinion of men — some good and some evil, there being nothing really evil by nature.”<sup>37</sup> Just because people created sin, does not mean, of course, that they have committed a sin, because spiritual knowledge means that people come to the knowledge that they can rid themselves of the burden of incarnations through a sinless life. When the last penny has been paid, the liberation has succeeded and the person has mantic and/or healing abilities. Carpocratian libertinism does not contradict the doctrine of reincarnation or philosophical magic.

Irenaeus raised the issue of magic, sorcery, and dream visions in *Contra Haereses* Chapter 25.3 when he wrote: “They practice also magical arts and incantations; philters, also, and love-

potions; and have recourse to familiar spirits, dream-sending demons, and other abominations, declaring that they possess power to rule over, even now, the princes and formers of this world.”<sup>38</sup> Since Irenaeus has a purely heresiological interest in the Carpocratians, he does not distinguish between magic, sorcery, ghost appearances, and dream visions. Iamblichus called it “θεῖων ὄνειρον” (divine dream vision). The “divine dreams” did not have to come from higher spiritual beings; they also came from the spiritual part of the soul. Nevertheless, it becomes clear at this point that the Carpocratians believed in and practiced ceremonial magic such as incantations and love potions.

The Christological conception of the Carpocratians, according to which Christ as a soul had overcome the powers of creators and darkness, shows that the path to healing and perfection can be found through philosophical magic. Ceremonial and heavenly magic can be helpful in the ascension process, but the main goal of the Carpocratians was “philosophical magic” in the sense of the conceptual definition of Agrippa von Nettesheim.

## **Conclusion**

The Carpocratians, who followed every Gnostic current, taught the obvious tripartite division of the soul into spirit, soul, and body. To them, people who succeeded in becoming free from all sins were spiritualized, that is, they found the spirit in themselves and let all passions of the soul fall away. Linked to this concept was the doctrine of reincarnation, which Irenaeus testified as being of importance to the Carpocratians. Through purification (katharsis), a person could escape the cycle of rebirths and in this way also acquire magical abilities, such as healing or the mantic arts. The Carpocratians held a similar conception of magic as Agrippa von Nettesheim. Their views were also in agreement with Iamblichus that magic can be practiced through the ceremonial invocation of spirits, but the ultimate goal was to free the human soul from the influence of angels (world creators) so that it could rid itself of the chain of rebirths. Irenaeus emphasized that the Carpocratians believed that Yeshua despised the creators of the world and that this laid the foundation for his abilities.

Ultimately, our knowledge of the followers of Carpocrates is limited to the fragmentary writings of a few Early Church Writers in the centuries after the life of Yeshua. These limited references were designed to warn early Christians of the dangers of heresy. However, it is hoped that readers today will better appreciate the spiritual philosophy of the Carpocratians that all might achieve Christ Consciousness.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 2, 5. It was cited from *The Library of Christian Classics: Volume II, Alexandrian Christianity: Selected Translations of Clement and Origine* with introduction and notes by John Ernest Leonard Oulton and Henry Chadwick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Gegen die Häresien* (München: Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, 1. Reihe, Band 3, 1912), I, 25, 6. Irenaeus mentioned Marcellina: “Others of them employ outward marks, branding their disciples inside the lobe of the right ear. From among these also arose Marcellina, who came to Rome under [the episcopate of] Anicetus, and, holding these doctrines, she led multitudes astray.”

<sup>3</sup> Clement talked in the *Stromata* about free love: “These then are the doctrines of the excellent Carpocratians. These, so they say, and certain other enthusiasts for the same wickednesses, gather together for feasts (I would not call their meeting an Agape), men and women together. After they have sated their appetites (‘on repletion Cypris, the goddess of love, enters,’ as it is said), then they overturn the lamps and so extinguish the light that the shame of their adulterous “righteousness” is hidden, and they have intercourse where they will and with whom they will. After they have practiced community of use in this love-feast, they demand by daylight of whatever women they wish that they will be obedient to the law of Carpocrates – it would not be right to say the law of God. Such, I think, is the law that Carpocrates must have given for the copulations of dogs and pigs and goats” (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 2, 10).

<sup>4</sup> Attilio Mastrocinque, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 24* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Pfeffer, *Studien zur Mantik in der Philosophie der Antike* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1976), 132.

<sup>7</sup> Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Occulta philosophia. Libri Tres* (Cologne, 1533), I, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 6. The quotation in the Latin text: “*Hinc provenit, quod nos in natura constituti, ea quae supra natura sunt cognoscimus, ac inferiora queque intelligimus, atque non modo ea quae sunt, & quae fuerunt, verumetiam eorum quae mox fiet & quae longe post futura sunt, assidue recipimus oracula.*”

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*; At the end of the sixth chapter in the third book Agrippa states: “*sed nemo potest operari per puram & solam religionem, nisi qui totus factus est intellectualis.*”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> The term “philosophical magic” does not exist in literature, but it seems to be the most suitable for the term as defined by Agrippa.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Burkert, *Weisheit und Wissenschaft: Pythagoras, Philolaos und Plato*. Band 10 von Erlanger Beiträge zur Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft (Nürnberg: Verlag H. Carl, 1962), 86-142.

<sup>13</sup> Porphyrius, *Vie de Pythagore, Lettre à Marcella* (Paris: Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1982); Bernd Kollmann, *Jesus und die Christen als Wundertäter: Studien zu Magie, Medizin und Schamanismus in Antike und Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 1996), 89-90.

<sup>14</sup> Iamblichus, *Pythagoras. Legende – Lehre – Lebensgestaltung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Kollmann, *Jesus und die Christen als Wundertäter: Studien zu Magie, Medizin und Schamanismus in Antike und Christentum*, 89-91.

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Gegen die Häresien*, I, 25,6.

<sup>17</sup> Pfeffer, *Studien zur Mantik in der Philosophie der Antike*, S. 132.

<sup>18</sup> Iamblichus, *Über die Geheimlehren (De Mysteriis)* (Leipzig: Theosophisches Verlagshaus, 1922), III, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 3.

<sup>20</sup> Iamblichus also says reason (Iamblichus, *Über die Geheimlehren*, III, 3).

<sup>21</sup> In note 42, the editor Hopfner quotes Strabo, who described the matter somewhat differently. Ptolemy was critically wounded and in a dream Alexander saw a man who showed him a root and a stem. He should grind this up and place it on the wounded man. Alexander looked for the root and found it when he awoke from the dream. The barbarians then submitted to Alexander because they believed he had discovered the cure (Iamblichus, *Über die Geheimlehren*, 209, note 42).

<sup>22</sup> Lynn Thorndyke, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*. Volume 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 371-372.

<sup>23</sup> Origenes, *Contra Celsum* (München: Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, 1. Reihe, Band 52 und 53, 1926), V, 62. See also: Heinz Kraft, “Gab es einen Gnostiker Karpokrates?” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 8 (1952): 434.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Leisegang, *Die Gnosis*, 7. Auflage, (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1985), 257.

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- <sup>25</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Gegen die Häresien* (München: Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, 1. Reihe, Band 3, 1912), I, 25,1.
- <sup>26</sup> Winrich A. Löhr, "Karpokratianisches," *Vigiliae Christianae* 49, No. 1 (1995): 25.
- <sup>27</sup> Plato, *Phaidros*, 247b-247c; Löhr, "Karpokratianisches," 25.
- <sup>28</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Contra Haereses: Libri Quinque* (Rom: Lateinisch/Griechisch, 1907), I, 25,1.
- <sup>29</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Gegen die Häresien*, I, 25,2.
- <sup>30</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Contra Haereses: Libri Quinque*, 25,1.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 25,4.
- <sup>32</sup> Luke, 12:58-59.
- <sup>33</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Contra Haereses: Libri Quinque*, I, 25, 4.
- <sup>34</sup> Herbert Liboron, *Die Karpokratianische Gnosis. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Anschauungswelt eines Spätgnostischen Systems* (Leipzig: C & E Vogel, 1938), 41.
- <sup>35</sup> George R. S. Mead, *Die Gnosis. Fragmente eines Verschollenen Glaubens* (Köln: Anaconda Verlag, 2008), 208.
- <sup>36</sup> Leisegang, *Die Gnosis* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1955), 268.
- <sup>37</sup> Irenaeus of Lyon, *Contra Haereses: Libri Quinque*, I, 25, 5.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 25, 3.