

## Italian versus Eastern Valentinianism?

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### Abstract

Three ancient texts seem to attest to a division between eastern and western Valentinians. Closer analysis of these three texts suggests that such a conclusion would be too hasty. The first text, the title to one of Clement of Alexandria's works, is either unreliable or so specific that it calls into doubt the division. Hippolytus's testimony, the second text, is so laden with problems that it reliably attests to merely the existence of the Eastern Teaching, and possibly to its distinctive doctrinal position concerning the body of Jesus. The third text, by Tertullian, is vague and seems not to refer to an eastern-western division. In sum, the three texts have so many problems that any future efforts to develop a taxonomy of Valentinianism should not begin with this alleged geographical division.

### Keywords

Theodotus, Clement, Hippolytus, Heracleon, Ptolemy, Tertullian

Three and only three ancient sources support the notion that the Valentinian school was divided geographically into Italian and eastern branches. Scholars use these three texts and the geographical distinction they apparently legitimate to classify various Valentinian texts and systems as being either eastern or western.<sup>1</sup> I argue here that such classification is hasty, and that the sources that attest to the so-called Eastern Teaching are too murky to allow this alleged geographical distinction to be the starting point of any taxonomy of Valentinianism. Indeed, as I hope to show, it is too difficult

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<sup>1)</sup> See, e.g., the map in Bentley Layton's *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1987), 268-69, where the names of famous Valentinians are split into two boxes, one marking the eastern side of the map and the other, the western.

to say exactly what kind of relationship the Eastern Teaching had to Valentinus and Valentinianism.

The first source is the title to Clement of Alexandria's notes on the theology of Theodotus, written in the late second century. The title reads: ἐκ τῶν Θεοδότου καὶ τῆς ἀνατολικῆς καλουμένης διδασκαλίας κατὰ τοὺς Οὐάλεντίνου χρόνους ἐπιτομοί ("Epitomes from the Works of Theodotus and the So-Called Eastern Teaching at the Time of Valentinus").<sup>2</sup> The work is known today as the *Extracts of Theodotus*, a title based on the Latin version, *Excerpta ex Theodozo*, but in this article I refer to the work as the *Epitomes*, for reasons to be discussed.

It has been recognized that the title is probably a later scribal addition, and not by Clement.<sup>3</sup> Knowing the competence of the person responsible for the title is very important for determining the reliability of what it says about this "So-Called Eastern Teaching." Either the title was written by a well-informed scribe (or even Clement himself; the difference is not all that important for determining whether the title is accurate), or it was written by a poorly informed scribe or editor. We need not know the name of the person, but we should determine if he was familiar with the contents of the *Epitomes* and with the doctrines and history of this Eastern Teaching. As we shall see, Hippolytus knew there was an Eastern Teaching, but he knew very little about it. Why should this scribe be any different? Leaf through almost any catalogue of Greek manuscripts and you will encounter treatises with blatantly incorrect titles or attributions.

Two clues suggest that the title writer either did not know the contents of the *Epitomes* or he was writing hastily, with great imprecision (with either conclusion, the consequence for scholars is the same: the title is untrustworthy). First, the epitome, a well-defined genre in antiquity, was traditionally a condensation of a longer work.<sup>4</sup> In traditional epitomes the epitomizer never argues against the material he condenses. But Clement's

<sup>2)</sup> Trans. Robert Pierce Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodozo of Clement of Alexandria* (London: Christopher, 1934), with my emendations. On the authorship of the title and the contents of the work it describes, see Christoph Marksches, "Valentinian Gnosticism: Toward the Anatomy of a School," in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years*, ed. John D. Turner and Anne McGuire (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 433-35.

<sup>3)</sup> Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians,"* Nag Hammadi Studies 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 28 n. 3 and refs. there.

<sup>4)</sup> U. Eigler and H.A. Gärtner in *Brill's New Pauly* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 4:1153-56.

counterarguments to Valentinianism make up nearly one fourth of the *Epitomes*. Thus, the work is not so much an ἐπιτομή as, in Christoph Marksches's words, "a critical refutation."<sup>5</sup> Second, the title implies that there are only two sources of the *Epitomes*, or one if you take the καὶ as epexegetical.<sup>6</sup> But analysis of the *Epitomes* suggests that Clement used up to four different Valentinian sources, some mutually incompatible, and at least one source closely connected with the Valentinianism Irenaeus discusses.<sup>7</sup> That is, in the *Epitomes* there seem to be specimens of Valentinian theology that, among proponents of the geographical distinction, would qualify as being uniquely western, not eastern.<sup>8</sup> We cannot say merely that the title writer meant to identify only one or two of what he knew to be several sources. After all, the title uses ἐπιτομαί, a plural, rather than the traditional singular.<sup>9</sup> A single epitome may be described in the plural as ἔκλογαι (as in Clement's *Eclogae propheticae*, which follows the *Epitome* in the single manuscript and is described as such) but never as ἐπιτομά. That is to say, the title writer thought of the text as being several concatenate epitomes.<sup>10</sup> It seems that here the title is accurate: scholars have generally agreed that the *Epitomes* fall into four distinct sections.<sup>11</sup> The precision of the title writer in the plural suggests an equal precision in what he identifies as the sources. That is, if he went to the trouble to specify that the text comprises several epitomes, then he must have taken the same trouble to specify the exact sources for those epitomes. Thus, these are, in his eyes, epitomes of works produced by *only* Theodotus and the so-called Eastern Teaching.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5)</sup> "Valentinian Gnosticism," 434.

<sup>6)</sup> So Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 28 n. 3, to argue that Theodotus's doctrines can be said to be distinctly eastern, too.

<sup>7)</sup> *Epitomes* 43.2-65.1. See Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 29 and Marksches, "Valentinian Gnosticism," 434.

<sup>8)</sup> See esp. *Epitomes* 59.4, which states that Jesus's body "was spun for him out of invisible psychic substance" (trans. Casey). This doctrine Thomassen takes to be distinctly western.

<sup>9)</sup> I. Opelt, "Epitome," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1950-), 5:947-57, 963-66.

<sup>10)</sup> This point is obscured by the title we customarily use, *Extracts from Theodotus*, as if it were one epitome of miscellanea. My provisional title here, *Epitomes*, highlights the awkwardness of the title and its intention to describe a composite work.

<sup>11)</sup> Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 29.

<sup>12)</sup> This may suggest, too, that the καὶ in the title is additive, responding as it does to the nominative plural ἐπιτομαί. If so, then καὶ is not epexegetical, and Theodotus need not be directly linked with the Eastern Teaching.

Although these two factors might suggest the title writer was not familiar with the contents of the *Epitomes*, two other important differences between the title and the treatise are open to opposing interpretations. First, the *Epitomes* quotes from Theodotus and from “the Valentinians” or “the followers of Valentinus,” but it does not say where any of its sources come from. The title is more specific, claiming that the *Epitomes* comes from a group whose name implies a provenance in the eastern part of the empire. Possibly this is further evidence that the title writer did not know the contents of the *Epitomes*. But it may also suggest the opposite, that the title writer was supplementing the text with correct information. We shall consider this possibility below. Second, whereas Clement refers in the *Epitomes* to the Valentinians, that is, to the successors and followers of Valentinus, the title writer refers to Valentinus, not his successors. The difference is significant. But again, it could be interpreted equally well as either the slip of an incompetent scribe or the clarification of a well-informed one.

If we take the above four points as evidence that the title writer did not know the *Epitomes* then my point is made, that the title alone is unreliable for anything beyond attestation of the existence of something called the Eastern Teaching in antiquity. But it is feasible to interpret the four points above in a manner consonant with the notion that the title writer knew what he was talking about. Let us suppose this is the case. Under this scenario new problems arise, and the identity of the Eastern Teaching remains nebulous.

The title claims that Clement consulted a body of texts, and that these came from the teacher Theodotus and the circle of the so-called Eastern Teaching. According to the title, this Eastern Teaching was current “in the time of Valentinus.” Note, it does not claim that this Eastern Teaching was a branch of Valentinianism. Indeed, it suggests the opposite, that this Eastern Teaching was not Valentinian. There are two reasons for asserting this rather counterintuitive notion.

First, the *Epitomes* refers frequently to οἱ Οὐαλεντινιανοί and οἱ ἀπὸ Οὐαλεντίου. That is, Clement quotes from the followers of Valentinus, not Valentinus himself. Had the title writer adhered to the contents of the book, he would have used the same formulas that Clement did, something like τῶν Θεοδότου καὶ τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς καλονυμένης διδασκαλίας τῶν Οὐαλεντινιανῶν ἐπιτομοί. By using Valentinus’s personal name and not the generic epithet for his followers the scribe has corrected the *Epitomes*, clarifying that the texts Clement epitomized come from those contemporary with Valentinus, not from his successors.

Second, the phrase κατὰ... χρόνους identifies only contemporaneity, nothing more. In Clement's corpus, when this construction is used, the name of the person whose lifetime marks the era under discussion is embedded inside the prepositional phrase. For example, in the *Protrepticus* Clement refers to Nikegoras of Zela, "in the days of Alexander"; in the *Stromateis*, to Ezra, "in the time of Artaxerxes king of the Persians."<sup>13</sup> Both examples establish a chronological framework, but they do not imply any other relationship between the two subjects of comparison. Clement's use of the phrase is typical for Greek authors. Thus, the author of the title states merely that Theodotus and the Eastern Teaching (or possibly only the latter) were both contemporaries of the more famous Valentinus, not that either *were* Valentinian.

Now, it may be argued that this is simply further evidence that the later scribe who wrote the title of the *Epitomes* used the phrase loosely. But if that is the case, then we must wonder what other terms in the title are used loosely. If the author of the title had special information and was careless in his formulation, then the title is just as unreliable as if written by a scribe who knew nothing. The only way the title could reliably tell us anything about the Eastern Teaching is if the scribe knew what he was talking about *and* he was accurate in his formulation. But if this is the case, then the Eastern Teaching texts that Clement epitomized for the *Epitomes* need not have been Valentinian. After all, the title makes no suggestion whatsoever about the relationship between the Eastern Teaching and Valentinus, besides contemporaneity. For all we know, this Eastern Teaching had little or no formal connection with Valentinus and his school. Or maybe it was a system from which Valentinus developed his own doctrines. Or maybe the Teaching drew inspiration from Valentinus. Whatever the case may be, the so-called Eastern Teaching did not necessarily come *from* Valentinus. Not, at least, according to the vocabulary of the title.

Whether or not this scribe knew what he was talking about, the text proves to be very difficult for establishing anything more than the existence of an Eastern Teaching that was current in the time of Valentinus. The author of the title to the *Epitomes* knew (or had heard) that there was something called the Eastern Teaching, and that it was associated with Valentinus in some way, temporally or otherwise. But we cannot say more

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<sup>13)</sup> *Protrepticus* 4.54.4; *Stromateis* 1.22.149.3.

than this without presuming too much of the text and relying upon the questionable good faith or competence of the writer of the title. All in all, Marksches's strong caution in depending on this title is well advised.<sup>14</sup>

The second source, written in the early or mid-third century, comes from Hippolytus, who mentions an Italian and an Eastern division of the Valentinians at the end of his discussion of that system. The relevant text, in full:

καὶ γέγονεν ἐντεῦθεν ἡ διδασκαλία  
αὐτῶν διηρημένη, καὶ καλεῖται ἡ μὲν  
ἀνατολική τις διδασκαλία κατ'  
αὐτούς, ἡ δὲ Ἰταλιωτική. οἱ μὲν  
<οὖν> ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας, ὃν ἔστιν  
Ἡρακλέων καὶ Πτολεμαῖος, ψυχικόν  
φασι τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ γεγονέναι,  
καὶ διὰ τούτο ἐπὶ τοῦ βαπτίσματος τὸ  
πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰ κατελήλυθε—  
τουτέστιν ὁ λόγος ὁ τῆς μητρὸς  
ἄνωθεν, τῆς Σοφίας—καὶ γέγονε  
<φωνὴ> τῷ ψυχικῷ καὶ ἐγήγερκεν  
αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν. τούτο ἔστι, φησί, τὸ  
εἰρημένον: ὅ “ἐγείρας Χριστὸν ἐκ  
νεκρῶν ζωοποιήσει καὶ τὰ θνητὰ  
σώματα ὑμῶν,” <τουτέστι> [καὶ] τὰ  
ψυχικά, <οὐ καὶ τὰ χοϊκά>. ὁ χοῦς  
γάρ “ὑπὸ κατάραν” ἐλήλυθε· “γῆ  
γάρ,” φησίν, “εἰ κ(αὶ εἰς γῆ)ῆν  
ἀπελεύσῃ.” οἱ δὲ αὖ ἀπὸ τῆς  
ἀνατολῆς λέγουσιν, ὃν ἔστιν  
Ἀξιόνι(κο)ς καὶ <Β>αρδησιάνης, ὅτι  
πνευματικὸν ἦν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ  
σωτῆρος· Πνεῦμα γάρ ἄγιον ἥλθεν  
ἐπὶ τὴν Μαρίαν—τουτέστιν ἡ  
Σοφία—καὶ “ἡ δύναμις τοῦ  
ὑψίστου”—<τουτέστιν> ἡ  
δημιουργικὴ τέχνη—ἴ<ν>α  
διαπλασθῆ τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ Πνεύματος τῇ  
Μαρίᾳ δοθέν.

And hence the doctrine of these has become divided: and one doctrine, according to them, is termed Oriental, and the other Italian. They from Italy, of whom is Heracleon and Ptolomeaeus, say that the body of Jesus was (an) animal (one). And because of this, (they maintain) that at his baptism the Holy Spirit as a dove came down—that is, the Logos of the mother above, (I mean Wisdom)—and became (a voice) to the animal (man), and raised him from the dead. This, he says, is what has been declared: “He who raised Christ from the dead will also quicken your mortal bodies, i.e. the animal bodies, not also the earthly bodies” For earth has come under a curse; “for,” says he, “dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” The Orientals, on the other hand, of whom is Axionicus and Bardesianes, assert that the body of the Saviour was spiritual; for there came upon Mary the Holy Spirit—that is, Wisdom and the power of the highest. This is the creative art, (and was vouchsafed) in order that what was given to Mary by the Spirit might be fashioned.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14)</sup> “Valentinian Gnosticism,” 435.

<sup>15)</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 6.35.5-6.35.7, trans. J.H. Macmahon, Ante-Nicene Fathers 5:9-153. The Greek text is taken from Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haere-*

There are reasons to question whether Hippolytus knew anything about the divisions in Valentinianism, beyond the most rudimentary facts. Einar Thomassen has already pointed out two major discrepancies in Hippolytus's account.<sup>16</sup> The first discrepancy is this: Hippolytus says on the one hand that the Eastern Teaching's distinctive is that the savior's body was spiritual (i.e., not of the soul or earth). But he then says that this body was "molded" or "shaped"—διαπλασθῆ—applicable only to nonspiritual (i.e., soulish) matter.<sup>17</sup> The second is Hippolytus's main presentation of Valentinianism, which he says adequately represents the doctrines of Valentinus, Heracleon, and Ptolemy, all of whom are ostensibly western Valentinians. But that main system of his describes the body of Jesus along lines he later describes as being uniquely eastern. Thomassen concludes that Hippolytus is presenting a point of contention within only the western branch of Valentinianism. The implication of Thomassen's conclusion is that Hippolytus knew there was an eastern form of Valentinianism, but he was either badly informed about it or he wanted to mischaracterize it.

Other inconsistencies suggest that Hippolytus embellished his account. The names Hippolytus gives of the leaders from each branch are suspect. Heracleon and Ptolemy, whom Hippolytus takes as the leading lights of the Italian branch, so prominent in other heresiological literature, were well known in the third century (although we might question how "Italian" they really were). But the two teachers Hippolytus gives of the eastern branch suggest he knew little if anything about this group. Axionicus is mentioned in extant literature only in Tertullian's *Against Valentinus* 4.3, which states: *solus ad hodiernum Antiochiae Axionicus memoriam Valentini integrâ custodia regularum eius consolatur* ("At Antioch alone to this day Axionicus consoles the memory of Valentinus by a full obedience of his rules").<sup>18</sup> Tertullian's point here is that in his era (the first decade of the

sium, ed. Miroslav Marcovich (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986) and the translation has been adapted.

<sup>16)</sup> *Spiritual Seed*, 43-45.

<sup>17)</sup> Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Epitomes* 2.1: πλασθέντος... τοῦ ψυχικοῦ σώματος and see also J.-D. Kaestli, "Valentinisme italien et Valentinisme oriental. Leurs divergences à propos de la nature du corps de Jesus," in B. Layton, *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism, 1. The School of Valentinus* (Leiden 1980), 391-403.

<sup>18)</sup> Trans. Mark Timothy Riley, "Q.S. Fl. Tertulliani *Adversus Valentinianos*: Text, Translation, and Commentary" (PhD dissertation, Stanford University, 1971), available online at [http://www.tertullian.org/articles/riley\\_adv\\_val/riley\\_00\\_index.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/articles/riley_adv_val/riley_00_index.htm) (accessed July 2006).

200s, or else in the days of his source) Axionicus was a lone ranger, a teacher unlike the other Valentinians, who had all widely departed from the doctrines of their founder. Tertullian's testimony to Axionicus does not square with Hippolytus's. Tertullian suggests that Axionicus was an isolated figure, but Hippolytus makes him the center of a significant movement. The mention of Bardesanes, Hippolytus's other example, is also suspicious, since the only other ancient source that claims Bardesanes had any connection with Valentinianism states that he began his religious journey there, but later rejected it.<sup>19</sup> There is, in fact, little resemblance between Valentinianism and the doctrines taught in Bardesanes' extant fragments and testimonies.<sup>20</sup> It seems that Hippolytus knew of Bardesanes' early interest in Valentinianism, so he inserted the name because he could not think of any other important Valentinian teachers from the East. Hippolytus seems to have known neither the history nor the nature of the Eastern Teaching, so padded his account of eastern Valentinianism to make it seem just as important as western Valentinianism.

Throughout his general presentation of the Valentinians Hippolytus mentions their many disagreements. The one most important to Hippolytus pertains to monadic versus dyadic schemes. He also mentions differences as to (1) whether Silence is a consort of the Father or not, (2) the source of the decad and duodecad, and (3) whether Silence is among the thirty aeons.<sup>21</sup> Of these, the first and the third debates pertain to the monadic-dyadic dichotomy.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, this dispute was important to Hippolytus. But when he distinguishes the Italian and eastern branches, he makes no

<sup>19)</sup> Eusebius, *Church History* 4.30. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 503, possibly to avoid presuming that Hippolytus meant to refer to the famous Bardesanes, retains the name Ardesanes, following the single, error-riddled manuscript that contains Hippolytus's text, Par. supp. gr. 464 (14th c.). It seems clear to me, as to Marcovich and previous editors, that Bardesanes is meant: Ardesanes is nowhere in all of Greek literature attested as a personal name (as Thomassen admits), and the manuscript mangles numerous personal names, not to mention ordinary words. See Marcovich's edition, esp. p. viii.

<sup>20)</sup> Of the many ancient testimonies to Bardesanes, see, e.g., Epiphanius, *Panarion* 56, where no connection to Valentinianism is made, implicitly or explicitly. Had Epiphanius known of such a connection, he would have publicized it. See on the critical judgment of Hippolytus' opinion that Bardesanes was a Valentinian H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen 1966), 167-170.

<sup>21)</sup> Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 6.30.3-5, 6.31.3.

<sup>22)</sup> Hippolytus has oversimplified the monadic-dyadic tensions in Valentinianism. A study on this is forthcoming.

suggestion that the monadic-dyadic issue was relevant. Rather, the only point of disagreement pertains to whether Jesus's body was spiritual or soulish. That Hippolytus places the Italian-eastern division across a point that is so minor—to him anyway—may lend some credibility to his account. After all, had Hippolytus wanted to embellish his sparse account of the Eastern Teaching he could have made the monadic-dyadic dichotomy central to the Italian-eastern division.

All this suggests to me that Hippolytus had heard in only the most generic terms about the split between eastern and Italian Valentinianism, and that the doctrinal difference had something to do with the kind of substance from which the body of Jesus was composed. He possibly even knew that the issue was over whether the body of Jesus was exclusively spiritual or not. But we should not consider the matter settled, in view of other unreliable aspects of Hippolytus's account, especially his unconvincing claim that Axionicus and Bardesanes were the guiding lights of the Eastern Teaching.

The third account is an allusion by Tertullian to two schools in Valentinianism: *munus enim his datur unum: procurare concinnationem Aeonum et ab eius offici societate duae scholae protinus, duae cathedrae, inauguratio quaedam dividenda doctrinae Valentini* ("These two [Christ and the Holy Spirit, two of the aeons in the Valentinian pleroma] have one duty—to stabilize the aeons. From the association of these two in this duty, two schools arise, two pulpits and the beginning (of sorts) of a division in the Valentinian teachings").<sup>23</sup>

In light of the problems with the first two texts, this one is hardly any clearer. According to Marksches, the comment is Tertullian's sarcastic portrayal of the Valentinians setting up parallel teaching posts, as if playing university by endowing multiple professorships.<sup>24</sup> Tertullian's analogy draws from contemporary institutions of higher education, in which parallel (and not competing) lectureships were funded, and it combines the model with the Valentinian doctrine of syzygies, to lampoon the Valentinians. In this passage the implication is that Valentinianism, after it underwent a single split, quickly bifurcated into as many positions as there were

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<sup>23)</sup> *Adversus Valentinianos* 11.2, trans. Riley.

<sup>24)</sup> "Valentinian Gnosticism," 435-36.

aeons. Certainly, in other parts of *Adversus Valentinianos* Tertullian emphasizes its multiple schools.<sup>25</sup> Because Tertullian uses the Valentinian doctrine of the aeons to depict the community itself, we should not depend upon this text alone to argue for an eastern–western split in Valentinianism. For all we know Tertullian knew of multiple Valentinian schools, yet chose to mention only two (at least in this passage) for rhetorical force.

Further, based on this passage alone, the purported doctrinal difference that led to this split in the Valentinian community had to do with the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the two aeons that were generated to stabilize the pleroma. It seems to have nothing to do with the composition of the body of the redeemer figure, who features in the lower, created realm, not the pleroma. Thus, even if we take this as evidence for two schools in Valentinianism, it pertains to a division altogether different from the one Hippolytus identifies.

Tempting as it is, Tertullian's text cannot speak to the eastern–Italian division, aside from what I have already mentioned, that Tertullian says that Axionicus of Antioch (the only Valentinian with a geographical epithet in this passage) was the only one not to depart from Valentinus's teaching.<sup>26</sup> But to associate this Axionicus with the Eastern Teaching is to rely on the shaky testimony of Hippolytus.

So, given all this, what can we say about the alleged split between eastern and Italian Valentinianism? Here is a synopsis of our three texts:

1. The title of the *Epitomes* was written by someone either uninformed or quite well informed of the Eastern Teaching. If the former, as some indications suggest, then all we know, based upon this text alone, is that the writer of the title heard that the so-called Eastern Teaching existed. But the title is arbitrary and is no reliable guide to the contents of the *Epitomes*. If the latter, then more problems arise, since it suggests that the Eastern Teaching existed in Valentinus's time, but it does not say who came from whom, and it does not necessarily imply that Valentinus had any direct relationship at all with this Eastern Teaching.
2. Hippolytus had only vague notions of what the Eastern Teaching in Valentinianism was. He seems to know of a major doctrinal dif-

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<sup>25)</sup> 1.4, 1.33-38.

<sup>26)</sup> *Adversus Valentinianos* 4.3.

ference concerning the composition of the body of Jesus, but his numerous inconsistencies and inaccuracies warn us not to depend on his testimony.

3. Tertullian portrays Valentinianism as a cacophony of contradictions. He suggests that it began in imitation of the syzygies of their pleroma, by splitting in two, over the role that the pleromatic aeons Christ and the Holy Spirit had. The only Valentinian said to be in the East, Axionicus of Antioch, Tertullian portrays as a solitary figure, not the leader of a significant separate school, as Hippolytus portrays him.

To these three texts may be added the observation that Irenaeus, who writes about Valentinianism so extensively, offers no evidence for an East-West split, even though *Against Heresies* identifies geographical splits in other successions.<sup>27</sup> Marksches speculates as to whether the split had yet occurred in the 180s, when Irenaeus was writing.<sup>28</sup> That is possible. It is also possible that, given the synopsis above, the Eastern Teaching was an independent movement that preceded Valentinus, gave him his theological start, and, after Valentinus became famous, became “Valentinian” by virtue of association. This would certainly qualify as an “Eastern Teaching in the time of Valentinus,” as the title of the *Epitomes* says. I do not claim that this is what happened, merely that it is a possibility that seems to fit with very elusive evidence. It suits the material just as well as a more conventional scenario, that after Irenaeus’s time Valentinus’s school split into western and eastern branches, the latter more conservative than the former. Further research may suggest yet other possibilities.

The geography of Valentinianism is too muddled to serve as the starting point for establishing the taxonomy of Valentinianism. It is to be hoped that other criteria, such as internal doctrinal differences, will shed light on these tantalizing but unreliable references to the Eastern Teaching.

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<sup>27)</sup> *Against Heresies* 1.24.1 says that Menander’s succession divided, between Saturninus in Syria and Basilides in Egypt.

<sup>28)</sup> “Valentinian Gnosticism,” 433.