

Libiamo ne' lieti calici

**Ancient Near Eastern Studies Presented
to Lucio Milano on the Occasion of his 65th
Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends**

edited by
Paola Corò, Elena Devecchi, Nicla De Zorzi,
and Massimo Maiocchi
with the collaboration of Stefania Ermidoro
and Erica Scarpa

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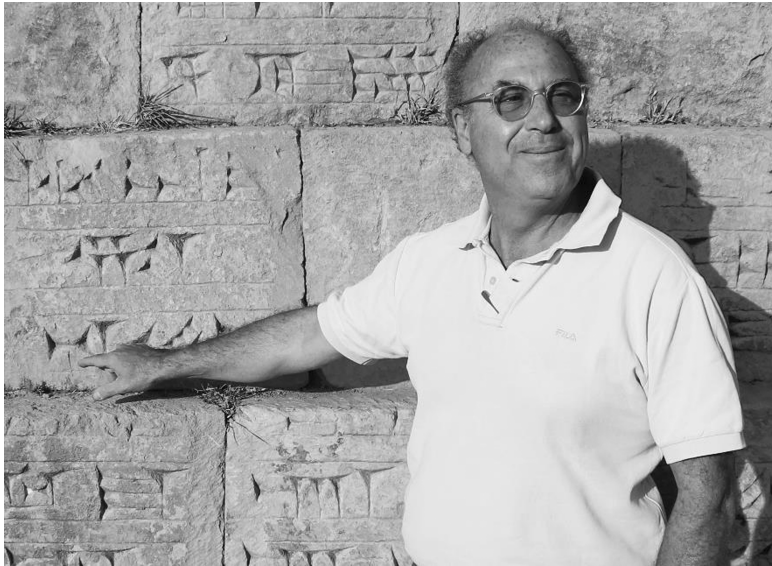
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Lucio at Jerwan (October 2013)

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Foreword

This book celebrates Lucio Milano's many scholarly achievements in the field of Ancient Near Eastern studies. As former pupils of his who have all greatly benefitted from his wide-ranging scholarship, guidance and support, we felt it was time for us to reciprocate by presenting him with this collection of essays from pupils, friends, and colleagues, as a token of our gratitude and affection on the occasion of his 65th birthday. On the other hand, we could also imagine his reaction: "*Oh ragazzi!*... what are we celebrating? It's too early for my retirement!". Our excuse is that in offering the present volume to Lucio at this time, we arbitrarily picked his 65th birthday as one occasion among the many special events that could have been chosen instead. We have no doubt that there will be many other celebrations for our dear friend Lucio in the future.

Although Lucio's Assyriological interests are manifold, we sought to narrow the scope of this volume to topics that over the course of his career have grown particularly close to his heart.

Lucio's wide-ranging work and interests reflect his intellectual formation. He studied Classics at "La Sapienza" University in Rome and graduated *summa cum laude* in 1975 with a thesis on "Viticoltura e enologia nell'Asia anteriore antica", written under the supervision of Mario Liverani. Appointed in 1977 to the Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Studies ("Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente") in Rome, he continued to work at "La Sapienza" University as "ricercatore universitario confermato" (1981–1993) at the Department of History, Archaeology and Anthropology ("Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Archeologiche e Antropologiche dell'Antichità") and as Professor of History of the Ancient Near East (1984–1987) for the post-graduate course in Oriental Studies ("Corso di Specializzazione in Studi Orientali"). In 1993 he moved to "Ca' Foscari" University in Venice as Associated Professor and since 2001 he has held at that university the chair of History of the Ancient Near East as Full Professor.

Lucio's research focuses on the social, economic, and political history of the third millennium BC, with special focus on Syria and northern Mesopotamia, especially Ebla and Tell Beydar, an area on which he has published extensively. His scholarly publications include several text editions and studies on a wide range of topics, which he explores through a multi-faceted approach, ranging from linguistics to prosopography, to digital tools for the study of the Ancient Near East. He is a leading scholar in the history of palaeonutrition, to which he has contributed articles and congress volumes, as a director of research projects and as a supervisor of doctoral theses. Since the early part of his career he has been heavily involved in archaeology as well, participating as an epigraphist in the expeditions to Ebla, Tell Ashara, Tell Mozan, Tell Leilan and Tell Beydar. In addition, he was active between 1997 and 2010 as director of the "Ca' Fosca-

ri” team at the Syro-European archaeological mission of Tell Beydar. Always ahead of his time, he has worked in digital humanities since the early 1980s, taking part in 1982–1983 in the “Project in the Computer Analysis of the Ebla Texts” initiated by G. Buccellati at the University of California, Los Angeles. Since 2010, he has been the chief editor of the project “Ebla Digital Archives” at “Ca’ Foscari” University.

Lucio has not only been a prolific researcher. Over the years, he has invested an enormous amount of time and energy in activities aiming at the divulgation of knowledge on the Ancient Near East to a wider audience, stimulating at the same time pertinent research. All of the undersigned – and many besides us – have benefitted from his inspirational teaching, from general courses for undergraduates to specialized seminars for doctoral and post-doctoral students. He has succeeded in establishing his own “school” of Ancient Near Eastern studies at “Ca’ Foscari” University. The defining characteristic of our “Venetian school” is not a single theme – far be it from Lucio’s mind to impose a single area of specialization on those who study with him – but is rather its *spiritus rector*’s historical methodology and openness to different approaches to elucidating the multifaceted realities of the Ancient Near East. This attitude is exemplified by Lucio’s endeavours under the auspices of the “Advanced Seminar in the Humanities: Literature and Culture in the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece, Rome and the Near East” at the Venice International University, which he has co-organized since 2005. A volume recently published under his editorship, *Il Vicino Oriente antico dalle origini ad Alessandro Magno* (2012), is on its way to becoming a standard manual for Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian history in Italian universities. Mention must also be made of the journal *Kaskal*, founded in 2003, of which Lucio is co-director, and which has grown into an internationally recognized and increasingly influential forum for the multi-disciplinary study of Ancient Near Eastern cultures.

International recognition for Lucio’s scientific achievements is reflected in his activities, under various titles, at “Ca’ Foscari” University, as well as at universities outside Italy, such as UCLA, Cornell University, and the École Pratique des Hautes Études.

Lucio’s contagious enthusiasm, gentleness, and wit immediately captivate all those who work with him. Only he – as students, colleagues, and friends have learned – could turn brisk walks with him through the Venetian *calli* towards Venice’s railway station into unique opportunities to discuss Assyriology and the vagaries of life. Moreover, his advice is delivered not only in this peripatetic form, but also in the many toasts offered during the numerous informal dinner parties held at his home for welcoming visiting scholars, or for celebrating shared successes.

All this is clearly reflected, we believe, in the contributions to this volume, which stand as a token of appreciation, certainly of Lucio Milano as an out-

standing scholar, but also, and perhaps more significantly, of Lucio as a *Mensch*.

Thus, once more, let us stand and raise our glasses to celebrate Lucio's 65th birthday. *Salute!*

Venice, Turin, Vienna
March 30th, 2016

Paola Corò
Elena Devecchi
Nicla De Zorzi
Massimo Maiocchi

Food for a Ritual Identity*

Sabina Crippa

In any treaty of Western cuisine, shellfish are illustrated in a specific chapter listing the qualities of clawed and spiny lobsters, shrimps, prawns, crayfish and other species; however, in the eyes of the fishermen of the Indian Ocean or the Gulf of Guinea, what we call shellfish are considered useless and annoying creatures cluttering up fishing nets, only deserving to be thrown back into the sea (they are nameless; the Somali term *isgaanbe* being a loanword borrowed from the Italian *scampi*).¹

This reflection by G.R. Cardona clearly refers to the fact that each culture has a structure of categorizations aimed at understanding and interpreting reality. Food and nutrition have long been identified as one of the most effective and relevant keys to interpretation, highlighting the existence of symbolic systems that stem from the links between food traditions and social conventions. More particularly, food traditions contribute to the construction of cultural identity.²

Classifications of reality often – if not always – reflect the structure of a community's social body; among the different ritual contexts elaborated by each culture, nutrition is undoubtedly a privileged one. Indeed, through nutrition we enter into the domain of (permanent or temporary) prohibitions, differentiated according to caste or sex or temporary status, or other social variables such as simple class membership or income.

We have specifically chosen the privileged field of nutrition in order to question a fundamental aspect in Ancient Mediterranean cultures namely, the construction of a ritual identity. It is well known that any figure of ritual practitioner is characterized by distinctive features that can vary significantly depending on the priorities of each culture, and the purposes assigned to these figures with the aim of addressing or solving critical issues of the entire community.³

However, explicit definitions of (or explanations related to) the multiple figures of the ritual practitioner are rarely found in ancient sources. In our analysis, the choice of food ingredients, their use and handling as well as episodes of imaginary commensality between human and divine will become valuable indica-

* For a general overview on the topic treated in this article, see Audollent 1904; Borgeaud 2004; Brelich 2001; Crippa 2014; Ducorthial 2003; Frankfurter 1997; Graf 1994; Jakson 1950; Koenig 1994; Scheid 2005; Tambiah 1969; Xella 2006.

¹ See Cardona 1993.

² See, *e.g.*, Milano 2001; *id.* 2004.

³ See, *e.g.*, Brelich 2001 and Xella 2006.

tors of ritual aspects and figures that are difficult to understand and often overlooked due to their apparent inconsistency with the set of sources.⁴

Our analysis will encompass a list of sources selected on the basis of their multicultural and ritual richness, and their undisputed novelty as “collective” sources of rituals of various intertwining areas and cultures. In particular, the second century AD, a period which is also called “Encyclopaedism” *ante litteram*, despite the difficulties in interpreting these sources can highlight new elements brought about by encounters between different (and often conflicting) cultures.

As an example, in their quality of “cross-cultural texts” – according to J. Dieleman’s definition⁵ – the *Greek Magical Papyri* (usually abbreviated *PGM*)⁶ reflect a multicultural society where the Egyptians dialogue with a new international culture. These scribes or scholars of different languages and cultures manipulate and develop⁷ new procedures introducing Greek, Roman or other features in order to give them a new physiognomy, adapted to the public, to the power⁸ implicit in the rituals and to the new status of practitioner.⁹ In their quality of written texts the *PGM*, conceived as real manuals, practical vademecums for implementing rites, stimulate a reflection on issues related to the handing down and codifying of knowledge.

These documents¹⁰ include treaties, collections of recipes and instructions, a library of books of “magic”, alchemy and texts related to different types of knowledge (medicine, astrology, phytotherapy). If this coexistence of different types of knowledge can be considered a common feature of other encyclopaedi-

⁴ On sacrifice, see in particular Grottanelli 1999.

⁵ Dieleman 2005, 294.

⁶ K. Preisendanz (reviewed by A. Henrichs), *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, Stuttgart, 1973–1974 (original edition: *Papyri Graecae Magicae, die griechischen Zauber Papyri*, Leipzig – Berlin, 1928 (I), 1931 (II), 1941 (III) = *PGM*). The corpus of the *PGM* represents a unique source for the study of magic rituals in the Ancient Mediterranean. It is an extraordinary and extremely complex collection of texts of different origins, also diverging in writing-, editing- and content-wise, whose final rendering was completed between the first and fourth century AD. A history of these texts is offered in Brashear 1995, 3380–3684.

⁷ According to Nock 1972, 176–194, these were “working copies” used by the practitioners, which included modifications and suggestions from other sources.

⁸ Gordon 2002, 71.

⁹ It is quite possible that several manipulations of the texts were due to the need to establish a new status of practitioner, in order to contrast the negative connotations of Greek literature which, however, had always been absent from the Egyptian tradition. See Gordon 2002, 71 and in particular Frankfurter 2002, 159–178.

¹⁰ These include small pieces dedicated to the preparation of an amulet, as well as big ones like the “Papyrus of Paris”, including more than 3000 verses integrating several different rites.

as of that time, it is interesting to note the peculiar combination of different types of knowledge in the *PGM*.

In a period marked by several important cultural and religious changes, particularly between a local Egyptian tradition and a Greek-Roman “international” culture, the *PGM* represent a new dynamic codifying of rituals.¹¹

Another significant example of this period could be the collection named *Nekepsos* (which for some authors would simply be a Greek transcription of the name of the Pharaoh of the 26th Dynasty). It is under this name that as early as the second century BC several writings began to circulate, which testified the development of a science of astrology combining Greek astronomy with the Egyptian-Babylonian astrological traditions. These texts had a great influence throughout the Mediterranean until the Middle Ages. Reading these texts, we notice that not only do they include astronomical knowledge, but also information on parts of the human body and related diseases, for which different remedies were provided.

In the first century AD the work of *Nekepsos* was still available in the Library of Alexandria, as mentioned by Doctor Thessalos of Tralles: “(...) I discovered a book by Nekepsos containing 24 ways to treat the whole body and all its diseases according to the zodiac signs and using stones and plants. I was astounded by the extraordinary breadth of this Work”.¹²

These texts have very different functions: ranging from astronomy to medicine and phytotherapy, they represent veritable encyclopaedias that cannot be reduced to catalogues of instructions aimed at forcing the gods, least of all through food. Contrary to what is often assumed, and sometimes asserted, the different foods are not ubiquitous, but appear in specific ritual contexts: in some cases, they consist of requirements concerning the behaviour of the practitioner, in other cases, of solid or liquid foods required by the ceremonial of the divinity whose help is looked for. We can also mention, as in the case of the Papyrus of Paris (*PGM IV*) dated between third and fourth century AD, the botanical¹³ or mineral context that represents an important feature of the ritual “ceremonies” of the *PGM*.

The ritual rules required to get in touch with the god Helios-RA include the request for an assistant, followed by the preparation of the scarab and of a plant, the *kentritis*. As for the scarab, the ritual practice involves the grinding of *loto-*

¹¹ Concerning this dynamic feature displayed in the completion of a ritual usually defined as repetitive and conservative, it seems interesting to quote the definition by V. Valeri (1981, 229): “The rite does not appear primarily as a code aimed at transmitting pre-existing messages, but rather as a mechanism allowing one to obtain new information. Indeed, it works as an aggregate potentially enabling knowledge creation”.

¹² For an analysis of this text, *Nekepsos*, see in particular Fournet 2000, 61–71.

¹³ Cf. Gordon 2007.

*metra*¹⁴ and honey to make a cake that will cause the scarab's death. This latter is then consecrated by throwing it into a bowl of rose oil.

The specific ritual prescribes the picking of the *kenrītis*, whose juice is extracted and mixed with honey and myrrh. Then the eight-letter name of the divinity must be written on a leaf that will be kept and licked in order to achieve protection and finally thrown into rose water (vv. 778–798). The next step is a detailed description of the origin and use of this plant (vv. 798–813): the *kenrītis* grows, from the month of Pauni, in the regions of the black earth (Egypt, in Coptic language); it looks like the erect verbena¹⁵ and can be recognized by dipping in its juice the black tip of an ibis wing. It is thought to be found near the plant *besas besados botanes* – a sort of wild asparagus, similar to wild beet.

It is interesting to note that this plant can also be used to produce the ink which will be used to write the name that is then swallowed.

It may be added that at the beginning of this recipe (vv. 467–485), the text focuses on the importance of juices extracted from plants. Rose juice and rose oil are considered very pure: oily matter, volatile and fragrant, to be found on the surface of rose water produced by distillation of rose petals.¹⁶

Since plant juice is often the most important element among the foods mentioned in the ritual, the way in which plants are used¹⁷ – cooked, marinated, smoked, applied as ointments according to Mediterranean pharmacopoeia in the widest sense – is strictly defined and explained in all sets of rules.

For instance, when picking a plant, the pickers need to be in a state of purity, avoiding wearing knots and belts (as also mentioned in some literary sources); songs, prayers and spells are offered to both plants and the divinities, following sprinkling with water from different sources. *PGM IV* (vv. 286–295) also lists the different steps: use the plant before dawn, pronounce verbal rituals, ask the plant to carry out its role, pick it with bare hands or with a metal tool. Cases may vary widely. The choice of a specific metal depends on the type of ritual (precious metals are preferred).

We obviously need to mention that it is very common to find *tabulae defixionum* transcribed on papyrus, attesting the practice of graphofagia – a very common phenomenon in the ancient Mediterranean, still to be found now. As in the case of Egyptian statuettes covered with inscriptions of magical texts, it could be a non-linguistic use of writing for therapeutical aims. Or in other tradi-

¹⁴ See Plinius *Naturalis Historia* XXII, 56 and the comment of Delatte 1961.

¹⁵ The glossaries of antiquity merely describe similarities with verbena (*Verbena officinalis* L.) due to its straight stem. Even if the commentators call verbena *hiera botane*, the only sentence they mention is this one of *PGM IV*. *Kenrītis* is not mentioned in any modern or contemporary text of botanical science.

¹⁶ Blondel 1889, 98.

¹⁷ See the recent work of Haro Sanchez 2004, 43–61.

tions, such as the Tibetan one, in which texts devoid of literal meaning are swallowed in order to treat an illness – or again, tablets or pieces of skin are eaten, by which the ritual practitioner (or an initiate) acquires a specific and instrumental knowledge.¹⁸

According to our sources, such behaviours range from drinking or licking the letters of a spell on an amulet or mummy fragment, to swallowing zoomorphic figurines made of flour of gods such as Hermes, Selene, etc. For example, in the “Eighth Book of Moses”,¹⁹ these figurines are made from flour, one bull-faced, one goat-faced, one ram-faced, each of them standing on the celestial pole and holding Egyptian flails. In other cases,²⁰ you can conjure up water, wine, bread, oil, vinegar and whatever you want to eat (except fish and pork, forbidden by the Egyptian tradition). The total appropriation through ingestion of these elements – tablets or smoked statuettes or simple sequences of letters²¹– gives rise to acts of instant appropriation of one or more divinities’ knowledge or, more simply, of a recipe’s content. In this case, foods are identified with the “objects” expressly made for a specific ritual.

The sources prescribe a detailed list of behaviours and foods that the ritual practitioner must comply with in order to ensure the success of a ritual act or ceremony; in this way he/she will establish a contact with the divinity and successfully complete the required procedure.

In order to establish this kind of contact, the practitioner establishes an invisible dialogue with the divinity, implying his full subordination to the authority of different divinities, in the absence of which any “magic” ritual would fail. The requirements involve very complex rules of conduct: bodily, gestural and especially verbal codes.

These rules require the practitioner – or the person who will use the recipe (it should be noted that these recipes were copies, commissioned and reiterated by constantly changing people) – to ensure the purity both of his/her body and of the ritual location symbolically allowing access to the divine.

A few examples are provided below. The most common requirements concern the prohibition of eating (*PGM I*, 104–195; *PGM IV*, 3079–3080) and the prohibition of sexual intercourse a few (usually three or seven) days before the ritual action (*PGM III*, 304; *PGM I*, 44). It is also necessary to refrain from any ritually impure action – such as contact with the dead and/or pregnant women (*PGM I*, 290). In the same Papyrus, the authority of god Apollon forbids – as far as *praxis* is concerned – eating fish and having sexual intercourse. In a

¹⁸ Cardona 1981, 183–188.

¹⁹ Quoted in Graf 1994, 133.

²⁰ *E.g.*, *PGM I*, 96–130.

²¹ Cf. Crippa 2010.

previous rite addressed to the Sun god, abstinence from sexual intercourse is imposed for seven days (*PGM I*, 285–290). These prohibitions are often found together in the same rite. For instance, in *PGM III*, 290–300, the oracular Apollon requires a state of purity involving the ritual practitioner's body (abstain for three days) as well as the oracular tripod (to be covered by a fabric including the inscription of the formula). Before pronouncing the formula, the ritual practitioner will need to dress in white and wear a laurel wreath, to be burned afterwards while singing a paean in honour of the god.

Furthermore, it is recommended dressing in white linen (*PGM 44*; *PGM III*, 305–306) and wearing a laurel wreath (or keeping it beside one's body the night before the ritual).

The prescription of specific behaviours – such as being in a state of purity, or banning some foods – is surely to also be found in other ritual ceremonies in different countries of the Ancient Mediterranean; however, some sources of some encyclopaedic “treaties” illustrating practices which also required the presence of a divinity are particularly significant. Indeed they question us on the particular complexity of the ritual practitioner's composite identity.

These requirements are necessary in order to step into, or “mark” the preliminary access to, a symbolic place from which the practitioner will be able to approach the divine; however, to be able to talk to the divine – the purpose of any ritual – the practitioner would need to reproduce all the divine voices and words. He will need to speak like a divinity.²² The encounter with the divinity is described both in terms of proximity (*PGM III* 496; I, 62; IV 777; VII 505; etc.) and very intimate conversation (*PGM I*, 39–40; II, 33; III, 192–194). This union can be achieved through the appearance of the divinity to the practitioner. The divinities are invited to spend time with the practitioner, relaxing on the same bed:

That's how the Genie will sit next to you, he will announce you mouth to mouth whatever you would need to know and he will be your companion at table and in bed (...) (*PGM*, opening words)

Or else, a prayer is pronounced that will enable the practitioner to access the vision of the divinity (*PGM IV*, 164; I, 76).²³ The practitioner asks the god:

Come to me, Hermes, like the children in their mother's womb (*PGM VIII*, 2)

He asks the deity to grant him the faculty to remember, to stay with him and meet mouth to mouth in a common conversation.

²² *PGM XIII*, 266. See Daniel 1991, 31–81.

²³ See *PGM IV*, 2448–2449.

Thus the practitioner shares the very nature of the gods (*isotheos physis*) (*PGM* IV, 220; I, 78; I, 20; I, 4): he will be prayed to in the same way as gods are (*PGM* I, 190–199; I, 12), his body will be treated as divine and his *pneuma* will not descend into Hades (*PGM* I, 177–180). He must identify himself with one or more divinities who have the same virtue or power:

You are me ... and I am you. Your name is mine and mine is yours, for I am your image.²⁴ I know you, Hermes, and you know me. I am you and you are me (*PGM* VIII, 36, 38, 49; see *PGM* II, 47)²⁵

The ritual procedure more specifically involves drinking, eating and having a *paredro* or assistant, since the ritual practitioner must be able to establish a familiarity between humans and gods, so that they can dine together (the god imposes a series of rituals in which, according to the Egyptian tradition, all foods are allowed except fish). More particularly, foods should be mostly vegetables and old wine (not specified whether pure or mixed with water).

It is important to note that the sources available hitherto do not describe the way the convivial meeting with the gods advocated by the ritual practitioner takes place. This is shown in the short example below.

In *PGM* I, 1–42 the recipe's ritual involves two steps. A first step, in which the ingredients are prepared for the rite: a hawk is drowned in milk, then made into a mummy; next to it are placed pieces of hair and nails, and a pure papyrus on which a short formula is written; then everything is soaked in a mixture of incense and wine.

The completion of this ritual also includes a preparatory step (the practitioner drinks the mixture of milk and honey, takes the hawk into a sanctuary, crowns it and prepares a meal), followed by the hawk's sacrifice;²⁶ when the god appears, this latter and the practitioner eat together. Then the practitioner leaves the place walking barefoot backwards.

This ritual behaviour, and the presence of some substances or materials, induced some authors to interpret the recipes²⁷ as steps of a initiation process, to be understood in the light of other initiation or mystery-related rituals.

²⁴ *PGM* VIII, 36–38.

²⁵ *PGM* VIII, 50.

²⁶ According to Graf 1994, 133, in the Egyptian tradition the act of killing a sacred animal like the hawk plays a symbolic role in the rite structure, allowing the “magician” to leave the human sphere and approach the divine one.

²⁷ In the well-known passage of Plato (*Sophist*, 226), purification is above all the “science of division” which prepares an individual for a special event, and at the same time transforms this event into a sacred one; in the “magic” rituals of Late Antiquity purification can be

For example, libations of water and/or milk and sacrifice of birds may refer either to the Eleusinian Mysteries or to public offers to the Eumenides. In particular, milk plays an essential role in the Orphic tablets of Pelinna and Thuri: the dead becomes a deity through the initiation rite²⁸ of falling into milk.

Conversely, Johnston (2000) considers how, for instance, in *PGM*, 27–29 the sacrificial rite involves some aspects that contradict an initiation ritual: on the one hand, in fact, the edge of the River Nile must be a pure and non-contaminated place – and thus, clean fabrics, new bricks (see *PGM* IV, 172–173; *PGM* XIV, 62–63 and 283); on the other hand, the state of maximum purity is required at the output, when it cannot be attributed to an initiation rite.

According to Johnston, these sources are not referring to an initiation (as suggested by the term *teletè*), rather to rites of completion and/or improvement, to ensure that the object/person is appropriate to further ritual use.²⁹

Other authors are convinced that the set of requirements involving acts of purification are aimed at defining patterns of human behaviour for the construction of a divine identity, the one that would be acquired by the practitioner thanks to these rites and equivalent, in the framework of “magic”, to a role of “divine-human” figure; see for instance Apollonius Magus’ definition of “magician”: he who worships the gods and imitates them in his own life, as did the Persian *magoi*.³⁰

However, it should be noted that these rites are not aimed at achieving deification, rather at ensuring the effectiveness of the “ceremonial” act. It’s not a quest for immortality or the final transformation of the practitioner into a divinity, rather a set of rituals intended at establishing a contact for a successful ritual action.

This aspect, included in the panoply of different forms of discourse – such as *historiolae*, hymns, prayers, oracular consultations – represents an extraordinary laboratory, the pursuit of *communio loquendi cum diis*,³¹ whose power ensures the implementation of any ritual. Indeed, a constant relationship is established between the sphere of competence of each god and the implicit “punitive” intervention, *i.e.* the failure of the ritual action.

Moreover, we would like to highlight some comments by Paul Veyne, based on Artemidorus’ *Key of dreams*. Veyne emphasizes that, in fact, those who had

defined as “one way in which the metaphysical can be made palpable”: see Parker 1983, 18–19. See also Douglas 1970.

²⁸ Graf 1994, 125–137.

²⁹ It would result in a modification of well defined rituals, known to the magician, who would thus play a role of “innovating conservative” of traditional rites.

³⁰ The theme of the deification of the ritual practitioner represents a different issue and is beyond the purpose of this paper. See, for example, Parker 1983, 275–283 and Scarpi 1988.

³¹ Apuleius, *Apologia* XXVI, 6.

the means to offer sacrifices to the gods could also invite them to their table; therefore, a religion would be described in which gods are treated as human beings. These examples are always interpreted as exchanges or real commensalities or again, occasions for meeting. However, these meals did not have anything in common with the Greek-Roman sacrifice. In the Greek *theoxenias*, for example, immortals and mortals have meals separately. Indeed, in this specific case the Greek-Roman anthropomorphism employs a metaphor. Whether they are private or public, *theoxenias* show a metaphoric familiarity with their gods. This familiarity has significant limitations: on the one hand, in this context gods are made even more similar to humans, but on the other, the immortals never reciprocate the invitation: thus there is no exchange, but simply a tribute from humans to gods.

Finally, according to Paul Veyne,³² this metaphorical transposition from the human to the divine order would result in a sort of *theoxenia* which, however, is intended as a diplomatic relationship,³³ an official act between humans and gods, aimed at starting a negotiation between two standards, the human and the divine.

At the level of a historical-religious analysis, the above mentioned (rare) dietary practices that the practitioner, so-called “magician”, asks to share with the divinity suggest an interpretation of these foods as signs and/or distinctive features intended at emphasizing a ritual border – more or less crossable, depending on the context – between human and divine. On a symbolic level, the recipes bring into play a panoply of measures, ingredients and words aimed at looking for divine benevolence and communicating with the divine sphere also in a perspective of commensality.

Furthermore, the examples mentioned above clearly show that the focus is not on the material elements themselves, but rather on a specific and strict sequence of behaviours and gestures performed by the practitioner. This suggests a new interpretation of these sources.

They are of particular interest since, focussing on the ingredients and the ritual practitioner’s gestures, we abstain from repeating preconceived and conventional definitions, and rather highlight the real elements (in particular, foods) and gestures that the sources intended to convey.

More particularly, given the difficulties and endless debates on the role of the so-called “magician”, we consider that an analysis of the diners’ foods and

³² Veyne 2000, 3–42.

³³ When a town celebrates a god’s or a hero’s *theoxenia*, it establishes a relationship of diplomatic *proxenia*, a hospitality arrangement whereby a god is invited and treated as a (public) guest. As Veyne also points out, the lexicon of hospitality and invitation is similar to those used in the town’s Decrees aimed at offering hospitality to ambassadors and inviting them to a joint and public dining table.

behaviours gives the opportunity to reconstruct, at least for the abovementioned examples, the peculiar features allowing (in specific cases or upon request) therapists, doctors, theologians etc. in the Late Antiquity to assume the role of the practitioner and therefore be provided with a ritual identity. These reflections open up new perspectives in order to decipher the “construction” of the identity of any ritual figure.

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