

# ORIGEN AND PROPHECY



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# Short Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to understand prophecy in the thought of Origen of Alexandria. There is no speculative theological work of Origen (or, indeed, of any other Church writer of his period) on prophecy as a theological category in its own right. Yet prophecy lies at the heart of Christian understandings of the world, as a topic which intersects with all of the most complex questions of theological philosophy – free will, foreknowledge, eschatology, soteriology, cosmology. To understand the thought of Origen, who is frequently characterised as the first systematic theologian, we must have some understanding of his concept of prophecy.

The overall argument of the thesis is that Origen was the first Christian writer to attempt to unite disparate notions of prophecy – as future-telling, ethical instruction, and mystical revelation – in order to counter the challenges to Christianity put forward both by breakaway Christian movements and by Jewish and pagan critics. To do so I propose a new framework for understanding how Origen thought about prophecy. I argue that Origen understood prophecy as tripartite in the same way in which he understood scripture as tripartite: that is, as a layered phenomenon of ‘somatic’ or bodily readings, ‘psychic’ or moral readings, and ‘pneumatic’ or spiritual readings. In demonstrating this tripartite structure, I make the case that prophecy and exegesis are, in Origen’s thought, mirror-images of one another, reflected in the mirror of Christ.



# Long Abstract

This thesis consists of an introduction, four parts, and a conclusion. The introduction sets up the research question: what was Origen's understanding of prophecy? It will introduce Origen and his work, as well as some theoretical and definitional considerations concerning prophecy.

The first part of the thesis concerns Origen's intellectual and cultural background. This part discusses various open questions in Greek, Jewish, and early Christian thought that shaped Origen's thinking about prophecy. I attempt to capture which frameworks Origen may have been thinking with when he considered prophecy, and make the case that prophecy was a centrally important topic for him

Chapter 2 considers early Christian movements which used or argued about prophecy, focussing particularly on the Phrygian and Marcionite movements, and their relationship to Jewish understandings of prophecy, particularly that of Philo. I consider some of the philosophical questions and difficulties raised by these movements, which were still unresolved in Origen's time. This chapter introduces three major themes of the thesis: first, the problem of the relationship between scripture and prophecy and its contested nature in early Christianity; second, the wide variety of Jewish, Christian, and pagan contributions to ongoing arguments over the nature of prophetic inspiration and its relationship to morality; and third, the debate over whether prophecy was an ongoing phenomenon in Origen's time.

Chapter 3 then examines Origen's understanding of ancient Greek practices and theories about prophecy, considering along the way various questions about prophetic inspiration and ecstasy. First I survey some lines of enquiry in Greek popular thought – literary, philosophical, and practical – into what constituted legitimate prophecy. Then I argue that there is no uniform model of what a prophet is in Greek thought prior to the Hellenistic period. However, in the first centuries AD we see a proliferation of figures who unite the roles of prophet and sage. I argue that this trend, exemplified by Apollo-

nus of Tyana, is an essential background for understanding the portrayal of Moses and the prophets in the work of both Philo and Origen.

Chapter 4 examines Greek and early Christian thinking about fate, foreknowledge, fulfilment, and free will. I argue that, in order to understand Origen on the subject, we must distinguish between several different philosophical approaches to the question of free will. I argue that the idea of a logical-metaphysical incompatibility between infallible divine foreknowledge and human free will – the free will/foreknowledge problem in the form that Origen understood it – only emerged in the work of Alexander of Aphrodisias a generation before Origen. By contrast, other early Christian understandings of free will focussed primarily on the importance of a meaningful notion of human moral responsibility, a traditional Stoic framing of the problem.

Part II of the thesis consists of a single chapter, Chapter 5, which will establish some theoretical and taxonomical frameworks used throughout the rest of the thesis. This chapter considers Origen's tripartite exegetical hermeneutic which he explains in detail in *On First Principles* Book 4. In short, Origen claims each verse of scripture has a somatic (surface or bodily) meaning, a psychic (moral) meaning, and a pneumatic (mystical) meaning. After a summary of the terminology and history of allegorical exegesis in Greek thought, I will here discuss the relationship of prophecy and scripture, and why the tripartite hermeneutic that Origen sets out in *On First Principles* 4 – and uses elsewhere in his work – can and should be applied to objects other than scripture. I make the case that it is entirely in line with Origen's own use of the tripartite hermeneutic as a method of 'reading' and taxonomising branches of knowledge to consider prophecy as a tripartite phenomenon with the same three layers of meaning.

With the arguments of Part II in mind, the third part of the thesis turns to Origen's answers to the questions raised in Part I. Chapter 6 looks at Origen's conception of the free will and foreknowledge problem, and attempts to sketch out his positions on free will, foreknowledge, the relationship between the two, and what that means for prophecy. I argue in this chapter that Origen 'solved' the free will and foreknowledge problem by taking a view of free will that centres on the narrative and life-long nature of the possibility of human choice, while simultaneously emphasising God's position outside time. In doing so, he puts prophecy at the centre of the philosophical debate about free will.

Chapter 7 considers Origen's explicit moral contrasting of the Greek oracles with the Old Testament prophets and seeks to establish what, in Origen's thought, qualified somebody to be a prophet. I examine a series of individual contenders for the title of

prophet beginning with a Greek example, the Pythia at Delphi. I then move onto two scriptural examples, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament: Balaam and Caiaphas. Origen ultimately judges none of these figures to be a true prophet; this is not, as is sometimes suggested, on the basis of their ecstatic inspiration. Instead, for Origen, in order for somebody who utters prophecies to qualify as a prophet, they must be personally virtuous and a moral exemplar to others. In the second half of the chapter I examine further examples to unpack what this means, including Isaiah, Jeremiah and Moses. In the case of Moses, I argue that Origen adopts much the same picture of Moses as Philo. However, in Origen's presentation there is an important difference: while for Philo, Moses' personal virtue justifies his status as the lawgiver *par excellence*, for Origen Moses functions primarily as a prophetic and moral forerunner and type of Christ.

Chapter 8 seeks to demonstrate that Christ was at the centre of Origen's thinking about prophecy; his aim is to reject the Marcionite notion that the Old and New Testaments are disjunct. The chapter will consider in particular the last of the prophets, John the Baptist. I propose in this chapter a new – and very simple – model for understanding the relationship between prophecy, scripture, and exegesis in Origen's thought.

The final part of the thesis is a single chapter. This chapter, Chapter 9, considers the immediate reception of Origen's ideas about prophecy by examining the thought of Eusebius of Caesarea on the same topic.

The structure of this thesis is designed to aid the overall argument, which is, in short: Origen combined several open questions from his various intellectual milieux and analysed them according to different hermeneutic principles; these principles are directly mappable onto Origen's tripartite hermeneutic of exegesis. That is to say, like scripture, prophecy has three senses of meaning: the somatic (bodily), psychic (moral), and pneumatic (spiritual). As such, I have structured the chapters of the each part to match the three principles, or layers of meaning examined in Chapter 5:

1. The somatic sense: this sense concerns the apparent or obvious meaning of a text or phenomenon. Chapters 4 and 6 deal with the logical and metaphysical ramifications of prophecy as literal future-telling.
2. The psychic sense: this sense concerns morally edifying allegorical readings of a text or phenomenon. Chapters 3 and 7 show how Origen uses various cultural understandings of prophecy to build an argument about morally legitimate and morally illegitimate prophecy, its stakes, and what it can teach us about Christian moral virtue. He makes these arguments primarily through discussion of the Old

Testament prophets, who he characterises as moral exempla and forerunners of the ultimate moral exemplar, Christ.

3. The pneumatic sense: this sense concerns mystic christological, ecclesiological and eschatological readings of a text or phenomenon. Chapters 2 and 8 concern prophecy's relationship to Christ and, more broadly, to the triune God. This chapter shows how Origen's polemical angle against the Marcionite movement and his practice of typological exegesis shaped his thought about prophecy and Christ. I demonstrate that for Origen, prophecy is the inverse of exegesis, and rests upon the same tripartite structure.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Beginning in 165 AD and ending in 180, just six years before Origen of Alexandria was born, large swathes of the Roman Empire were devastated by a terrible plague. This plague, named the Antonine after the *cognomen* of the emperor Marcus Aurelius, had a serious and lasting impact on the population, industry, and economy of the Roman Empire.<sup>1</sup> While the fifty years following the plague were politically – although not socially – stable under the Severan dynasty, the period afterwards, from the 230s to the 280s, saw some of the most serious challenges that the Empire had faced in the two hundred or so years since the reign of Augustus. Over the course of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, a total of thirty different emperors claimed the title, many of whose reigns only lasted a few months.<sup>2</sup>

It is in this context of military, economic, religious, and above all political instability that we must understand the life and work of Origen. The third century is an unusual period in intellectual history in this respect.<sup>3</sup> Despite a significant number of major literary, philosophical, and even scientific figures active in the period, we know relatively little about most people’s daily lives and material circumstances compared to other centuries. It is perhaps for this reason that there is a tendency in popular notions of the early church to conflate third century patristic writers with post-Nicene, Late Antique

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Wilson and others have recently argued that the Antonine plague had a far more serious and longer-lasting effect on the Roman economy and on society than previously recognised. cf. J. R. McConnell et al. (2018). “Lead pollution recorded in Greenland ice indicates European emissions tracked plagues, wars, and imperial expansion during antiquity”. In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115.22, pp. 5726–5731.

<sup>2</sup>In Origen’s lifetime alone there were 21.

<sup>3</sup>A number of excellent essays on different features of the period are to be found in S. Swain, S. Harrison, and J. Elsner, eds. (2007). *Severan Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

figures who clearly belong to quite a different social and political era.<sup>4</sup>

We must bear in mind, for example, the position of Christianity in the Roman Empire at the various different periods of Origen's life. Origen came of age at the very start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, under the persecutions of Septimius Severus, in which his father died. However, the following thirty years – under Caracalla, Elagabalus, and Alexander Severus – were a period of fairly untroubled religious relations between Christians and pagans. Yet the position of Christians clearly deteriorated again in the period from 235, with sporadic persecutions that may have been related to wider political instability. This tendency culminated in an episode of severe persecution under Decius in the 250s, during which Origen was arrested and tortured.

Pagan religion was also changing rapidly in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. There was a great increase in the popularity of mystery cults and solar-based religions, such as Mithraism and the cult of Sol Invictus.<sup>5</sup> By and large these were seen by the traditional pagan elite – and have been seen by scholars since – as a degeneration of religious customs, a weakening of traditional religious life. Yet this was no peripheral phenomenon; a number of emperors, including Elagabalus and Aurelian, endorsed and participated in these cults.<sup>6</sup> Some members of the imperial families also began to be interested in Christianity; Julia Mamaea, the mother of Severus Alexander (and aunt of Elagabalus) took notice of Christian intellectuals, even at one point inviting Origen to Antioch to give a series of imperially-sponsored theological lectures.

It was, then, a deeply ambiguous period for Christian intellectuals: Origen's life, bookended by the martyrdom of his father and his own torture and death, nevertheless contained moments of political and cultural acceptance. Despite the fact that Origen is almost unique among patristic writers in his silence on his own life and times, it is in this volatile context that we must understand Origen's thought.

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<sup>4</sup>For a full critique of this tendency cf. M. J. Edwards (2002). *Origen Against Plato*. Farnham: Ashgate, 6ff.

<sup>5</sup>See e.g. G. H. Halsberghe (1972). *The Cult of Sol Invictus*. Leiden: Brill and R. Turcan (1981). *Mithra et le mithriacisme*. Paris: Les belles lettres.

<sup>6</sup>There is an extensive bibliography on these topics. For an introduction to the religion of Aurelian, cf. A. Watson (1999). *Aurelian and the Third Century*. London: Routledge. For an introduction to Elagabalus, cf. M. Frey (1989). *Untersuchungen zur Religion und der Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabalus*. Franz Steiner.

## I Life of Origen

In his vast corpus of work, Origen gives us remarkably few autobiographical details. Much of our information comes instead from his followers, particularly Gregory Thaumaturgus, whose *Panegyric* gives us some vital details, particularly about his curriculum and teaching in later life, and Eusebius, who wrote a short *Life* of Origen. Other sources include his translators, Jerome and Rufinus, and various later historians, including Socrates Scholasticus, Epiphanius, and the Byzantine patriarch Photius. The careful work of Pierre Nautin has sorted through those reliable – and those less reliable – elements of Eusebius’ account.<sup>7</sup> Scholarly biographies since – including those by Henri Crouzel,<sup>8</sup> Ronald Heine,<sup>9</sup> and Joseph Trigg<sup>10</sup> – have refined our knowledge of Origen’s life further.

Origen was born in Alexandria some time around the year 185-6, the oldest of seven children, to Christian parents. Origen’s father Leonides was a scholar in his own right, possibly from a reasonably well-off background. Origen’s mother, whose name we do not know, may well have been of humbler origins – Origen’s name, at least, ‘son of Horus’, points to a distinctively Egyptian socioethnic background.<sup>11</sup> This mixed parentage would likely have meant Origen did not have Roman citizenship rights.<sup>12</sup> The first event we know much of in Origen’s life was the martyrdom of his father in the Severan persecution in around 202-3, when Origen was nearly seventeen years old.<sup>13</sup> According to Eusebius, the young Origen wished to join his father in martyrdom, but was prevented by his mother from turning himself over to soldiers.<sup>14</sup>

Instead, while still a very young man, Origen became a teacher for the Alexandrian Church, teaching catechumens in their preparation for baptism.<sup>15</sup> His duties would

<sup>7</sup>P. Nautin (1977). *Origène. Sa vie et son oeuvre*. Christianisme antique 1. Paris: Beauchesne.

<sup>8</sup>H. Crouzel (1989). *The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*. Trans. by A. Worrall. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.

<sup>9</sup>R. E. Heine (2010). *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*. Christian Theology in Context. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>10</sup>J. W. Trigg (1983). *Origen. The Bible and Philosophy in the Third Century Church*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.

<sup>11</sup>Jerome states (*Epistle* 39.22) that Origen’s mother was a Jew, which would, in fact, make Origen ethnically Jewish, although it is unclear whether this is true.

<sup>12</sup>See J. A. McGuckin (2004a). “Life of Origen”. In: *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*. Ed. by J. A. McGuckin. John Knox Press, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup>For discussion of the relationship between citizenship rights and persecution of Christians in 3<sup>rd</sup> century Alexandria, see A. Rousselle (1974). “La persécution des chrétiens à Alexandrie au III<sup>e</sup> siècle”. In: *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 52, pp. 222–51.

<sup>14</sup>*Church History* 6.2.12.

<sup>15</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.3.3.

have included teaching basic doctrine and scripture to those new to the faith, likely both children and adults. While teaching there, Origen took on private pupils – both boys and girls – in grammar and rhetoric.<sup>16</sup>

Scholars have divergent views on the details of Origen's own education in the philosophical school in Alexandria. The divergence is over whether his teacher was Ammonius Saccas, a noted Platonist probably from India, and later the teacher of Plotinus, who was 20 years Origen's junior. The testimony for this identification comes from Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, in which he lists other pupils of Ammonius, mentioning Origen by name but without reference to his Christianity.<sup>17</sup> This has posed two separate but related problems: first, whether there was an additional, later, Origen who was a Platonist philosopher; second, whether there was a additional, earlier, Ammonius who was the teacher of our Origen.

Mark Edwards argues for both of these cases, positing that Origen's teacher was the Peripatetic philosopher Ammonius (who may have later been a pagan, but was Christian by birth) referred to by Philostratus;<sup>18</sup> and, some years later, there was Ammonius Saccas, the teacher of Plotinus, who taught another pagan disciple, Origen the Platonist.<sup>19</sup> Trigg and Böhm take the admittedly simpler view that Origen was indeed taught by Ammonius Saccas, arguing that the coincidence of two Ammoniuses and two Origenes is too great.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Sources including Eusebius allege that Origen castrated himself in this period. Eusebius implies that the reason Origen did this was that he was teaching girls (i.e. teenagers of marriagable age) and that he wished to show his commitment to chastity and remove himself from temptation; in carrying out literally the command of Matthew 19:12, to live like a eunuch, Origen served the purpose of making himself a safe and holy teacher. Thus Eusebius in *Church History* 6.8.1. While this story still persists widely among Origen scholars (see, for example, Crouzel (1989), op. cit., p. 9; Trigg (1983), op. cit., p. 53), I do not think there is much evidence to support it. Origen's complex approach to non-literal exegesis makes it highly unlikely that he would make a literalistic interpretation of what is quite clearly a metaphor in the gospel; indeed, later in his life in his own commentary on the text (*Commentary on Matthew* 15.1-5) he clearly scorns the literalistic interpretation. Additionally, in a defence of allegorical reading in *Against Celsus*, Origen provides a scornful comment on the literalistic reading of castration in pagan mythology, presumably in reference to Cronos and Zeus (*Against Celsus* 1.17). Indeed, Origen finds even the much milder body-modificatory practice of circumcision distasteful (e.g. *Homilies on Genesis* 3.4.), indicating that he would have found such a drastic action as self-castration to be quite unnecessary and offensive. My own view is that the story is a (humorous?) barb on the part of Origen's detractors, that Eusebius somehow picks up and misunderstands: Origen is, in their view, overly allegorical when interpreting passages of scripture that he should take literally; in this case alone the pattern is inverted and he interprets literally a passage clearly meant as a metaphor, with painful personal consequences.

<sup>17</sup>Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 3.10ff

<sup>18</sup>Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists* 2.27.

<sup>19</sup>M. J. Edwards (2015). "One Origen or Two? The *Status Quaestionis*". In: *Symbolae Osloenses* 89.1, pp. 81–103.

<sup>20</sup>cf. Trigg (1983), op. cit., p. 12. See also T. Böhm (2002). "Origenes, Theologe und (Neu)platoniker?"

In any case, Origen's focus on his philosophical work soon caught the attention of his bishop, Demetrius. In particular, Demetrius, himself an avid church administrator, disapproved of Origen's delegation of his ecclesiastical duties to his colleague and friend Heraclas in order to focus on his own work.<sup>21</sup> This tension with Demetrius was exacerbated by visits that Origen made in 212 to Rome,<sup>22</sup> in 213 or 214 to Arabia, at the request of the governor of the province,<sup>23</sup> and in 215 and 216 to Jerusalem and to Palestine.<sup>24</sup> The last of these visits involved a series of theological lectures that Origen gave; at the time this was a very uncommon honour for a layperson, and angered Demetrius further. Origen also began a friendship with Ambrose, a reformed Valentinian gnostic who would be his patron for many years and sponsored a great number of his works.<sup>25</sup>

In around 231, according to Eusebius, Origen was ordained in Palestine while on Church business.<sup>26</sup> The exact details of this event are not clear from Eusebius, who reports different stories at different places in the *Church History*. Whatever the precise sequence of events, by 231 Origen's relationship with Demetrius had broken down to such an extent that Origen was not welcome to return to Alexandria.<sup>27</sup> Because of the connections he had made in the Church in Caesarea on earlier visits, he moved there permanently.

At some point either late in his time in Alexandria, or in the initial years of his new life in Caesarea, Origen was summoned by Julia Mamaea, the mother of the emperor Severus Alexander, for an official visit to Antioch for a series of theological debates.<sup>28</sup> Julia's own interest in Christian doctrine seems to have stemmed from the likely in-

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In: *Adamantius* 8, pp. 6–23. To me it does seem somewhat unlikely that later detractors of Origen could fail to notice the existence of a pagan philosopher with the same name – surely the temptation to make jibes about the coincidence, especially if denouncing Origen for a heretical and overly philosophical approach to doctrine, would be too great for any polemicist to resist?

<sup>21</sup>For more on Demetrius, see P. Carrington (1957). *The Early Christian Church*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 378–9.

<sup>22</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.14.10.

<sup>23</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.19.15.

<sup>24</sup>Eusebius *Church History*, 6.19.16.

<sup>25</sup>Ambrose sponsored the *On First Principles, Commentary on John, Treatise on Prayer, Exhortation to Martyrdom* and *Against Celsus*. He also paid for stenographers and scribes to aid Origen in his work – these were well-educated young women, according to Eusebius (*Church History* 6.23.2). For more on Ambrose, cf. J. A. McGuckin (1995). “Structural Design and Apologetic Intent in Origen's Commentary on John”. In: *Origeniana Sexta*. Ed. by G. Dorival and A. L. B. et al. Leuven: Peeters, pp. 441–57.

<sup>26</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.26ff.

<sup>27</sup>McGuckin suspects that this had been Origen's plan all along, citing Photius's account of the move as evidence (Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 118). See McGuckin (2004a), “Life of Origen”, pp. 14–15.

<sup>28</sup>On the subject of when exactly this visit happened, the evidence is not conclusive either way. See Eusebius *Church History* 6.21.3–4. For discussion of the possible timing see *ibid.*, p. 11; see also Nautin (1977), *op. cit.*, 427ff.

clusion of a large number of Christians in the wider Severan dynasty and the imperial household.<sup>29</sup>

Also soon into his time in Caesarea, Origen founded a Christian school with a major new library, which would go on to attract Christian scholars for some three centuries afterwards, and, according to McGuckin, had an important influence on practices of Byzantine Christian education.<sup>30</sup> His elementary curriculum would not have been atypical in a pagan institution, and included – according to Gregory Thaumaturgus – logic, physics, geometry, and ethics, with further courses in theology and scripture.<sup>31</sup> Gregory’s *Panegyric*, a long and very personal oration portrays Origen as a kind and engaging teacher.<sup>32</sup>

Not long into Origen’s time in Palestine, a major political crisis began with the murder of Alexander Severus and the ascendancy of Maximinus Thrax. Many prominent Christians were exiled or arrested; Origen went into hiding and apparently lived in the house of a wealthy woman named Juliana for some months.<sup>33</sup> In the relative calm of the 240s under the rule of Gordian he was again able to travel and went on visits to Athens and to Nicomedia.<sup>34</sup>

In his late sixties, Origen was taken prisoner and brutally tortured during the Decian persecution.<sup>35</sup> Although he was not killed on the rack, his health never recovered, and he died in Tyre as a confessor of the faith at the age of seventy, in around 255.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Maximinus Thrax, who came to power after Alexander Severus, for example, seems to have carried out a significant purge of Christians from the imperial household, suggesting there were many Christians present before. However, Maximinus likely did not carry out full-scale persecutions – for a specific discussion of the evidence from Origen, see G. W. Clarke (1966). “Some Victims of the Persecution of Maximinus Thrax”. In: *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 15.4, pp. 445–453.

<sup>30</sup>McGuckin (2004a), op. cit., p. 16. For a discussion of Origen’s aims in founding the school, see A. Knauber (1968). “Das Anliegen der Schule des Origenes zu Cäsarea”. In: *Münchener theologische Zeitschrift* 19, pp. 182–203.

<sup>31</sup>For a more extensive discussion, cf. I. Ramelli (2009b). “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Re-Thinking the Christianisation of Hellenism”. In: *Vigilae Christianae* 63, pp. 217–63, 223ff. See also P. W. Martens (2012). *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 28ff.

<sup>32</sup>For discussion of the oration as a text, cf. D. Satran (2018). *In the Image of Origen*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>33</sup>S. Elm (1994). *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.32.2. cf. also Origen’s *Letter to Africanus*, discussed below, in which he states that he is in Nicomedia.

<sup>35</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.39.6.

<sup>36</sup>Eusebius gives a date of 253, but this is incompatible with his own statements that Origen lived to the age of 69, and was nearly 17 in 202, making his date of death some time in 254 or 255. See Eusebius *Church History* 7.1.

Origen was posthumously condemned at the Second Council of Constantinople some three hundred years after his death, in 553. I will consider the reasons for this in greater detail in Chapter 5;<sup>37</sup> for now, it is important to note that a number of Origen's doctrines were controversial both in his own lifetime and afterwards. Of these, the most notable is his apparent assertion that all souls will ultimately be saved, including that of the devil.<sup>38</sup>

Origen had particularly vocal enemies during his life and afterwards – including Methodius of Olympus, Peter of Alexandria, Eustathius of Antioch, Pacomius, and Epiphanius. Later, Jerome would condemn his work as heretical. Nevertheless, he also had a number of apologists, with the most important being Eusebius of Caesarea – to whom I will return in Chapter 9.<sup>39</sup> The highly polarised nature of the debate over Origen's orthodoxy has meant that the survival of his works is deeply bound up with his eventual condemnation.

## II The Works of Origen

The implications of Origen's condemnation were far-reaching. After the Second Council of Constantinople the physical copies of a large number of his works were destroyed. Some fell out of favour in the Middle Ages or simply were not copied. Many had already been lost prior to 553. Several writers in the centuries after Origen – both his supporters and his detractors – made notes of the number of his works and some of the titles. These include a list by Eusebius<sup>40</sup> and a list by Jerome.<sup>41</sup>

Of those works that do survive, a number survive only in translations made from Greek into Latin by Rufinus of Aquileia (c.340–410) and by Jerome (347–420). Although Rufinus' translations have been criticised on the grounds of suspected interpolation, scholars in the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including Henri de Lubac and John Behr, have defended their overall quality.<sup>42</sup> Jerome's translations are also consid-

<sup>37</sup>cf. pp. 151–152.

<sup>38</sup>cf. L. Holliday (2009). "Will Satan Be Saved? Reconsidering Origen's Theory of Volition in "Peri Archon"". In: *Vigilae Christianae* 63.1, pp. 1–23.

<sup>39</sup>See pp. 269–273.

<sup>40</sup>*Church History* 6.24–25 and 6.36.

<sup>41</sup>For the text, translation, and commentary of the letter, *Epistle 33* that contains this list, see Crouzel (1989), op. cit.

<sup>42</sup>While there are occasional theological infelicities (for example, particularly pointed instances of the trinitarian formula, which seem unlikely to be Origen's own), for the most part, the translations are broadly accurate, despite the slanders of Jerome. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised in attributing

ered to be generally accurate, although given his later hostility to Origen it is likely that he made significant silent emendations.<sup>43</sup>

## i Critical editions

Editions of the works of Origen have been made possible thanks to the tireless work of a number of scholars. The first comprehensive edition of Origen's work is that of the Imprimerie Catholique of Jacques Paul Migne, in the *Patrologia Graeca* series. Origen's work accounts for volumes 11-17 of the series, published in the 1850s and 60s in Paris. These editions are still widely used.

However, for this thesis, I have used the texts from *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* (GCS), the series of patristic critical editions published in Leipzig and Berlin from the 1890s to the present day. This series includes a series of 13 editions of Origen's works compiled in between 1899 and 1976 by Erwin Preuschen, Paul Koetschau, Wilhelm Baehrens, Max Rauer, Erich Klostermann, Ernst Benz, Ursula Treu and Ludwig Früchtel. I have included a complete list of these editions in the bibliography.

The other critical editions that are frequently used by scholars belong to the *Sources Chrétiennes* series. The Origen editions in this series were published between 1960 and 1999, and prepared by Henri Crouzel, Marguerite Harl, Eric Junod, Manlio Simonetti, Marcel Borret, Jean Scherer, Cécile Blanc, Robert Girod, Luc Brésard, Oliver Rousseau, Pierre and Marie-Thérèse Nautin, Gilles Dorival, Annie Jaubert, and Louis Doutreleau. I have referred to a number of these volumes but I have not used them extensively in this thesis.

Additional editions of individual works include Joseph Armitage Robinson's 1913 edition of the *Philocalia*, which I have used in Chapter 6.<sup>44</sup> During the writing of this thesis, two new editions of Origen have been published. The first is John Behr's new edition and translation of *On First Principles*, which I have consulted for some passages

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firm doctrinal positions to Origen on the basis of translations. For further discussion, see Origen (2013). *On First Principles*. Ed. by J. C. Cavadini. Trans. by G. Butterworth and H. de Lubac. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, pp. xii-xiv. See also Origen (2017a). *On First Principles*. Ed. by J. Behr. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. xi-xiv.

<sup>43</sup>Rufinus claims as much: 'you left words out at your discretion', he alleges in his *Apology Against Jerome* 2.27. For further discussion, see A. Fürst (2009). "Jerome Keeping Silent: Origen and His Exegesis of Isaiah". In: *Jerome of Stridon: His Life, Writings and Legacy*. Ed. by A. Cain and J. Lössl. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, pp. 141-52.

<sup>44</sup>Origen (1913b). *Philocalia*. Ed. by J. Robinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

quoted in Chapter 5. The second is Lorenzo Perrone's GCS edition of the newly discovered *Homilies on the Psalms*. These homilies, discovered by Marina Molin Pradel in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich in 2012, include a number of homilies on various of the psalms and significantly increase the number of extant homilies of Origen. I have not used them extensively in this thesis.

## ii Translations

The first comprehensive set of translations of the works of Origen belong to the Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Church series, edited by Frederick Crombie in the 1860s-1890s. Although these translations are acceptable (and very accessible) for general reading, I have generally used more modern translations for scholarly purposes.

While all the translations in this thesis of passages of Origen are my own, I have used translations of a number of other scholars in my reading and for reference. I used Henry Chadwick's translation of *Against Celsus* and G.W. Butterworth's translation of *On First Principles*. For study of the homilies and commentaries, I have used the various Origen volumes in the Fathers of the Church series, by Joseph T. Lienhard, Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, Thomas P. Scheck, John Clark Smith, Ronald E. Heine and others. For some of the homilies and commentaries not represented in the Fathers of the Church series, I have used the translations from the Ancient Christian Writers series, prepared by Thomas P. Scheck. As with the editions, I have included a complete list of translations used in the bibliography.

## iii Origen's Works by Genre

The extant works of Origen fall into eight generic or formal categories. The different forms and genres, governed by their own conventions and norms, contribute to the effect that Origen's expression of his ideas varies between different texts. I have quoted passages from a wide variety of different works in this thesis, sometimes in quite quick succession; it therefore seems advisable to set out some details about what is – and is not – present in Origen's works, in terms of both form and content.

### I. Homilies

By far the largest category (by combined length) is the homilies: short, self-contained sermons on particular passages of scripture. We know of 574 homilies written by Ori-

gen; of these, we have 250 in Latin translations, and 50 in the original Greek. They divide as follows:

### **Greek**

*Homilies on Jeremiah* (20 homilies).

*Homily on 1 Kings 28* (1 homily, also known as the homily on 1 Samuel).

*Homilies on Psalms* (29 homilies).

### **Latin, translated by Jerome**

*Homilies on Isaiah* (9 homilies).

*Homilies on Jeremiah* (28 homilies, 20 of which also survive in Greek (see above)).

*Homilies on Ezekiel* (14 homilies).

*Homilies on Luke* (39 homilies and 257 fragments).

*Homilies on Song of Songs* (2 homilies).

### **Latin, translated by Rufinus**

*Homilies on Genesis* (16 homilies).

*Homilies on Exodus* (13 homilies).

*Homilies on Leviticus* (16 homilies).

*Homilies on Numbers* (28 homilies).

*Homilies on Joshua* (26 homilies).

*Homilies on Judges* (9 homilies).

*Homilies on the Psalms* (2 homilies).

Each homily is between three and twenty-five pages long, with the majority between eight and thirteen pages. The homilies usually treat a few verses of scripture, although sometimes a homily is written on a single verse, or will draw together similar but non-consecutive verses. Most of the homilies seek to convey two or three main messages about their subject. For this reason, the homily is as a form resistant to long asides. The homiletic form is also conducive to sustained rhetorical arguments that develop around a theme over the course of the text. As such, Origen's homilies often have to be read as whole units to understand his thematic development of an allegorical reading.

Socrates Scholasticus records that Origen preached in the church in Caesarea every Wednesday and Friday over a period of many years.<sup>45</sup> Eusebius claims that Origen was reluctant to have his homilies copied by stenographers until his later life, stating that only when Origen was past the age of 60 did he allow copies to be disseminated.<sup>46</sup> This may be true; it would be in line with standard ancient publishing practice if Origen or his subordinates had prepared special copies of the homilies specifically for publication.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless it is – as far as we can tell – likely that the homilies we have, or something very like them, were delivered in the church.

## II. Commentaries

The next largest category is the commentaries, of which we have four. They are as follows:

*Commentary on John* (32 books of approximately 100 pages each; only books 1, 2, 6, 10, 13, 19, 20, 28 and 32 survive).

*Commentary on Matthew* (25 books; the Greek of books 10-17 survive, and a Latin translation of approximately books 12-25 survive).

*Commentary on Romans* (15 books; fragments of the Greek survive, and an abridged translation of the whole commentary by Rufinus into 10 books).

*Commentary on Song of Songs* (10 books; only the first four books survive in a translation by Rufinus).

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<sup>45</sup>See Socrates, *Church History* 5.22.

<sup>46</sup>*Church History* 6.36. Nautin rejects this tradition, cf. Nautin (1977), op. cit., pp. 389–409.

<sup>47</sup>For more on the question, see H. Y. Gamble (1997). *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press; see also L. Reynolds and N. Wilson (1968). *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Origen was the first major Christian writer to make extensive use of the commentary form. Unlike the homilies, the commentaries allow space for extremely detailed, encyclopaedic analysis, often with rich cross-referencing.<sup>48</sup> Sometimes, in order to fully explain an idea relevant to a verse, Origen will write a one- or two-page philosophical excursus on the idea in question. It is, therefore, extremely important for the conceptual historian working with Origen's texts to search the commentaries carefully for such *ad hoc* asides, as they may provide clearer examples of Origen's understanding of various concepts than his stated positions in more abstract works. While the commentaries are broadly similar in approach, each has a distinctive character. I therefore provide a brief summary of each.

Origen began work on the *Commentary on John* in Alexandria at some point between 226 and 229,<sup>49</sup> under the sponsorship of his patron Ambrose. After his move to Caesarea in 231 he recommenced work from Book 6; it is not certain if he ever finished the work. Origen's *Commentary on John* is the longest work of his oeuvre. While, for practical reasons, scholarship often divides Origen's works into the exegetical and the philosophical works, the *Commentary on John* bridges this gap – as a commentary, it provides large-scale exegesis. Yet its depth and detail also provide the space for large detours and asides, many of which take the same form as Origen's more straightforwardly philosophical writing. The *Commentary on John* follows quite closely the commentary of Heracleon, a Valentinian gnostic, on the same topic – indeed, Origen often quotes from Heracleon. On these grounds it is fair to assume that part of Origen's intention in writing the *Commentary on John* was to 'rescue' the commentary form from its associations with gnostic theology; indeed, it would be hard to argue that he was unsuccessful in this aim.<sup>50</sup>

Origen likely wrote his *Commentary on Romans* some time before 244.<sup>51</sup> As far as we know, Rufinus' book divisions do not match the original book divisions; additionally, some sections are known to be abbreviated.<sup>52</sup> Some fragments of the Greek were found

<sup>48</sup>For example, Origen's *Commentary on John* spends over ninety pages on the single verse "in the beginning was the Word".

<sup>49</sup>See J. A. McGuckin (2004b). "The Scholarly Works of Origen". In: *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*. Ed. by J. A. McGuckin. John Knox Press, pp. 25–44; see also Origen (1989). *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel According to John, Books 1-10*. Trans. by R. E. Heine. Fathers of the Church 80. Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, pp. 4–5.

<sup>50</sup>McGuckin (2004b), op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>51</sup>For the chronology of Origen's commentaries, see C. Hammond-Bammel (1995). "Origen's Pauline Prefaces and the Chronology of His Pauline Commentaries". In: *Origeniana Sexta*. Ed. by A. L. B. Gilles Dorival. Leuven: Peeters, pp. 495–513.

<sup>52</sup>For example, Socrates Scholasticus mentions a section in the first book of Origen's text that is not

in 1941 at Toura, although these are not extensive.

At some time towards the end of his life, Origen wrote the *Commentary on Matthew*. According to McGuckin, Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* was to cement the place of Matthew as *the* primary synoptic gospel, ahead of Luke and Mark.<sup>53</sup> The commentary is, like the *Commentary on John*, a highly philosophical work. Out of Origen's commentaries it is the one that is most clearly useful for the construction of homilies, and is the only commentary that deals with liturgical themes in any detail.

The *Commentary on Song of Songs* was, as far as we know, written in two phases: the first half in Athens during Origen's travels in the early 240s, and the second half on his return to Caesarea. It is one of the only texts of Origen's to deal with ecclesiology. This is, by many accounts, the most mystical of Origen's commentaries. While Jerome's translation of the corresponding homilies focus on the ecclesiological interpretation of the Church as the bride of Christ, Rufinus' translation deals primarily with the psychic interpretation, of the soul as the bride of Christ.

In addition, we know of several lost commentaries. Eusebius states that while still resident in Alexandria, Origen wrote a *Commentary on Lamentations* in 25 books. We know he wrote a *Commentary on Genesis* – and, indeed, have a section from it excerpted in the *Philocalia*<sup>54</sup> – which was, according to Eusebius, in 12 books, of which the first nine were written in Alexandria.<sup>55</sup> Lost works of Origen's later life listed by Eusebius include a 30-book *Commentary on Isaiah* and a 25-book *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets*,<sup>56</sup> we have a fragment of his work on Hosea extant in *Philocalia* 8.

Other works listed by Jerome include<sup>57</sup> a *Commentary on Ezekiel* (25 books according to Eusebius, 29 according to Jerome). Papyrological and other fragments of a *Commentary on Kings* and *Commentary on Acts* have shown up in various finds.<sup>58</sup> Other lost commentaries that we know through reference alone from Jerome and others include a 15-book *Commentary on Luke*, a 5-book *Commentary on Galatians*, a 3-book *Commentary on Ephesians*, and commentaries on Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Hebrews, Titus, and Philemon. According to McGuckin, we have no record of anything on Mark or Revelation.<sup>59</sup> Despite the miraculous appearance of the lost *Hom-*

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present in Rufinus's translation. cf. Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.32.

<sup>53</sup>McGuckin (2004b), op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>54</sup>See below, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.24.2.

<sup>56</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.36.2.

<sup>57</sup>cf. Jerome, *Epistle* 36 to Damasus.

<sup>58</sup>Including the Toura papyri in 1941.

<sup>59</sup>McGuckin (2004b), op. cit., p. 32.

*ilies on Psalms* it does not seem likely that we will find further works.

### III. Philosophical tracts

Origen wrote several short philosophical tracts and several larger-scale systematic works. The short tracts are as follows:

*On Prayer*

*On Martyrdom*

*On the Pascha*

These works, broadly speaking, seek either to treat a single concept or practice, or a set of closely related concepts. They thus have a unifying topic, like a homily, but one that is not governed by the structure of the scriptural verse or set of verses.

Origen wrote *On Prayer* for his patron Ambrose, most likely shortly after his move to Caesarea.<sup>60</sup> This work is highly important for understanding Origen's approach to free will and foreknowledge as the first half of the text deals with practical and mechanical questions concerning prayer, taxonomies of prayer, and a discussion of the role of Christ in prayer. The second half contains a line-by-line exegesis of the Lord's Prayer, the first of its kind.

*On Martrydom* was written under the persecution of Maximinus Thrax in 235. In it, Origen encourages Christians not to give in and make pagan sacrifices, even under threat of torture or violence. Origen's rhetorical powers are in full flow in this work, which draws extensively on biblical examples of righteous death. The topic must have been one close to Origen's heart after the martyrdom of his own father some thirty years previously; indeed, when faced with persecution in his own life in the 250s Origen would live up to his exhortation.

The fragmentary *On the Pascha* was, like various other of Origen's texts, found in the Toura papyri. We have only a very small amount of the text, in which Origen discusses the pascha in Exodus. Some scholars have argued that it is in fact fragments of two separate versions of the work.<sup>61</sup> Eusebius also mentions a lost treatise in two books entitled *On the Resurrection*, about which we know very little.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>61</sup>cf. G. Sgherri (2000). "Pasqua". In: *Origene: Dizionario: la cultura. il pensiero. le opere*. Ed. by A. M. Castagno. Rome: Città Nuova, pp. 341–344.

<sup>62</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.24.3.

The second type of philosophical tract is the larger-scale systematic work, which sets forward a whole philosophical outlook. The only extant example is *On First Principles*, the patristic philosophical tract *par excellence* and the first of its kind. In this work, Origen opens with a theological summary of doctrines concerning the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, before moving on to discuss the divine economy in the second part of the work. A large proportion of the work is dedicated to the nature, inspiration, and correct method of reading scripture.

There have been to date two full editions of *On First Principles*, and two good English translations. The earlier edition, by Paul Koetschau, has an extreme scepticism for the Latin translation of Rufinus, in which the majority of the text survives. Where possible, Koetschau presents side-by-side the Greek texts available from catena fragments and other such sources, and sometimes inserts Jerome's paraphrases into the text.<sup>63</sup> We are lucky as regards *On First Principles* 3.1, which actually exists in its entirety in Greek, as one of the passages excerpted in the *Philocalia*.<sup>64</sup> As such, this chapter is frequently treated in the scholarship as a test-case for the accuracy of Rufinus' translations. Behr's edition is less sceptical towards Rufinus and corrects some of the errors of Koetschau's.

We know also that early in his career Origen wrote a *Stromata*, likely based on Clement of Alexandria's text of the same name, but none of it survives.<sup>65</sup>

#### IV. Polemic

Origen wrote two polemics:

*Against Celsus*

*Dialogue with Heracleides*

*Against Celsus* is the most famous of Origen's works and the most widely analysed. It was written as a long point-by-point refutation of the anti-Christian work, the *True Doctrine*, by the pagan philosopher Celsus, who was active in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century. As such, *Against Celsus* is largely structured by Celsus's concerns. The work skips between specific doctrinal, exegetical, ecclesiological, and liturgical concerns, and displays Origen's

<sup>63</sup>The catenae are the "chains" of patristic commentary-notes that were collected in antiquity – after the sixth century – to serve as manuals for preachers, illustrating the various verses of the Bible' (McGuckin (2004b), op. cit., p. 26). For more generally on the catenae, see H. Houghton, ed. (2016). *Commentaries, Catenae and Biblical Tradition: Papers from the Ninth Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament, in association with the COMPAUL project*. Gorgias Press.

<sup>64</sup>*Philocalia* 21.

<sup>65</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.24.3.

extremely wide reading in classical literature and philosophy. We have no surviving work of Celsus outside quotations in Origen, although many scholars have attempted to reconstruct Celsus' work from *Against Celsus*.<sup>66</sup> It is perhaps because of an overreliance on *Against Celsus* that some readers characterise Origen's work as disordered and impulsive; the style of *Against Celsus* is in fact quite different from most of his writing.

*Dialogue with Heracleides*, another Toura discovery, is the most unusual of Origen's works – if we can call it a work of his, since it appears to be a stenographer's record of an actual disputation that took place between Origen and a Valentinian called Heracleides. The discussion, which is fragmentary, focusses mostly on the relationship between the Son and the Father: Heracleides, some sort of monarchianist, objects to the notion of referring to the Son and Father as two separate persons.

## V. The *Philocalia*

The *Philocalia* is an anthology of Origen's works, compiled by Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus. It contains 27 thematically organised chapters, some of which are themselves chapters excerpted from other works, and some of which are more complex patchworks of short excerpts. The themes include the inspiration of scripture, free will, and logic. As well as preserving the Greek for some works for which we only have later Latin translations, it has also saved many passages from oblivion. The *Philocalia* is used regularly and sometimes quite uncritically in the scholarship; however, the editorial choices of Basil and Gregory are sometimes quite significant, especially in those texts made up of a patchwork of other passages. It is, in that sense, also a hugely valuable work for understanding the reception of Origen among the Cappadocian Fathers.

## VI. The *Hexapla*

Another work that does not survive is Origen's monumental *Hexapla*, a work of biblical textual criticism unparalleled until the Renaissance. It was made up of six columns of text: the first two were the Masoretic Talmud and a transliteration of that text from Hebrew characters into Greek characters.<sup>67</sup> The next four columns were standard Greek

<sup>66</sup>cf. e.g. the reconstruction by Arnold. J. Arnold, ed. (2016). *Der Wahre Logos des Kelsos. Eine Strukturanalyse*. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag.

<sup>67</sup>The transliteration was likely from the text of Aquila. While Origen had some training in Hebrew, he was likely not proficient enough for this sort of work. For a discussion of his linguistic ability and sources for his use of Hebrew etymologies, see R. Hanson (1956). "Interpretations of Hebrew Names in Origen". In: *Vigilae Christianae* 10.2, pp. 103–123.

versions of the scriptures: the third column was the Greek text Aquila,<sup>68</sup> the fourth was Symmachus,<sup>69</sup> the fifth was the Septuagint text,<sup>70</sup> and the sixth was Theodotion.<sup>71</sup>

To these standard texts, Origen added in some places an additional two or three columns, sometimes known as the Quinta, Sexta, and Septima. Quinta and Sexta were additional Greek texts of the scriptures that Origen had found in his book-buying travels. Quinta came from Nicopolis in Greece, presumably acquired on one of Origen's trips to Athens. Sexta is more complex: according to McGuckin, Origen's claim that he found it in a jar in a cave is trustworthy – indeed, McGuckin speculates that it may have been part of the Qumran library.<sup>72</sup>

In the *Hexapla*, Origen made use of Alexandrine textual critical practices, particularly practices of marking the text. He marked the Septuagint column, using the obelus (÷) to mark passages of the Septuagint that were not present in the Hebrew text, and the asterisk (\*) to mark the absence of passages in the Septuagint that were in the other Greek texts.<sup>73</sup>

Clearly, because of its size, the *Hexapla* was never meant for wide dissemination and was used primarily at the library of the school in Caesarea. Eusebius records that he had used the master copy made by Origen,<sup>74</sup> and it is judged likely that Jerome did too.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Compiled by Aquila, a Jewish scholar of the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. For more on Aquila and the importance of the Aquila-tradition to early Christian scholars, see J. R. Labendz (2009). “Aquila's Bible Translation in Late Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Perspectives”. In: *The Harvard Theological Review* 102.3, pp. 353–388.

<sup>69</sup>Compiled by Symmachus, another Jewish scholar, this time of the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Symmachus is often considered to be more commentary-like in form than other translations; cf. L. J. Liebreich (1944). “Notes on the Greek Version of Symmachus”. In: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63.4, pp. 397–403.

<sup>70</sup>Compiled some time between 300 and 200 B.C. For more on the production of the Septuagint text, a topic that fascinated exegetes of the time, including Origen, see M. Simon-Shoshan (2007). “The Tasks of the Translators: The Rabbis, the Septuagint, and the Cultural Politics of Translation”. In: *Prooftexts* 27.1, pp. 1–39.

<sup>71</sup>Once again compiled by a Jewish scholar, probably in around 180 AD. For a comparative discussion of the identity of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion see Section I. of A. Salvesen (2012). “The Role of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion in Modern Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible”. In: *Let us Go up to Zion*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 95–109.

<sup>72</sup>I am not wholly convinced. For further discussion see McGuckin (2004b), op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>73</sup>Martens (2012), op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>74</sup>See Eusebius *Church History* 6.16.44.

<sup>75</sup>cf. J. M. Dines (n.d.). “Jerome and the Hexapla: The Witness of the Commentary on Amos”. In: *Origen's Hexapla and Fragments*. Ed. by A. Salvesen. *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum* 58. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 421–436.

## VII. Letters

We only have two letters by Origen, to Gregory Thaumaturgus and to Africanus, and one reply to him, from Africanus. All three are short. The letter to Gregory is a general exhortation to consider the value of pagan learning alongside Christian scholarship.<sup>76</sup> The letter to Africanus is a reply to a specific exegetical query, about the legitimacy of the prophecies made by Daniel concerning Susanna, which Origen judges to be legitimate.<sup>77</sup>

## VIII. Scholia

The final, and smallest category (in terms of what is extant), is the scholia or scholarly notes, which only survive in fragments.<sup>78</sup> According to Jerome, Origen wrote scholia on Exodus, Leviticus, Isaiah, Psalms 1-15, Ecclesiastes, and the Gospel of John.<sup>79</sup> Several fragments have survived – some in Rufinus’s translation of Origen’s *Homilies on Numbers*, some in the catenae, and some in the *Philocalia*.

## iv Audience

As we can see from this survey, the formal possibilities and limitations of Origen’s works are quite varied. Origen himself was well aware of this; indeed, across his works he makes a number of explicit statements about the forms in which he is writing. Sometimes he talks about the structure of his texts.<sup>80</sup> More often, he comments on the restrictions – either real or perceived – imposed on him by his audience.<sup>81</sup>

We do not have a great deal of direct evidence about the intended audiences of various of Origen’s works. The easiest audience to determine is that for his homilies: as Origen would have delivered these in the church, we can be sure that they were intended for a fairly general audience (which perhaps included some theologically educated members). Similarly, we know the audience of the letters, and can conjecture that the *Hexapla* and the scholia were for reference in the library at Caesarea. *On Prayer*, *On Martyrdom*, and

<sup>76</sup>cf. pp.93–94.

<sup>77</sup>Daniel 13:1ff. We know that the letter from Africanus and the reply from Origen date to some period between 238 and 244 from Eusebius’ record of Origen’s travels. cf. Eusebius *Church History* 6.31.1-3.

<sup>78</sup>For more discussion see E. Junod (1995). “Que savons-nous des “Scholies” d’Origène?” In: *Origeniana Sexta*. Ed. by G. Dorival and A. L. Boulluc. Louvain: Peeters, pp. 133–49.

<sup>79</sup>*Epistle* 33.

<sup>80</sup>(e.g. *Against Celsus* pr.6.

<sup>81</sup>cf. *Homilies on Genesis* 2.6: ‘He will discover in this passage many secrets of a profound and hidden mystery which we cannot now bring forth either because of the shortness of time or the fatigue of the listeners.’

*On the Pascha* are clearly for Christian audiences; while it is possible they were directed at other clergymen, they would not be inappropriate for educated lay readers.

More complex, however, is the question of the commentaries, *On First Principles*, and *Against Celsus*. *Against Celsus* is sometimes taken to be intended for a pagan audience – or at least a mixed pagan and Christian audience.<sup>82</sup> Clearly as a polemic it would be attractive to Christian readers who wished to understand the nature of arguments made against them by pagans. Whether it was read by pagans or how it was received by them is far harder to grasp. As regards *On First Principles*, some scholars have speculated that it was used by other clergy and instructors, particularly in their preparatory reading for the teaching of catechumens.<sup>83</sup> Teaching catechumens had been the start of Origen's own career, and it does seem *prima facie* likely that he may have this pedagogical aim in mind.<sup>84</sup>

The commentaries may also have been written for other clergy and Christian intellectuals, but not as teaching aids; rather as reference works for their own homiletics. It certainly seems unlikely that the commentaries would have been for private readership or use by laypeople: even the shortest commentary (of which we know), *Commentary on Song of Songs*, is 10 books long. Reproducing these commentaries for wide distribution would have been prohibitively expensive. I suspect that Origen probably used his own commentaries to aid in the writing of his homilies; unfortunately, since there is hardly any overlap in the books treated by the extant homilies and commentaries, it is very difficult to know.

We see, then, that Origen wrote different works for different audiences who – while they were primarily fellow Christians – had very different levels of education. We should for that reason not be afraid to consider the philosophical views expressed in the more difficult works such as the commentaries as more central to Origen's understanding than the more *ad hoc* polemical views expressed in *Against Celsus* or the more popular works where necessary. Additionally, knowing the variety of his audiences, we should not expect total concordance across his corpus.

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<sup>82</sup>McGuckin (2004b), op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>83</sup>E. A. Dively Lauro (2005). *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture Within Origen's Exegesis*. Leiden: Brill, 38ff.

<sup>84</sup>While the commentaries are exegetically organised and thus seem more useful for those preparing specifically exegetical sermons, *On First Principles* would be ideally organised for a theoretical teaching approach to the basic doctrines of Christianity, allowing the instructor to pick and choose the level of detail that he or she wanted to include.

### III Literature on Origen

A few facts about Origen's life and works are particularly pertinent to the question of prophecy. The first is his condemnation. Origen has always been an ambiguous figure in Christian history; his significance has always been tacitly acknowledged, but it is only in the last century or so that his work has been openly defended as orthodox within the Church.<sup>85</sup> This has had a major effect on the way in which he is studied; despite the increasing secularisation of academic theology, both in the UK and elsewhere, its agenda is still defined to a great degree by the open questions and controversies within various Christian denominations. Since Patristics sits on the boundaries of other academic disciplines with more embedded secular traditions – such as History or Classics – its relationship to this trend is quite complicated. As regards Origen studies, this has led to a clear pair of scholarly focusses. The first is whether it should be considered orthodox.

The second is the question of his philosophical training and allegiance, and, in particular, his relationship to Platonism. Origen scholarship in the last century has tended to circle round this debate. On the one hand, there are those who argue that Origen was, in essence, a Platonist with a veneer of Christianity, and on the other, those who argue that his work has little in common with Platonism and should be understood instead in a tradition of mystic Christian spirituality. The former view prevailed for much of the early twentieth century, especially in German-language scholarship.<sup>86</sup> The latter view was more popular in French scholarship, particularly in French monographs of the early twentieth century.<sup>87</sup> It also gained ground in the later half of the century, particularly following the work of Henri Crouzel.<sup>88</sup>

There has, of course, been a more recent third position on both of these debates, which is that of criticising the terms of the argument both around Platonism and orthodoxy: this is exemplified by Mark Edwards, who emphatically argues that Origen was not in any meaningful sense a Platonist.<sup>89</sup> I will start from this third position, with the

<sup>85</sup>John Paul II (1998). *Fides et Ratio*. Encyclical letter. Vatican.

<sup>86</sup>cf. A. Miura-Stange (1926). *Celsus und Origenes: Das Gemeinsame ihrer Weltanschauung, nach den acht Büchern des Origenes gegen Celsus*. Giessen; H. von Campenhausen (1955). *Die Griechischen Kirchenväter*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer; E. von Ivanka (1964). *Plato christianus: Uebernahme und Umgestaltung des Platonismus durch die Väter*. Einsiedeln; and still occasionally today, e.g. John Paul II (1998), op. cit.

<sup>87</sup>cf. E. De Faye (1926). *Origen and His Work*. Trans. by F. Rothwell. London: Allen & Unwin, and J. Daniélou (1948). *Origène*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.

<sup>88</sup>H. Crouzel (1961). *Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer. cf. also Trigg (1983), op. cit.; J. Alviar (1993). *Klesis. The Theology of the Christian Life According to Origen*. Dublin, and J. Laporte (1995). *Théologie Liturgique de Philon d'Alexandrie et Origène*. Paris.

<sup>89</sup>Edwards (2002), *Origen Against Plato*.

assumption that both Origen's piety and his background of Platonic education are moot. To frame discussions of Origen's thought solely around this dichotomy seems to me to vastly oversimplify the religious milieu of 3<sup>rd</sup> century Alexandria, where a complex set of worldviews were combined and contested in the academies and on the streets.<sup>90</sup>

This debate does, of course, represent a wider historical strand in the study of patristic thinkers. It is by now uncontroversial to state that there is a spectrum of approaches within the discipline of Patristics, from the apologetic and doctrinal to the anthropological, social scientific, and history-of-ideas. It is perhaps less uncontroversial to acknowledge that the discipline does not have widely accepted conventions for demarcating studies with different epistemic bases – and, indeed, it is not clear that there is a consensus that such a demarcation is necessary or desirable.

It is not, for example, a convention for those who work on Hellenic polytheism to state in the introduction to their works whether they themselves believe in and worship the Greek pantheon. But this is because the reader may safely assume that classical scholars, unless for contrarian reasons, are not themselves Hellenic polytheists. This is evidently not the case in institutions where scholars study the history of Christianity. I believe there is an often unacknowledged<sup>91</sup> convention that many academic theologians may – quite legitimately – have a doctrinal horse in any given theological race. That is to say, many scholars subscribe to the notion that some position or other on any particular theological issue is correct, and that there is therefore an objective yardstick by which to measure the various positions of patristic writers. Thus, to borrow terminology from anthropology, some patristic studies have 'emic' elements.<sup>92</sup>

I do not believe this to be a problem *per se*. My objection is to the switch between etic and emic perspectives without any signposting; such gear changes can lead to cases where Christian scholars with different denominational backgrounds and doctrinal commit-

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<sup>90</sup>Take, for example, the later story of Hypatia of Alexandria, in which the entire cast of characters lie along a multi-dimensional spectrum between fervent Christianity and fervent paganism. This story, which plays out in the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, demonstrates a great deal of religious diversity even in a period in which Christianity is undoubtedly fully established as the state religion. In Origen's pre-Nicene period, when the prevalence of paganism was much higher and Christians subject to occasional persecution, this can only have been even more of a pronounced feature of the city's demographics. cf. C. P. Jones (2014b). *Between Pagan and Christian*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. See also I. Moyer (2011). *Egypt and the Limits of Hellenism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>91</sup>Or coyly acknowledged; see, for example, Lewis Ayres' preface in L. Ayres and G. Jones, eds. (1998). *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*. Christian Origins 1. Oxford: Routledge.

<sup>92</sup>The idea of 'emic' (insider) and 'etic' (outsider) epistemological approaches has a huge scholarly literature of its own. For an introduction to the question, see M. Terkourafi (2009). "Emic/etic". In: *Key Ideas in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language*. Ed. by S. Chapman and C. Routledge. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp. 66–67.

ments may *really* be discussing contemporary theological issues *via* ancient theologians.

While this thesis may have other (non-religious) epistemological biases or problems of its own, in what follows, I take no interest in what is the ‘correct’, ‘true’ or ‘orthodox’ answer to any of the philosophical and theological problems presented. I am interested only in the views of those living before 553. Nor am I concerned with the importance of Origen’s views for modern doctrine. I am interested only in what Origen argues, if and how and why he uses those who wrote before him, and if and how and why he influences those who wrote in the century or so after him.

There is also a well-observed trend in which many scholars of Classics and Ancient Philosophy pass over Christian philosophers. I believe that Origen absolutely can and should be studied as a philosopher. Part of the reason he is not always read as such is that the vast majority of Origen’s extant writing is exegetical – that is to say, (nearly) line-by-line explanation of scripture. Yet it is the major theoretical works (*On First Principles* and *Against Celsus*) that have formed the backbone of most intellectual scholarship on Origen. Indeed, many studies fail to establish a rigorous or comprehensive approach to the other works – particularly the works of exegetical rather than speculative theology, such as the many homilies.

This bias gives an unbalanced sense of Origen’s thought, and in particular, his motivations for writing. I believe it has helped to prolong unnecessarily the Platonist/mystic debate. In separating Origen’s works along these lines, we underplay the exegetical significance of the speculative works, and, by the same token, the speculative significance of the exegetical works. We must allow our focus to be led by Origen’s own interests and rhetoric. Therefore this thesis attempts, as far as possible, to engage with a broad spectrum of Origen’s work, and to seek examples that do not always reach the attention of more general accounts. In this sense, I do not draw lines – which I see as artificial – between Origen as theologian and Origen as philosopher.

## IV Literature on Origen and Prophecy

Although the literature on prophecy in Origen’s thought is not extensive, two books have been written on the topic. The first is *Charismatic Succession* by Gunnar af Hällström<sup>93</sup> and the second is *The More Divine Proof* by Robert J. Hauck.<sup>94</sup> Both works were

<sup>93</sup>G. af Hällström (1985). *Charismatic Succession: A Study on Origen’s Consept [sic] of Prophecy*. Helsinki: Toimittanut Anne-Marit Enroth.

<sup>94</sup>R. J. Hauck (1989). *The More Divine Proof*. Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press.

published in the 1980s and were originally doctoral theses.

The works take rather different approaches to the question: Hällström's takes a wider-angled view and is more clearly situated within a theological framework. It aims at defining an abstract, overall system or taxonomy of Origen's understanding of prophecy. In contrast, Hauck's book is more narrowly focussed on *Against Celsus* and takes in a wide historical context, with discussion not only of the history of Greek philosophy on the topic of prophecy, but also a number of other early Christian views. While Hauck comes to some conclusions about Origen's understanding of prophecy, his work seeks primarily to situate Origen in a wider context.

Both books have a number of important and valuable insights that have been very helpful for the development of this thesis.<sup>95</sup> However, I do not think that either work settles the issue of Origen's understanding of prophecy. In both cases, I believe there are significant oversights – indeed, I believe each work would benefit from a little of the approach of the other. Hauck, who writes excellently on Origen's philosophical and cultural background, limits his scope to a narrow section of Origen's works (primarily *Against Celsus*) and therefore, almost by definition, cannot account for how prophecy fits into Origen's thought overall. While this may not be his aim, it seems to me an important oversight; I cannot help feeling uneasy when he draws general conclusions – some of them incorrect – about Origen's understanding of prophecy on the basis of *Against Celsus* alone.

On the other hand, while Hällström surveys the full range of Origen's texts, he does not engage with much of Origen's non-Christian historical context (or indeed with much of his Christian context). My disagreement with him is greater: I believe he misunderstands Origen's taxonomy of prophecy completely. I will discuss the earlier work first (Hällström's), and then the later work (Hauck's).

### *Charismatic Succession*

In this book, Hällström puts forward a concise thesis. He argues that Origen saw Jewish prophecy in two categories – the major scriptural prophets, who dealt with knowledge of Christ, the future of Israel, and major eschatological points; and the minor 'second-class' prophets, who had only local importance and prophesied on matters of conventional

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<sup>95</sup>In particular, I have been influenced by Hauck's discussion of Apollonius of Tyana, and how he exemplifies a certain rhetorical contest both within and between pagan and Christian critics over magic, sorcery and miracles (see particularly *ibid.*, pp. 38–48). I discuss some of these issues in Chapter 3.

community importance (including prediction of the future). While prophecy technically culminated in Christ, in reality, Christians inherited this twofold structure, with the apostles and subsequent ‘charismatic’ teachers – including Origen himself – taking a role like that of the scriptural prophets, while a large structure of second-class prophets and teachers beneath them supported them through treatment of less spiritually pressing matters.

Hällström’s taxonomy into first- and second-class prophets rests upon *Against Celsus* 1.37, which he uses to argue a strong distinction between the two types of prophecy in Origen’s thought, not only among Jews, but later, among Christians. Since this passage is important for understanding both Hällström’s thesis and my criticisms, I quote it in full:

δοκεῖ μοι οὖν μετρίως κατεσκευάσθαι... ὅτι... προφηῆται ἦσαν ἐν Ἰουδαίοις, προλέγοντες οὐ μόνον τὰ καθολικὰ περὶ μελλόντων, ὡς τὰ περὶ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὰ περὶ βασιλειῶν κοσμικῶν καὶ περὶ τῶν συμβησομένων τῷ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ πιστευόντων τῷ σωτῆρι ἐθνῶν καὶ πολλῶν ἄλλων τῶν περὶ αὐτοῦ λεχθέντων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ καθ’ ἕνα, ὡς περὶ τῶν ὄνων Κίς ἀπολομένων, πῶς εὑρεθήσονται, καὶ περὶ τῆς νόσου, ἧς ἐνόσησεν ὁ τοῦ βασιλέως Ἰσραὴλ υἱός, ἢ εἴ τι ἄλλο ἀναγέγραπται τοιοῦτον.

It seems to me to have been well established that there were prophets among the Jews who spoke not only general predictions about the future – such as things about Christ and the kingdoms of the world and about the events which would happen to Israel, and those peoples that would believe in the saviour and many other things about him – but also specific predictions, such as how the lost donkeys of Kish would be found, and about the disease that had made the son of the king of Israel ill, and any other things like this which have been recorded.

Hällström takes the statement ‘there were prophets among the Jews’ to indicate two separate statements, each pertaining to one of the two types of prophecy mentioned in this passage (‘general predictions about the future’ and ‘specific predictions’). That is to say, he reads ‘there were prophets among the Jews who uttered general predictions about the future’ *and* ‘there were prophets among the Jews who uttered prophecies respecting particular events’, *and* (implicitly) that these are two separate groups of people.

I think this is stretching the text. The phrase ‘not merely... but also’ (οὐ μόνον... ἀλλὰ καὶ) is conjunctive, making it clear that the prophets who utter the general prophe-

cies are the same people as the prophets who utter the specific prophecies.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, Origen emphasises this conjunction by claiming that ‘it has been well established’ – i.e. he feels that what he is claiming is neither unique to him nor particularly controversial. It would be unusual if Origen felt that proposing a strict dichotomous hierarchy of prophets was ‘pretty well established’, given that we see no such claim in any other Christian or Jewish writer prior to him.

Instead, given the polemical context, I think it is more likely that Origen is, with this emphatic formulation, rebutting a specific criticism put by Celsus. So what is this criticism? To me it seems most likely that Celsus’ objection here is one or both of the following points:

either 1) ‘Jewish/Christian prophets all make general predictions which either don’t come true or can’t be proved to have come true’

and/or 2) ‘Christians wrongly read fulfilment through Christ into Jewish prophecies that actually have nothing to do with Christ, and thus claim truth for prophecies that have not been proved true’

In answering in this way, Origen would be refuting both of these accusations. Concerning 1), Origen’s rebuttal is that prophets can and routinely do make prophecies – such as that about the donkeys of Kish – that are absolutely subject to truth tests, and they do indeed pass those tests. Concerning 2), his rebuttal is as follows: since the prophets have been proven to be correct in localised issues of prophecy, we can also trust them in their more general prophecies; Christians are correct to take Christ as the proof of those prophecies.

Thus, while Hällström’s distinction between the types of prophecy is supported by the text – indeed, it is clear from this text that Origen believes different categories or types of prophecy are possible – there is nothing in Origen’s work to suggest that this distinction has any parallel in the prophets themselves. Hällström’s claim that these two types of prophecy are carried out by separate people is entirely without textual basis, and makes little sense in the logic of Origen’s polemic.

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<sup>96</sup>cf. 2764 in H. W. Smyth (1920). *A Greek Grammar*. New York, NY: American Book Company, p. 630.

### *The More Divine Proof*

In this work, Hauck examines the presentation of prophecy and inspiration in the arguments made by Origen (and implicitly by Celsus) in *Against Celsus*. His thesis, in one sentence, is the following:

The question of prophetic knowledge is central to what holds pagan and Christian apart, and indeed, is an important facet of late antique religious thought.<sup>97</sup>

Since Hauck is interested in the rhetorical framing of prophecy as part of a wider polemical clash between Celsus and Origen, he must establish the background for both men's views; he therefore carries out a survey of Greek philosophical doctrines about prophecy, and also of early Christian understandings of the same topic. Hauck's view, in short, is that there is no clearly-identifiable feature of Greco-Roman prophecy that is not also found in Christian prophecy, and *vice versa*. For example, while Hällström states that the presence of prophetic ecstasy is the dividing line between pagan and Hebraeo-Christian prophecy,<sup>98</sup> Hauck would (correctly) disagree, since prophetic ecstasy can be found in both but is uniform in neither. This is an extremely useful piece of work.

Instead, Hauck argues that to understand why certain categories of pagan divination were rejected by Christians one must understand both what made prophecy legitimate in Christian eyes, and why pagans rejected Christian prophecy. Furthermore, he argues that, since prophetic ecstasy plays an important role in polemic in both pagan and Christian theories of prophecy, it is not in itself sufficient for claims of legitimacy or illegitimacy, which is, once again, in my view completely correct.

To make his case, Hauck takes account of a diverse range of authors: Plato, Plutarch, Cicero, but also Philo, Philostratus, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tatian, Tertullian, and Hermas. Central to his analysis of the question of inspiration in *Against Celsus* is the problem of how human beings can distinguish between inspiration by God and inspiration by demons. Thus, argues Hauck, while some authors may claim the presence of prophetic ecstasy as the sign of demonic inspiration, others use other criteria; this becomes clear in the case of Apollonius of Tyana, a self-proclaimed prophet and sage whose critics did

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<sup>97</sup>Hauck (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup>Thus Hällström: 'ecstasy [is] a dividing line between Christianity and paganism.' (Hällström [1985], *op. cit.*, p. 15). For further discussion of this feature see pp.100–104 on prophetic ecstasy in Platonic philosophy, and Chapter 7 for the lines of demarcation that Origen himself draws between pagan and Hebraeo-Christian prophecy.

not focus on questions of ecstasy, but of magic and charlatanry. Thus, as Hauck shows, pagan and Christian critics alike formulated arguments about the morality of those persons claimed as prophets, often using the criterion of immorality as a way of deriding a prophet's claim to legitimacy and authority.

While this line of argument is, I think, a profitable and sound approach to the rhetorical context, the point can at times become reductive. This is especially the case when dealing with a lot of polemical and apologetic works, as Hauck does in his later chapters. He does not, for example, consider issues like the question of fate or free will, prophecy's interaction with time, or the relationship between prophecy and scripture.

Hauck devotes a chapter to Origen's doctrine on the question of prophecy. He concludes in this chapter that the usual scholarly spectrum of rationalism/mysticism does not apply very well to Origen's thought about inspiration and prophecy; instead, Hauck frames the question, as he has in previous chapters, as one of demonology:

This conflict addresses a pressing spiritual issue of its world: which side has the spiritual effectiveness sufficient to break the encompassing power of the daemons and to make available knowledge of God?<sup>99</sup>

I think that for a certain strand of Origen's understanding of prophecy – which I address in Chapter 7 – this is completely correct. However, Hauck's primarily demonological approach to Origen's view of prophecy is limited by his exclusive focus on *Against Celsus*. While it works extremely well for that text, it misses a number of other facets foregrounded in other works. While I recognise that this means Hauck achieves what he set out to do, it does not comprehensively answer the question of how Origen understood prophecy – which I aim to do in this thesis.

## V Glossary of Prophetic Terminology

It will be useful at this juncture to provide a glossary of Greek and Latin terminology used to denote prophecy and related concepts. If we are to grasp precisely at what Origen means by prophecy, and how this is different from those who went before or after him, we must be able to do it both in the language in which he wrote, and the languages in which others read him: i.e. Latin as well as Greek.<sup>100</sup> This glossary does not attempt or

<sup>99</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>100</sup>Regrettably, I have not been able to examine the Hebrew terminology as I have no knowledge of the language. While Origen did know some Hebrew, the major Jewish author I discuss in this thesis, Philo, wrote in Greek, which – I hope – will help to alleviate the omission.

pretend to be comprehensive, but I hope it will be of some use.

## i Greek

The prefix *προ*, used in nearly all verbs of prophesying, straightforwardly has the sense of ‘before’, both spatially and in time.<sup>101</sup> The most usual verbs for prophesying or foreseeing are *προλέγω*, *προφήμι*, *προεπίσταμαι*<sup>102</sup> and *προγιγνώσκω*<sup>103</sup>, with its related noun / adjective pair *προγνώσις* / *προγνωστικός*, from which we get ‘prognosis’ and ‘prognostic’. This term is used in medical literature with the same meaning as the English transliteration,<sup>104</sup> but is also used to mean ‘foreknowledge’ in astrological literature<sup>105</sup> and in the Septuagint and Greek New Testament.<sup>106</sup>

Other less commonly used verbs of foreseeing or foreknowing attested in various classical writers include *προαθρέω*,<sup>107</sup> *προβλέπω*<sup>108</sup> (with adjective *προβλεπτικός*, ‘able to foresee’<sup>109</sup>), *προγνωρίζω*<sup>110</sup> and *προδέρκομαι*.<sup>111</sup> Several verbs imply explicit pronouncement of the prophetic knowledge (with more or less public connotations), including *προαγορεύω*,<sup>112</sup> and *προθεσπίζω*.<sup>113</sup> Compare these with, for example, *προεῖπον* (to declare publicly), attested widely with no futurative sense.<sup>114</sup>

There is a class of verbs used of omens that denote showing or signifying ahead of time, used most properly of the objects of divination. These include *προαποσημαίνω*<sup>115</sup>, *προδείκνυμι*<sup>116</sup> and *προδηλώω*.<sup>117</sup> Some have specific religious connotations, like *προ-*

<sup>101</sup>cf. 1694 Smyth (1920), op. cit., p. 384.

<sup>102</sup>LSJ p. 1488. cf. e.g., Plato, *Gorgias* 459e, Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*. 4.3.12.

<sup>103</sup>LSJ p. 1473. Used in philosophy (e.g. Plato, *Symposium* 219e) and medical texts (Hippocrates, *Prognostics* 1).

<sup>104</sup>LSJ p.1473. e.g. Hippocrates, *Prognostics*, Galen, *On the Art of Medicine* 4.90.

<sup>105</sup>LSJ p.1473. Used of astrologers by Vettius Valens, *Anthology* 37.28.

<sup>106</sup>e.g. Judges 9:6 (LXX), Acts 2:23, 1 Peter 1:2 (SBLGNT).

<sup>107</sup>LSJ p.1466. Eustathius, *On the Necromancer, against Origen* 86.41.

<sup>108</sup>LSJ p.1471. e.g. Psalms 36 (LXX), but used as ‘provide against’ in Heraclitus, *On Unbelievable Tales* 11.

<sup>109</sup>LSJ p.1471. Eustathius, *On the Necromancer, against Origen* 83.33.

<sup>110</sup>LSJ p.1473. Aristotle *Topics* 141b12.

<sup>111</sup>LSJ p.1474. e.g. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 250.

<sup>112</sup>LSJ p.1465-7. Used straightforwardly as ‘prophesy’ by Xenophon (*Symposium* 4.5), but more usually used for ‘proclaim publicly’ (e.g. Herodotus, *Histories* 7.10). Related nouns include *προαγόρευμα* (Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.110) and *προαγόρευσις* (Aristotle, *Poetics* 1454b5).

<sup>113</sup>LSJ p.1481, e.g. Lucian, *Alexander* 19.

<sup>114</sup>LSJ p.1476, e.g. Plato, *Euthyphro* 3c.

<sup>115</sup>LSJ p.1469, e.g. Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.3.4.

<sup>116</sup>LSJ p.1473. e.g. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.209.

<sup>117</sup>LSJ p.1474, Plutarch, *Pompey* 32, but also used to mean ‘aforesaid’ in Vettius Valens.

καταμαντεύομαι (to divine).<sup>118</sup>

The most commonly used nouns for ‘prophet’ and ‘seer’ are προφήτης<sup>119</sup> and μαντις.<sup>120</sup> More specifically used of oracles are φάτις,<sup>121</sup> θέσπισμα,<sup>122</sup> and χρησμολογία<sup>123</sup> (or χρηστήριον).<sup>124</sup> μαντεῖον<sup>125</sup> has its own set of derived terms including μαντεία<sup>126</sup> (oracular activity / divination). The simplest term for ‘prophecy’ is προφητεία.<sup>127</sup> Of oracular activity in general, Plutarch uses προδήλωσις<sup>128</sup> (prognostication), and its related adjective προδηλωτικός.<sup>129</sup>

Then too there are the names of the various mantic arts, which are usually compounds with μαντεία: πυρομαντεία (divination by fire), κληδομαντεία (divination by sudden noises), ὀρνιθομαντεία (divination by birds), ὄνειρομαντεία (divination by dreams), and so on. Other specialised types of diviners include χρῆσμολογοί<sup>130</sup> and ἐγγαστρίμυθοι.<sup>131</sup> For prophetic ecstasy, we have ἔκστασις<sup>132</sup> which comes ultimately from the verb ἐξίστημι<sup>133</sup> (to stand outside). There is also μανία,<sup>134</sup> regularly used.

Origen’s terminology is fairly simple. He uses προφητεία as his standard word for prophecy, especially in definitional statements.<sup>135</sup> His usual words for ‘prophet’ and ‘prophesy’ are προφήτης and προφητεύω.<sup>136</sup> For foreknowledge, he uses the usual words προγνώσις τῶν μελλόντων, using this formula both for divine foreknowledge<sup>137</sup> and the foreknowledge of agents that he would consider demonic – such as Apollo.<sup>138</sup>

More interestingly, in cases where Origen does not believe a prophet to be a true prophet, his terminology varies. Thus of Balaam and Caiaphas – figures to whom I

<sup>118</sup>LSJ p.1484. e.g. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Rhesus* 28.

<sup>119</sup>LSJ p.1540. e.g. Euripides, *Rhesus* 972.

<sup>120</sup>LSJ p.1080. e.g. Homer, *Iliad* 1.62.

<sup>121</sup>LSJ p.1919. e.g. Aeschylus, *Persians* 227.

<sup>122</sup>LSJ p.795, e.g. Herodotus, *Histories* 2.29.

<sup>123</sup>LSJ p.2006, e.g. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca* 16.26.

<sup>124</sup>LSJ p.2006. e.g. Euripides, *Medea* 667.

<sup>125</sup>LSJ p.1079. e.g. Homer, *Odyssey* 12.272.

<sup>126</sup>LSJ p.1079. e.g. Plato, *Timaeus* 71d.

<sup>127</sup>LSJ p.1539, e.g. Lucian, *Alexander* 40. Used widely in the LXX, e.g. 2 Chronicles 15:8.

<sup>128</sup>LSJ, p.1474. e.g. Plutarch, *Moralia* 2.398d.

<sup>129</sup>p.1474. e.g. [Plato], *Definitions* 414b.

<sup>130</sup>LSJ p.2006, e.g. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.62.

<sup>131</sup>LSJ p.467. Hippocrates, *Epidemics* 5.63.

<sup>132</sup>LSJ p.520. e.g. Aristotle, *Categories* 10a1.

<sup>133</sup>LSJ p.595. Used in the Bible for ‘lose consciousness’, cf. Judges 4:21.

<sup>134</sup>LSJ p.1078. e.g. Plato, *Philebus* 45e.

<sup>135</sup>e.g. *Commentary on Corinthians* 55 or *Commentary on John* 2.208.

<sup>136</sup>e.g. *Homilies on Luke* 6.2.

<sup>137</sup>e.g. *On Prayer* 6.4.

<sup>138</sup>e.g. *Against Celsus* 7.3.

return in Chapter 7 – Origen uses προφητεύει of their prophesying, but will not describe them as προφήται, opting instead, in Balaam’s case, for the fairly neutral μάντις.<sup>139</sup> In the case of figures who he does not consider legitimately inspired at all, he uses a completely separate family of words, referring to the Greek oracles as θεοπρόπων and θεσπίζω and its cognates. For the ecstasy of the Pythia he uses the usual word, ἔκστασις. I return to these specific examples in the relevant discussions in Chapter 7 and elsewhere.

## ii Latin

As in Greek, the prefix ‘pro’ (or, related, ‘prae’) begins most Latin verbs that explicitly denote prophetic activity; the most common of these verbs include *praedico*,<sup>140</sup> *profor*<sup>141</sup> and *praenosco*.<sup>142</sup> Less frequently used but still attested are *praesentio*,<sup>143</sup> *praevideo*,<sup>144</sup> *praesago*<sup>145</sup>. Otherwise, verbs of divination include *divino*,<sup>146</sup> *vaticinor*<sup>147</sup> and the pejorative *hariolor*.<sup>148</sup>

Words for seer vary: there is the rather literary *vates*,<sup>149</sup> (or its related noun *vaticinator*<sup>150</sup>) used of the Sibyl and others. The term mostly used for oracles is *oraclum*,<sup>151</sup> both the site itself and the prophecies delivered. *prophetia* and *propheta*, as transliterations from the Greek, are used occasionally for prophecy;<sup>152</sup> for divination generally, the usual word is *divinatio*.<sup>153</sup>

As in Greek, there is a specialised vocabulary for different types of divination: thus *haruspex*<sup>154</sup> for somebody who divines by entrails, *augur*<sup>155</sup> for somebody who divines by the flight of birds, and so on.

Generally, for ‘prophecy’, Jerome and Rufinus both use *prophetia*, usually separating

<sup>139</sup>e.g. *Commentary on John* 28.12.

<sup>140</sup>OLD p.1428, e.g. Cicero *On the Orator* 3.37.

<sup>141</sup>OLD p.1477, e.g. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 1.739.

<sup>142</sup>OLD p.1435, e.g. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 12.86.

<sup>143</sup>OLD p.1440, e.g. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* 4.682.

<sup>144</sup>OLD p.1449, e.g. Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.445.

<sup>145</sup>OLD p.1438, e.g. Suetonius, *On Grammarians* 23.

<sup>146</sup>OLD p.564, e.g. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.114.

<sup>147</sup>OLD p.2015, e.g. Pliny, *Natural History* 28.147.

<sup>148</sup>OLD p.786, e.g. Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 2.7.

<sup>149</sup>OLD p.2015. Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.65.

<sup>150</sup>OLD p.2015. e.g. Ovid, *Letters from Pontus* 1.1.42.

<sup>151</sup>OLD p.1262. e.g. Virgil, *Georgics* 4.449.

<sup>152</sup>OLD p.1492. e.g. Strabo, *Geography* 2.

<sup>153</sup>OLD p.564. e.g. Cicero, *On Divination* 2.148.

<sup>154</sup>OLD p.787. e.g. Cicero, *Catiline Orations* 3.19.

<sup>155</sup>OLD p.213. e.g. Livy, *From the Founding of the City* 8.23.14.

this from ‘divination’ (*divinatio*).<sup>156</sup> This term, while not widely used in Latin, is a direct Greek analogue of προφητεία; for prophet, they usually use *prophetes*.<sup>157</sup> We can be reasonably sure in these cases that they are transliterating Origen’s usual terms.

### A note on use of Greek and Latin in this thesis

In order to balance the competing needs of accuracy and word-limit, in this thesis I quote fully in Greek or Latin only passages of Origen. All translations of Origen are my own unless otherwise noted. Passages of other texts originally in Greek or Latin are presented in translation only, although I sometimes additionally give Greek or Latin in brackets for particular phrases. All quotations from the Bible are from the NRSV unless otherwise marked. All quotations from scholarly literature not in English are given in translation.

## VI Definitions of Prophecy

When we compare biblical “prophecy” with “prophecy” in other texts or cultures it is always our own views of prophecy that we compare. The quality of these views may vary, to say the least.<sup>158</sup>

In her book *Luck, Fate and Fortune*, Esther Eidinow analyses two cinematic portrayals of fate, examining the assumptions and systems of thought in play in *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Terminator*. Each of these films, argues Eidinow, has a character who is aware not only of their own fate, but also its fatedness. Many modern secular portrayals of prophecy in film and literature focus – in one way or another – on the ambiguous relationship between the future and an individual’s free will. In such a set-up, prophecies are cryptic but unalterable plot devices, like in *Oedipus the King*, with the dramatic tension focussed not on whether the prophesied events will come to pass, but *how* – and how the characters will respond. What is missing from many of these portrayals is any kind of divine force; fate operates in a general Greco-Roman sense.

In the news media and arts criticism, however, the term ‘prophet’ regularly means little more than ‘harbinger’ or even ‘person on the cutting edge’. Additionally, although

<sup>156</sup>e.g. at *Homilies on Numbers* 13.6.2, which draws this distinction. cf. p. 214.

<sup>157</sup>e.g. *Homilies on Isaiah* 9.1.

<sup>158</sup>H. Barstad (2000). “Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context”. In: *Comparare necesse est? Ancient Israelite and ANE Prophecy*. Ed. by M. Nissinen. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, p. 9.

some religious and political leaders self-style or are styled by others as prophets (or false prophets), religious prophecy is extremely peripheral to most people in the West, outside some evangelical Christian cultural spaces; this, of course, contrasts sharply with its status as a major cultural and religious force in other parts of the world.

Dealing, then, even with common-sense definitions of prophecy can be to walk on shifting ground. Modern scholarly categories do very little to aid this confusion; the study of prophecy crosses a great number of different disciplinary boundaries, including philosophy, theology, history, anthropology, and psychiatry. But, as Laura Nasrallah argues, this can obscure the fact that in both Greco-Roman and Jewish antiquity ‘dreams, prophecies, visions, and oracles were understood to be part of the same basic phenomenon.’<sup>159</sup>

It may seem intuitive that the most suitable background framework of scholarly literature on prophecy in Origen’s thought would be histories of prophecy in the early Church. For many other early Christian thinkers this may be the case. But Origen was, for a person of his theological standing, remarkably seldom involved in any kind of ecclesiastical politics. The only polemic he wrote was against a long-dead pagan critic. In this sense he is very different from figures like Tertullian, who wrote frequently and scorchingly against contemporary opponents.

While – as I will argue throughout this thesis – Origen’s views on prophecy were undoubtedly shaped by claims to prophetic status made by contemporary individuals and movements, much of his writing and thinking about prophecy focusses on other incarnations. He writes, for example on Greek prophecy, OT prophets, and abstract philosophical notions of what a prophet might know and how they might know it. To understand him on these topics we must know not only what thinkers of his own time thought about prophecy, but also what he might have read or picked up from the many centuries of thought about prophecy that went before him.

There is, additionally, a set of source and methodological problems which complicates much scholarship written in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries on the history of prophecy in the early Church. Several major histories from before the 1960s that are still in use base their narratives on a problematic claim that it is an anthropological universal that ‘primitive’ societies go through a phase of shamanistic prophecy which becomes increasingly institutionalised within bureaucratic structures – such as that of the Church. Thus, for example, von Campenhausen identifies the relationship between individual prophets

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<sup>159</sup>L. Nasrallah (2003b). *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Theological Studies, p. 1.

and the Church as the focal point of study of Christian prophecy in the first three centuries.<sup>160</sup> Adolf Harnack's work<sup>161</sup> and that of E.R. Dodds take the same line.<sup>162</sup>

Laura Nasrallah, whose own work focusses on similar issues in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, extensively critiques histories of this kind in two ways.<sup>163</sup> First, with respect to early Christian prophecy as a whole, she argues that they rely on problematic and outdated central assumptions that were outdated even by their own times.<sup>164</sup> Second, she argues that they often reproduce uncritically the prejudices of their sources.<sup>165</sup> Nasrallah's own careful work on the Phrygian movement has gone some way to nuancing such histories; I return to her work in Chapter 2. Similarly, work by Michael J. Kruger and Larry Hurtado has helped nuance the wider history of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century in particular.<sup>166</sup>

If we turn to histories of prophecy in Jewish or in Greco-Roman thought, we are faced with more of a methodological disjunct: we do not, for example, need to know the precise details of institutional shifts in the portral of prophecy in the Early Second Temple to understand how Origen views the OT prophets. But by the same token, it would be foolish to assume that he was not influenced at all by Jewish thought about prophecy in his own time and the decades before him. Similarly, while Origen would not have had an up-to-date knowledge of the geology of Dephi, we must be attentive to – for example – any significant shifts in oracle consultation practices in the post-Hellenistic period which may have affected how he understood oracles.

For this reason, I give a overview of the relevant literature at the beginning of each chapter. By and large I do not try to fit Origen into a wider narrative about prophecy in the third century. In the rest of the Introduction, I will instead survey some definitions of prophecy from various different scholarly literatures. This should – I hope – serve as a set of possible frameworks for understanding what follows, in which I survey definitions of prophecy in the Bible, in other early Christian writers, and finally in Origen himself.

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<sup>160</sup>Campenhausen (1955), op. cit.

<sup>161</sup>A. von Harnack (1908). *Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*. Trans. by J. Moffatt. London: Williams and Norgate.

<sup>162</sup>E. Dodds (1965). *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>163</sup>Nasrallah (2003b), op. cit.

<sup>164</sup>For example, many of the notions about 'primitive' prophecy expressed in such works rely on highly racist anthropological literature such as, for example, the work of Edward Tylor. cf. E. Tylor (1871). *Primitive Culture*. London: J. Murray.

<sup>165</sup>For example, found in Eusebius' *Church History* or Tertullian's *Prescription Against Heretics*.

<sup>166</sup>M. J. Kruger (2017). *Christianity at the Crossroads*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. See also L. W. Hurtado (2016). *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

## i Scholarly Definitions

Johannes Lindblom, writing specifically on prophecy in Ancient Israel, gives the following:

[A prophet is] a person who, because he is conscious of having been specially chosen and called, feels forced to perform actions and proclaim ideas which, in a mental state of intense inspiration or real ecstasy, have been indicated to him in the form of divine revelations.<sup>167</sup>

Similarly, Martti Nissinen defines prophecy as ‘the transmission of allegedly divine messages by a human intermediary to a third party’.<sup>168</sup> James L. Kugel defines a prophet as ‘a messenger sent by God to speak on His behalf’.<sup>169</sup>

Emerging from these definitions are a few features: first, that a prophet is a type of messenger; second, that the prophet acts as some sort of (possibly self-conscious) gateway between the divine and the human; and third, that the prophet delivers his or her message to others.

Alexander Jassen particularly emphasises this final element in his definition: ‘what distinguishes a prophet from any other alleged recipient of divine revelation is his or her status as a spokesperson to a larger body of people.’<sup>170</sup> Similarly, Eugene Boring gives the following definition of Christian prophecy:

The early Christian prophet was an immediately inspired spokesperson for the risen Jesus, who received intelligible messages that he or she felt impelled to deliver to the Christian community or, as a representative of the community, to the general public.<sup>171</sup>

However, as a complication, the term ‘prophecy’ is sometimes used in the Jewish context to refer to the prophetic books of the Tanakh. In the Greco-Roman context, a further complication arises more readily than from the Jewish: what is the difference

<sup>167</sup>J. Lindblom (1963). *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, p. 46.

<sup>168</sup>M. Nissinen, ed. (2000). *Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context*. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, p. vii.

<sup>169</sup>J. L. Kugel (2007). *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture Then and Now*. New York, NY: Free Press, p. 439.

<sup>170</sup>A. P. Jassen (2008). “Prophets and Prophecy in the Qumran Community”. In: *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 32.2, p. 300.

<sup>171</sup>E. M. Boring (1991). *The Continuing Voice of Jesus*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, p. 38.

between prophecy and divination? The Old Testament is very clear that divination of all forms excepting a kind of priestly lot-casting is prohibited.<sup>172</sup> Yet even in the Jewish context, the lines between prophecy, divination, magic, and various other practices were blurred: for example, the interpretation of prophetic dreams was not considered a form of divination in ancient Israel.<sup>173</sup>

Both in Greco-Roman writers and in Classical scholarship, sometimes a divide is posited between ‘natural’ and ‘technical’ divination. Technical divination involves divination by means of some sort of skill – sometimes using specialist equipment – which a practitioner can learn. Natural divination is seen as an inbuilt and unwilling ability which a practitioner does not have to learn. Pierre Bonnechere has proposed the terms ‘inductive’ and ‘inspired’ in place of technical and natural, as they capture more exactly the distinction.<sup>174</sup>

Armin Lange has argued for a distinction between Israelite-Jewish prophets and Greek seers on the basis of the inductive/inspired distinction.<sup>175</sup> However, as David Aune points out, the distinction does not always apply neatly. For example, some prophets attached to temple sites in ancient Israel were involved in group stimulation of prophetic trances through the ritual and performative use of music, movement, and even hallucinogens.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, when examined closely, several divinatory and prophetic techniques suggest a certain mixing of inspired and inductive types: there seems nothing inherently contradictory in suggesting that somebody could still be an inspired prophet even if they take some (inductive) steps (such as use of movement or hallucinogens) to modify their circumstances in order to be more receptive to inspiration. Nasrallah therefore uses the term ‘prophetic experience(s)’<sup>177</sup> for all categories with which she is concerned, including more technical forms of divination. I find this too unwieldy a term and – despite its difficulties – use Bonnechere’s ‘inductive’ and ‘inspired’ distinction in much of this thesis.

Many definitions of prophecy involve – implicitly or explicitly – the presence of

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<sup>172</sup>Prohibitions of divination occur at: Genesis 44:5; Genesis 44:15; Leviticus 19:26; Numbers 22:7; Numbers 23:23; Deuteronomy 18:10; 1 Samuel 15:23; 2 Kings 17:17; 2 Kings 21:6; 2 Chronicles 33:6; Jeremiah 14:14; Ezekiel 12:24; Ezekiel 13:6–7; Ezekiel 13:23; Ezekiel 21:21–3; Micah 3:6; and Acts 16:16.

<sup>173</sup>D. E. Aune (1983). *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p. 82.

<sup>174</sup>P. Bonnechere (2007). “Divination”. In: *The Blackwell Companion to Greek Religion*. Ed. by D. Ogden. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 150.

<sup>175</sup>A. Lange (2007). “Greek Seers and Israelite-Jewish Prophets”. In: *Vetus Testamentum* 57.4, pp. 461–482.

<sup>176</sup>Aune (1983), op. cit., p. 86.

<sup>177</sup>Nasrallah (2003b), op. cit., p. 2.

some kind of ecstasy or possession trance. Thus David Aune:

The basic assumption was that if a god was actually speaking through an individual, that person's own mind must become inactive in order that his speech organs might become instruments of the divinity. Inevitably this notion became part of the socially recognized features of oracular speech, exhibiting itself through behaviour associated with divine possession or inspiration.<sup>178</sup>

Models of the possession trance vary between complete possession (the prophet is not aware of what is happening, and often 'wakes' from the trance with no recollection) and partial possession (the prophet is aware of what is happening and can interact with, and sometimes intervene with, the prophecy). Yet Aune is careful to note that this is not a culturally interchangeable definition. Indeed, Aune presents no overall narrative of prophecy, arguing in his literature review chapter that such an approach has been unsuccessful in the past.<sup>179</sup>

While these definitions go some way to establishing lines of inquiry into the phenomenon of prophecy in their various contexts, for reasons that will become clearer below, none of these definitions of prophecy works wholesale for Origen. In the next section, I turn instead to definitions from Origen's Christian context, both from the Bible and from other patristic writers who came before him.

## ii Early Christian Definitions

### The Bible

There is no explicit definition of prophecy in the Old Testament, despite the centrality of the concept to the various books, stories, and people. While New Testament writers make a number of references to the fulfilment of prophecies from the Old Testament,<sup>180</sup> the mentions of prophecy that make any kind of definitional points come from just

<sup>178</sup>Aune (1983), loc. cit.

<sup>179</sup>Aune sees quite serious limitations in the histories of Christian prophecy by H. A. Guy (1947). *New Testament Prophecy: Its Origin and Significance*. London: The Epworth Press, É. Cothenet (1977). "Les prophètes chrétiens comme exégètes charismatiques de l'Écriture". In: *Prophetic Vocation in the New Testament and Today*. Ed. by J. Panagopoulos. Brill, pp. 77–107, **croneprophecy**, and D. Hill (1979). *New Testament Prophecy*. Richmond, VA: New Foundations Theological Library.

<sup>180</sup>For example, Matthew 13:14 – "In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah" – in reference to Isaiah 6:9.

three writers: the author of 1 Peter, the author of Revelation, and Paul. First, and most straightforwardly, we have a definition of prophecy from the author of 1 Peter:

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.<sup>181</sup>

The passage comes as part of a wider exhortation to believe accounts of Christ's glory and thus the definition focusses on the epistemological validity of prophecy as more-than-human. Origen considered 2 Peter to be spurious, and it is perhaps for this reason that no definition resembling this appears in his work.<sup>182</sup>

The second set of definitions of prophecy come from Revelation. On the one hand, the author of Revelation makes a number of references to his own text as prophetic,<sup>183</sup> and also giving instructions, sent from Christ, about how (not) to use the text given its status as a prophetic work – namely, not to 'seal up' the 'words of the prophecy.'<sup>184</sup> Along with these instructions come warnings about the consequences of defacing or tampering with the prophetic work:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.<sup>185</sup>

But alongside this self-conscious discussion of Revelation's prophetic status its author makes a more general statement about prophecy. It is this that I wish to focus on:

Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades who hold the

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<sup>181</sup>2 Peter 1:20–21.

<sup>182</sup>Eusebius, *Church History* 6.25.8, quoting a lost work of Origen: 'Peter, on whom the Church of Christ is built...has left one acknowledged epistle; perhaps also a second, but this is doubtful.'

<sup>183</sup>"Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book." (Revelation 22:7).

<sup>184</sup>Revelation 22:10.

<sup>185</sup>Revelation 2:18–19.

testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”<sup>186</sup>

What does the author of Revelation mean when he defines the ‘spirit of prophecy’ as the ‘testimony of Jesus’? His view of prophecy here clearly focusses very heavily on Christ, a view which Origen will pick up and to which I will return in Chapter 8.

Finally, let us turn to the more extensive definitions and discussions of prophecy given in the letters of Paul. There is a short comment about prophecy in Romans, and a much more extensive discussion of it in 1 Corinthians. Both passages discuss prophecy in the context of a wider discussion about spiritual gifts, and both discuss prophecy very much as a current and ongoing phenomenon.

First, the passage from Romans:

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.<sup>187</sup>

I will return to what the other gifts of the spirit are in my discussion of the passage from 1 Corinthians. For now it is interesting to note that Paul cautions against excessive prophesying – what does it mean for somebody to use their gift in proportion to their faith?

The passage from 1 Corinthians goes into further detail on the other types of gift, which Paul describes as “the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”. Other gifts – alongside prophecy – include “the utterance of wisdom”, the “utterance of knowledge”, faith, “gifts of healing”, miracle-working, the “discernment of spirits”, “various kinds of tongues” and finally the “interpretation of tongues.”<sup>188</sup> These gifts are, according to Paul, manifestations of one and the same Spirit, who allots them to individuals as he chooses.

These gifts, however, come with a caveat, found in Paul’s famous disquisition on the importance of love, where he claims that any gift of the spirit still leaves its recipient as “nothing” without love.<sup>189</sup> Similarly, Paul cautions that although individual gifts come from the Spirit, they are neither complete nor eternal:

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we

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<sup>186</sup>Revelation 19:10.

<sup>187</sup>Romans 12:6.

<sup>188</sup>1 Corinthians 12:7–11.

<sup>189</sup>1 Corinthians 13:2.

know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.<sup>190</sup>

The longest passage of relevance to us is 1 Corinthians 14:1 where Paul focusses on two specific gifts of the spirit, the gift of prophecy and the gift of speaking in tongues. He contrasts the two gifts, and makes it clear that prophecy is by far the superior.

Scholars have overall seen this final definition, of Paul, as the most authoritative definition of prophecy in the NT; the reasons for this are complex and are as much to do with Paul's status in New Testament scholarship as with the definition itself. As Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has demonstrated, however, this underplays the significance of the Johannine definition from Revelation.<sup>191</sup> Nasrallah, who discusses Paul's definition at length, has shown that this definition participates in a highly rhetorical and highly contested discourse over the nature of prophecy in the earliest Christian communities.<sup>192</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not have Origen's comments on either of these verses. In what follows, I assume that while the definition from 2 Peter is not of much interest to Origen, both the Pauline and Johannine definitions are pertinent to his understanding of prophecy.

### Patristic writers

Definitions of prophecy in Christian writers of the first two centuries AD tend to emphasise two features of prophecy. Some of them, like Paul's definitions above, focus around the idea of prophecy as a spiritual gift, that is, a fundamentally moral calling that is there for the edification and education of others. But the other feature that is emphasised in many definitions is prophecy as a way of predicting the future. Thus Irenaeus:

Prophecy is the prediction of the future, that is, those things which come afterwards, through presignification.<sup>193</sup>

Similarly, Justin Martyr:

There existed, long before this time, certain men more ancient than all those who are esteemed philosophers, both righteous and beloved by God, who

<sup>190</sup>1 Corinthians 13:8.

<sup>191</sup>cf. e.g. E. S. Fiorenza (1985). *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 133ff.

<sup>192</sup>Nasrallah (2003b), op. cit., pp. 61–94.

<sup>193</sup>*Against Heresies* 4.34.5.

spoke by the Divine Spirit, and foretold events which would take place, and which are now taking place. They are called prophets.<sup>194</sup>

While Justin's definition has some focus on the character of the prophet ('righteous') it is – like that of Irenaeus – primarily focussed on the future. However, some definitions in patristic texts are less about seeing the future than seeing things hidden to others. Thus Tatian:

God's spirit is not given to all, but dwelling among some who behaved justly and being intimately connected with the soul it revealed by predictions to the other souls what had been hidden.<sup>195</sup>

Similarly, pseudo-Clement gives a definition of a prophet as simply, 'he who sees all' (ὁ πάντοτε πάντα εἰδώς).<sup>196</sup> Hällström considers this to be the closest definition to Origen's, noting that it is not clear in this case how prophecy and philosophy are distinct,<sup>197</sup> but that the prophet's sphere of knowledge is in 'sublime truths':

The activity of a prophet [in Origen's thought] is also called "philosophizing", an activity which implies erudition in so sublime truths that ordinary people know nothing about them.<sup>198</sup>

It is, however, highly contested whether the Clementine homilies were written prior to Origen.<sup>199</sup> Despite this apparent overlap of prophecy and philosophy, other patristic writers take a different position. For example, Athenagoras famously uses an image of a divine flautist to distinguish between the insights of a philosopher and the inspiration of a prophet:

You... cannot be ignorant of the writings of Moses or of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the other prophets, who, lifted in ecstasy above the natural operations of their minds by the impulses of the Divine Spirit, uttered the things with which they were inspired, the Spirit making use of them as a flute-player breathes into a flute.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>194</sup>*Dialogue with Trypho* 7.

<sup>195</sup>Tatian, *Oration* 13.3.

<sup>196</sup>pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, 6.1.

<sup>197</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>198</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>199</sup>cf. J. Chapman (1902). "Origen and the Date of Pseudo-Clement". In: *Journal of Theological Studies* os 3.11, pp. 436–441. For an overview of the debate, see D. H. Carlson (2013). "Overview of Previous Scholarship". In: *Jewish-Christian Interpretation of the Pentateuch in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.

<sup>200</sup>Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 9.

From this brief summary we can see that there is a great deal of variety in what early Christian thinkers consider the fundamental or essential characteristics of a prophet. Some take prophecy simply to be prediction of the future, some focus on hidden knowledge, and others highlight the importance of prophetic ecstasy.

### iii Origen

Origen gives one explicit definition of prophecy, and several explicit definitions of what a prophet is. The definition of prophecy appears in his *Commentary on Corinthians* and is quite unlike any of the early Christian definitions explored above:

προφητεία ἐστὶν ἢ διὰ λόγου τῶν ἀφανῶν σημαντικὴ γνῶσις, ἢ εἶδησις τῆς τοῦ κόσμου συστάσεως καὶ ἐνεργείας στοιχείων καὶ χρόνων.<sup>201</sup>

Prophecy is knowledge which can signify obscure things through reason [or speech], the understanding of the structure of the cosmos and of the functioning of the elements and of time.

I will return to this definition in some detail in Chapter 8, after I have examined the concept thoroughly throughout Origen's work. For now, we may note the breadth of its scope (the structure of the cosmos, functioning of time), its primary focus on cosmic metaphysical questions, and its use of the term λόγος, that most versatile of all Christian words, which spans several possible meanings: speech, dialogue, reason or Christ.

Origen's definitions of prophets themselves are less abstract, and more in line with his contemporaries. They include the following, from the *Selections on Ezekiel*:

προφηταὶ εἰσὶν οἱ καλῶς διακονοῦντες τῷ λόγῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας, καὶ προφητεύοντες τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>202</sup>

Prophets are those who serve the word through teaching, and prophesying the things of God.

We see in this definition the link between prophets and teaching, a link which Origen also draws in other definitions:

*docere autem est prophetare.*<sup>203</sup>

To teach is to prophesy.

<sup>201</sup> *Commentary on Corinthians* 55.

<sup>202</sup> *Selections on Ezekiel* 13.

<sup>203</sup> *Commentary on Matthew Commentary Series* 49.

Hällström emphasises this feature in particular, arguing that the *Commentary on Corinthians* definition also emphasises the importance of teaching:

Both definitions [of prophecy, and of prophets] emphasize that the prophet is a teacher. Prophecy is σημαντική, it takes place διὰ λόγου and consists in administering τῷ λόγῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας.<sup>204</sup>

Hällström gives his own definition of a prophet in Origen's thought as follows:

The prophet in Origen's writings is, then, a person ὁρῶν θεόν. His most important equipment is consequently the "eye of the soul".<sup>205</sup>

This definition – which, as Hällström points out, is similar to the definition of pseudo-Clement above – is formed with reference to *Against Celsus* 7.7, in which Origen describes the Jewish prophets as:

ἀεὶ ἐνορῶντες τῷ θεῷ καὶ τοῖς ἀοράτοις τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μὴ βλεπομένοις αἰσθητῶς καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὖσιν αἰωνίοις.<sup>206</sup>

Those who were always looking at God and his blessings, which are not to be perceived by the senses and because of this are eternal

Hällström also provides another definition of a prophet in Origen's thought, claiming that Origen believes that a prophet is analogous to a sage, 'more or less a philosopher'.<sup>207</sup> He argues that this portrayal is very much in line with Philo's understanding, a topic to which I return in Chapter 2. Yet Hällström takes a further step:

Origen has also shown, through these definitions, that he does not follow the general view of (OT) prophecy in early Christianity. Knowledge of the future and of the human heart are not constituent of this kind of prophecy.<sup>208</sup>

I disagree with this characterisation of what it means for a prophet to be a 'sage' in Origen's thought. While, as I shall argue in Chapters 2, 3, 7 and 8, Hällström is right to point out Origen's reliance on highly philosophical notions of the sage from both Philo

<sup>204</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., pp. 24–25.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>206</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.7.

<sup>207</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

and Greek traditions, I disagree that this means Origen does not include knowledge of the future and of the human heart in his definition of prophecy. Indeed, in Chapter 6 I demonstrate exactly how these two subjects are linked in Origen's thought and directly under the purview of prophecy. Additionally, Hällström's definition does not capture the centrality of Christ to Origen's definition of prophecy, and its similarity to the definition in the Gospel of John – a feature I argue for at length in Chapters 7 and 8.

#### iv Taxonomies

Belongs to the Emperor

Is a suckling pig

Looks like a fly from a distance<sup>209</sup>

In *The Order of Things*,<sup>210</sup> Michel Foucault argues that knowledge-ordering schemes are always culturally specific. He makes use of an example from Jorge Luis Borges's 1942 essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins", in which Borges discusses the (fictional) ancient Chinese encyclopaedia, the Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge. The Celestial Emporium is a taxonomy of animals that splits them not along familiar Linnaean lines, but instead into fourteen categories whose systematising principle is – to the (presumed) modern Western reader<sup>211</sup> – unclear. Indeed, this raises an initial question: is there no principle at all, or is there one that is obscure? No system of knowledge-ordering, Foucault therefore argues, can assume that its categories are obvious or intrinsic to its subject matter, or even mutually comprehensible between cultures or time periods.

As Borges's essay points out, our sense of what is intuitive in a subject like the taxonomy of animals is an accident of history, geography, and reality; some ways of thinking from the past, particularly at a geographical, historical, or fictional remove, are very different from modern ways of thinking. Borges, no doubt, would wish us to take this startling fictional example as a cautionary tale for assuming we understand geographically or temporally closer cultures.

<sup>209</sup>J. L. Borges (1952). *Otras Inquisiciones*. Buenos Aires: Sur.

<sup>210</sup>M. Foucault (1970). *The Order of Things*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

<sup>211</sup>I note the (undoubtedly deliberate) orientalisising connotations of this example: that Chinese culture is, to the Western eye, quirky; nevertheless, these connotations help to strengthen the overall point of the example, which is to highlight the cultural disjunct between knowledge-ordering schemes – and thus the possibility for both misunderstanding and judgement.

This insight is particularly pertinent in the case of prophecy. In English, we do not distinguish between two uses of the noun ‘prophecy’: first, prophecy as a concrete noun, that which is said/written prophetically; second, prophecy as an abstract noun, an interrelated set of concepts (textual genres, cultural norms, processes etc.) which includes but is not limited to that which is said/written prophetically. Indeed, from this summary, it is not even clear whether ‘prophecy’ is a single concept or several related concepts.

As will be evident from the glossary,<sup>212</sup> this confusion is shared by both Greek and Latin, the primary languages with which this thesis will deal – and, additionally, by Hebrew, the other language underlying the concepts of this thesis. The lack of clarity over the term ‘prophecy’ in all four languages makes it very hard to see exactly which concept is being employed in different texts and contexts, both in Origen’s own work and in the secondary literature. I showed how strange Origen’s – highly technical – definitions of prophecy looked beside the varied and sometimes contradictory definitions of his contemporaries, but also of modern scholars in a range of academic fields.

In order to counter this problem I intend throughout the thesis to talk a good deal about taxonomies in Origen’s thought. What I mean by this is broadly what Borges, Foucault, or Umberto Eco would mean: a scheme of conceptual classification, including the underlying principles – explicit or implicit – that determine such a classification. Thus when I talk about Origen’s ‘taxonomy of prophecy’ I am talking both about *how* he categorises the various concepts connected to prophecy, and *why* he does so.

Later in this thesis I will speak of Origen’s hermeneutic of prophecy. I mean by this something more specific than his taxonomy of prophecy: roughly, I mean both the taxonomy itself and the way in which Origen uses that taxonomy to pull out meaning from a text – exegesis in its fullest sense – and in doing so, to reach a sort of conceptual unity, or taxonomical collapse.

What do I mean by *that*? I hope it will become clearer in the course of the thesis, but essentially this: Origen’s life was a life spent thinking very intently about scripture, and thinking about it in an extremely structured manner.<sup>213</sup> Origen’s tripartite hermeneutic of scripture is – as he says himself<sup>214</sup> – a pervasive underlying structure in much of his thinking. The central argument of this thesis runs something like this:

a) Origen’s tripartite taxonomies of scripture (bodily, moral, spiritual / past, present

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<sup>212</sup>cf. pp. 41–45.

<sup>213</sup>cf. e.g. Martens (2012), op. cit.

<sup>214</sup>cf. Chapter 5.

future, etc.) underlie his scriptural hermeneutic and thus his understanding of the whole scriptural universe.

b) Origen's taxonomies of prophecy are also tripartite (factual, moral, spiritual / past, present, future, etc.).

Thus c) I propose that Origen had an implicit 'hermeneutic of prophecy' which is analogous to his own explicit hermeneutic of scripture, but takes as its 'text' not just the prophecy of scripture, but the whole notion and experience of prophecy.

As I will argue in Chapter 8 this whole taxonomy for Origen rests upon Christ. What initially seems trichotomous (i.e. it has three distinct senses) is revealed, through Christ, instead, to be triune. Thus what I mean by taxonomical collapse is that, in the final estimation, all three senses are ultimately just different aspects, or hypostases.

Origen does not provide a list like the Celestial Emporium; we do not know if he ever wrote a work called *On Prophecy* – and if he did, we certainly do not have it. To approach the question of his taxonomy of prophecy, then, I am looking not only for the things he does say in his numerous and wide-ranging writings, but also for the things he does not say. Indeed, it is precisely the things which he assumes – and therefore relies on his reader also to assume – that are the most illuminating on such a question.

Origen lived in a world rich with ancient intellectual traditions, methods, and structures. Some of these came from shared philosophical notions, some from extremely tenacious religious notions (both from pagan religion and from Judaism), and some from educational, legal, and institutional frameworks that had remained largely unchanged in the Roman world for several centuries by the time of Origen's youth. It is thus with these conditions in mind that I am examining Origen's thought. One of the central premises of this thesis is that these various cultural and social conditions led to an immense richness but also an immense stability in Origen's hermeneutical approaches to concepts and phenomena.

## VII Methodology

Origen existed as part of a shared cultural, social, political and intellectual world. He was also an individual and often unusual thinker. It is necessary, therefore, to be constantly vigilant concerning when Origen uses or participates in shared understandings of a phenomenon or practice, and when he may use idiosyncratic understandings. This thesis

seeks to locate not only Origen's place in contemporary understandings of prophecy, but his individual development of that concept. I hope, in doing so, to also argue clearly where Origen's development of the concept in particular has influenced later thinkers.

There is also a textual-methodological point that this thesis makes. As discussed on p.36, Origen's texts are often split using a theoretical versus exegetical dichotomy in the scholarship. I wish to suggest that we should be a little clearer about what we mean – and why it matters – when we categorise some texts as 'theoretical' and some as 'exegetical'. I will argue, throughout the course of this thesis, that this split is not dichotomous.

In preparing this thesis, I read and took notes on each of Origen's extant works, compiling a complete record of any reference to prophets or prophecy. While my analysis sometimes follows through a text or passage in the order in which that text or passage discusses the topic at hand, in other places I combine passages about prophecy from a range of different texts, placing them side-by-side in order to build up a conclusion by the amassing of evidence.

Part I (Chapters 2–4) attempts to locate Origen's different intellectual contexts. In these chapters I sketch what the networks of his intellectual predecessors and contemporaries thought about prophecy. At the end of Part I, I sum up the major issues in the discourse of the time – in Christian, Jewish, and Greco-Roman spheres – about prophecy and how Origen responds explicitly and polemically (that is, negatively) to some of them. This part, therefore, establishes the limits of what Origen's views on prophecy might be, given what comes before him and what positions we know him to have disagreed with.

Part II (Chapter 5) involves examining what it looks like and means when Origen makes an explicit theoretical, programmatic statement about how he thinks about something. I consider we can say, on the basis of it, about *how* he thinks. It therefore advances the case that Origen's thinking about scripture is not only an appropriate but a *necessary* parallel for his thinking about prophecy.

Part III (Chapters 6–8) involves those texts of Origen where he is arguing for certain positions, or giving explanations mostly, but not exclusively, in an exegetical setting. Part III therefore takes various case studies and uses them, with what we know from Parts I and II, to build a picture of both the structure and positive content of Origen's thinking about prophecy.

Part IV (Chapter 9) returns to the individual versus others distinction of Part I and considers Origen's effect on the thinking of those who followed him on the subject of prophecy. I now turn to the early Christian context.

# Part I



## Chapter 2

# Christian and Jewish Prophecy

*quam velim et ego suffodere, quidquid Marcion in auribus deceptorum aedificavit.*<sup>1</sup>

How I wish that I could undermine what Marcion has constructed in the ears of those he has deceived.

In Mysia in Anatolia, some time around the 160s or 70s AD, a trio of prophets – Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla – began to gather followers.<sup>2</sup> They set up their base in Phrygia, claiming the small town of Pepuza as the New Jerusalem. The precise activities of the three cannot be captured from the patchy historical record – but it appears that they mostly operated as itinerant prophets who opposed the burgeoning episcopal structure of second-century Anatolian Christianity, and called for a return to a more prophetically-led, less bureaucratic form of worship.<sup>3</sup> The group apparently claimed their prophetic descent from Quadratus and Ammia of Philadelphia, themselves said to be descended from the prophet Agabus and the daughters of Philip the Evangelist.<sup>4</sup> This provided an alternate line of succession that ran in parallel to the Church’s ecclesiastical

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<sup>1</sup>*Homilies on Ezekiel* 1.12.

<sup>2</sup>While the movement is often referred to in scholarship as ‘Montanism’, this term was rarely used by contemporary writers, only appearing first in Jerome late in the fourth century. This thesis will use the term Phrygians for the three prophets and their movement, which is the term used by contemporary heresiologists. For an objection to the gender politics of the term ‘Montanism’, see A. Jensen (1993). “Prisca – Maximilla – Montanus: who was the founder of ‘Montanism’?” In: *Studia Patristica* 26, pp. 147–150.

<sup>3</sup>For the details of the beginning of the movement, see Frederick Klawiter who suggests a spate of persecutions in the 170s as the immediate trigger: F. Klawiter (1980). “The Role of Martyrdom and Persecution in Developing the Priestly Authority of Women in Early Christianity: A Case Study of Montanism”. In: *Church History* 49, pp. 251–261. See also T. Barnes (1970). “The Chronology of Montanism”. In: *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 21, pp. 403–408.

<sup>4</sup>cf. Eusebius *Church History* 5.17.

succession from the apostles – and meant that they, the Phrygian prophets, were the true spokespeople of God.<sup>5</sup>

The Phrygians were said to claim that true knowledge of God – and true expression of God’s will – came through inspired prophecy. This sort of prophecy was available only to certain people (in particular, the movement’s leaders), and those people – both men and women – were chosen by God on account of their virtues as leaders. The Phrygians believed that prophets entered a trance state in order to prophesy. In such a state, they had no control over their mental faculties and were completely taken over, out of their senses. We do not know exactly how the Phrygians believed that this trance state functioned, as we have no texts left directly by the Phrygian leaders and must instead rely on claims (some more polemical than others) from later writers such as Tertullian and Epiphanius.

At the same time in Rome, another movement, also with a focus on the phenomenon of prophecy, was gaining ground. Their leader was Marcion, an enigmatic preacher who began publicly to disagree with the Roman Church.<sup>6</sup> Marcion himself, a former mariner from Sinope in what is now northern Turkey, attracted a great deal of speculation; even now, histories of the Marcionite movement tend to have at their heart a potent and energetic central figure in Marcion. Stories circulated about him from the start: some said that he was the son of a bishop, excommunicated by his own father over a sex scandal;<sup>7</sup> some said he had been rebuked for his breakaway views by John the Apostle, or by Polycarp.<sup>8</sup> Those who wrote about Marcion and his views were often violently angry with him. Tertullian, a near-contemporary, describes Marcion as ‘more savage than the beasts of [Pontus]’.<sup>9</sup>

As with the Phrygian movement, none of Marcion’s texts is extant. Because of this, our picture of Marcion and his movement comes from a tapestry of works of oth-

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<sup>5</sup>For Hällström’s corresponding theory of prophetic succession in Origen’s thought, cf. Hällström (1985), op. cit., pp. 4–9.

<sup>6</sup>From Tertullian, we have a fixed date concerning Marcion – ‘115 years and 6 ½ months between Christ and Marcion’ (*Against Marcion* 1.19.2) – i.e. some time in mid-July 144 C.E, if we believe him. This may have been the date that Marcion came to Rome, or that he founded his breakaway community. Sebastian Moll simply refers to it as ‘Marcion Day’. cf. S. Moll (2010). *The Arch-Heretic Marcion*. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck.

<sup>7</sup>Epiphanius, *Panarion* 42.1.3. This is very unlikely to be true. cf. A. von Harnack (1990). *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*. Trans. by J. E. Steely and L. D. Bierm. Durham: Labyrinth Press.

<sup>8</sup>Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.3.4) claims that Marcion was rebuked by Polycarp. Even more spuriously, Philastrius claims that he met the very aged apostle John (*Catalogue of Heresies* 45.7, written c.388 according to BeDuhn (J. D. BeDuhn (2013). *The First New Testament: Marcion’s Scriptural Canon*. Salem, OR: Polebridge Press).

<sup>9</sup>Tertullian *Against Marcion* 1.1.

ers. Some, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian, were his contemporaries or near-contemporaries. Others lived some or many centuries after him, including Origen, Epiphanius (c.310–403), and Ephrem the Syrian (c.306–373).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, from a relatively early date Marcion took on a mythical status as the fount of all heresies, the originator of the tradition of Christian theological dissent.<sup>11</sup>

Despite this swirl of romantic associations, we are able to establish the historical Marcion's core beliefs: he and his followers rejected the OT on the grounds that the god portrayed in it was evil.<sup>12</sup> They argued that this god was originally a divine demiurge who had turned evil. That this had happened was, they claimed, evident from his changeable nature, his jealousy, his rage, and his propensity to dispense unnecessarily harsh or inconsistent punishment to those people who failed to do his bidding. Instead the one true God was, in their eyes, the god of the Gospels, the Father of Christ – who was, in his Incarnation on earth, stepping in to rescue humanity from the OT god's clutches. Thus a Marcionite Christian could dispense with the OT and Jewish practices wholesale, and focus only on the Gospels, the letters of Paul, and Christ.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Marcion made his own edited version of the Gospels and Paul which did just that.

These two movements took very different approaches to the subject of prophecy, yet both of them posed difficult questions about it: what it was, who had access to it, and what we could know from it. The Phrygians were, as far as we know, concerned with the mechanism of inspiration – for them, the dividing line between true and false prophets – and the assertion that they, after the time of Christ, were part of a living prophetic tradition. In contrast, the questions posed by the Marcionites concerned specifically the long-distant past of the OT prophets: in particular their legitimacy, and whether they could be relied on as sources of true divine knowledge.

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<sup>10</sup>Interestingly, Marcionite arguments against Christianity are often employed by mediaeval Muslim writers, although orthodox Muslim theologians tended to refute Marcionite ideas. cf. H. Lazarus-Yafeh (1996). "Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity". In: *The Harvard Theological Review* 89.1, p. 65.

<sup>11</sup>For example, Clement of Alexandria, an early polemicist against Marcion, accuses him of violating the principle that the Church is a unity: cf. *Stromata* 7.17 – 'it is my opinion that the true Church, that which is really ancient, is one.' cf. also G. Boys-Stones (2001). *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of Its Development from the Stoics to Origen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 151–175.

<sup>12</sup>According to Tertullian, Marcion took issue with a number of specific biblical episodes. These include Moses' 'image' of the serpent (Numbers 21:9; Tertullian *Against Marcion* 2.20-2), God's tendency to change his mind (e.g. concerning Jonah's prophecy of Nineveh's destruction, Jonah 3:10; *Against Marcion* 2.23-4), and his propensity to relent after please from his people (e.g. Moses' intercessions for Israel, Exodus 32:30–33; *Against Marcion* 2.25-7).

<sup>13</sup>For extensive discussion of the principles of Marcionite theology J. M. Lieu (2015). *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 293–432.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Origen very seldom commented on contemporary or recent Christian prophetic movements.<sup>14</sup> We might, on these grounds, suspect that the Phrygian movement was of no interest to Origen at all. It is certainly true that he does not refer to it in any detail, even when opportunities arise.<sup>15</sup> But the question it poses, whether ongoing prophecy is possible after Christ, certainly does have repercussions for the definition of prophecy and the understanding of revelation as a whole, questions I return to in Chapter 8.

It is also worth considering *why* Origen might only be peripherally interested in prophetic ecstasy – or why it might not serve as a dividing line between true and false prophecy for him – when so many of his contemporaries were. I argue in this chapter that to understand Origen's background on these questions we must understand the views of Philo, a writer who lived long before the Phrygian and Marcionite movements began, but who nevertheless considered in detail many of the problems that they later raised.

This chapter will discuss both movements and the issues they raise for understanding prophecy, before considering Philo's detailed approach to the subject in three texts: *Who is the Heir*, *On Dreams*, and *Life of Moses*. This approach is designed to familiarise the reader with the problems before turning to the texts to which Origen would have turned for a solution.

I make the case that two of Philo's most important and fundamental doctrines concerning prophecy are: 1) that the OT prophets are not only legitimately God-inspired truth-tellers and predictors, but are also people of such unimpeachable virtue that they take on the role of philosophers and sages, and 2) relatedly, that while ecstatic prophecy does feature in Philo's understanding of the phenomenon of prophecy, it is not of the passive type that the Phrygians advocate and instead requires the intellectual participation of the prophet. Philo's focus on the morality and intellect of the prophet would lay the foundations for two key features of Origen's thinking on issues raised by the Phrygians and Marcionites: first, it would provide a model for Origen's own decentering of ecstasy in the debate over legitimate and illegitimate prophecy. Second, and more importantly, it would provide him with an angle of attack against Marcionite portrayals of the OT prophets. The argument I make in this chapter will lay the ground-work for Chapters 7 and 8, in which I will show exactly how Origen's own views on these subjects draw on Philo in his explicit answering of both the Phrygian and Marcionite challenges.

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<sup>14</sup>cf. pp. 46.

<sup>15</sup>I discuss an example of such an opportunity in Chapter 7. cf. p. 199.

## I Literature

### i Marcionites and Phrygians

No scholarly discussion of Marcion can avoid the enormous influence of Adolf Harnack on the subject. Harnack, whose first important work on Marcion was written before he was twenty years old,<sup>16</sup> spent much of his life devoted to the study of Marcion and Marcionism in its 2<sup>nd</sup> century context. In short, Harnack's view of Marcionism posits the complete dualist antithesis of matter and spirit. The true God, who is completely ontologically separate from human beings, is therefore fundamentally alien, and known only to us in part. The Creator, who deals with matter, cannot in this system be truly divine.<sup>17</sup> Harnack also attempted a reconstruction of Marcion's Bible: in his view, Marcion's canon included the Gospels and letters of Paul in an edited version which excised every citation of the OT.

A number of scholars since have attempted alternative reconstructions of Marcion's Bible, or discussed related issues: for example Jason BeDuhn has traced Marcion's canon and its history,<sup>18</sup> while Dieter T. Roth's work focuses particularly on Marcion's use of the Gospels.<sup>19</sup> In this thesis my interest in Marcion's Gospel is limited only to his use of the figure of John the Baptist.<sup>20</sup>

Another major focus is the problem of trying to reconstruct the historical Marcion from the polemics about him. This has been most comprehensively attempted in recent years by Judith Lieu,<sup>21</sup> with further significant work by Markus Vinzent<sup>22</sup> and Sebastian Moll.<sup>23</sup>

The final popular topic, of most interest to us (and most empirically sound), is Marcion's influence on the development of Christian thought as a whole in the second and third centuries and beyond. Lieu characterises the debate here, somewhat critically, as vacillating between two poles. There are those, she says, who argue that Marcion was extremely important, perhaps *the* most important figure in the first few centuries, in the

<sup>16</sup>A. von Harnack (2003). *Marcion. Der moderne Gläubige des 2. Jahrhunderts, der erste Reformator (1870)*. Ed. by F. Steck. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

<sup>17</sup>See idem (1990), *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*.

<sup>18</sup>BeDuhn (2013), op. cit.

<sup>19</sup>D. T. Roth (2015). *The Text of Marcion's Gospel*. Leiden: Brill.

<sup>20</sup>For more, cf. pp. 249–255.

<sup>21</sup>Lieu (2015), op. cit.

<sup>22</sup>M. Vinzent (2014). *Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels*. Studia Patristica Supplements 2. Leuven: Peeters.

<sup>23</sup>Moll (2010), op. cit.

development both of Christian theology and of the NT canon.<sup>24</sup> Conversely, others reject this argument, sometimes on the grounds that such development needed no external catalyst, and sometimes on the grounds that if it did, Marcion was not that catalyst.<sup>25</sup>

Lieu's criticism of this debate centres around what she characterises (quite fairly) as a scholarly failure to engage with the source problems; not enough scholars who work on the influence of Marcion, in her view, capture a sense of the real historical Marcion, or of the complexity and variety of views, movements, and approaches to Christian intellectual practice in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. While I take her point, the fact remains that for those of us interested in later patristic writers, the historical reality of Marcion is not as pertinent as the impression of him (and the views of his later followers) gained by those later patristic writers. I argue in this chapter that – whatever we make of the question of the historical Marcion – some version of Marcionism had a profound influence on Origen's thought.

Lieu does briefly discuss the relationship between Marcion and Origen, arguing that Origen uses Marcion primarily as a 'cipher for views contrary to a proper understanding of the scriptures and the teaching of the Church'.<sup>26</sup> It has, however, been argued by Ruth Clements that Origen had a fairly detailed understanding of Marcionite textual criticism.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Joseph Trigg emphasises anti-Marcionite thought as an important step in Origen's training in Christian philosophy, as does Josep Rius-Camps.<sup>28</sup> On the whole I am persuaded by these approaches, although I am sure that Lieu is correct in suspecting that Origen's view of Marcionism was also highly influenced by other polemical accounts. I return at length in Chapter 8 to Origen's explicit discussions of Marcionism.

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<sup>24</sup>Generally, see M. Vinzent (2011). *Christ's Resurrection in Early Christianity and the Making of the New Testament*. Farnham: Ashgate.

<sup>25</sup>Thus E. C. Blackman (1948). *Marcion and His Influence*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

<sup>26</sup>Lieu (2015), op. cit., pp. 135–142.

<sup>27</sup>R. Clements (2005). "Origen's Readings of Romans in *Peri Archon*: (Re)Constructing Paul". In: *Early Patristic Readings of Romans*. Ed. by K. L. Gaca and L. L. Welborn. New York, NY: T.&T. Clark International, p. 160.

<sup>28</sup>Trigg (1983), op. cit., pp. 46–50. See also J. Rius-Camps (1975). "Origenes y Marcion: Carácter Preferentemente Antimarcionita del Prefacio y del Segundo ciclo del *Peri Archon*". In: *Origeniana: premier colloque international des etudes origéniennes. Montserrat 21 septembre 1973*. Ed. by H. Crouzel and G. Lomiento. Bari: Istituto di letteratura Cristiana antica: Università de Bari, pp. 297–312. Studies of Marcion's influence on other patristic writers have also taken the approach that Marcion was central to many thinkers: these include work by Andrew Hayes on Justin Martyr, and Charles Hill on Polycarp. cf. A. Hayes (2017). *Justin Against Marcion*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press. See also C. E. Hill (2006). *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp: Identifying Irenaeus' Apostolic Presbyter and the Author of 'Ad Diognetum'*. Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck.

The Phrygian movement also has its own complex scholarly literature. It first received major scholarly attention in English in an essay by John de Soyres,<sup>29</sup> although it had been studied at some length by Albert Schwegler and other German scholars of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Early studies of the Phrygian movement were often concerned with whether it is most properly considered intrinsic or extrinsic to the development of Christian orthodoxy. These studies considered questions including the relationship of the Phrygian movement to gnosticism and to traditions of magic and miracle-workers.<sup>31</sup>

Scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century moved away from the intrinsic/extrinsic question, instead investigating in more detail the doctrinal elements of the movement, and its relationship to particular early Christian figures – frequently focussing on Tertullian; on the basis of work by Timothy Barnes, it is generally considered safe to assume that Tertullian was part of the Phrygian movement, even if it is less clear which of his views were shared and which were more idiosyncratic.<sup>32</sup> Recent work by Laura Nasrallah has been incisive on the rhetorical claims made by the Phrygian movement and how they fit into wider debates about madness, holiness, and authority in the early Christian period.<sup>33</sup>

There has not been a direct comparison of the theories of prophecy in the Phrygian and Marcionite movements, perhaps because in other ways their concerns are so divergent and their approach to doctrine so different. In this chapter I suggest that the Phrygian and Marcionite movements taken together raise some of the most profoundly challenging questions about prophecy put to Christian thinkers.

The Phrygian movement deals primarily with the present- and future-looking features of prophecy: what true prophecy is and how it affects the prophet, how you can tell a true prophet, and, most importantly, what it means for prophets to prophesy in the period after Christ. Marcionism, on the other hand, emphasises the past-looking aspects of prophecy. Because of a belief in the alienness and unknowability of God, it is primarily concerned with establishing that those generally considered to be authorita-

<sup>29</sup>J. de Soyres (n.d.). *Montanism and the Primitive Church: The Hulsean Prize Essay*. 1877.

<sup>30</sup>A. Schwegler (1841). *Der Montanismus und die christliche Kirche des Zweiten Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen: Ludwig Friedrich Fues.

<sup>31</sup>For example, Schelpert in the 1920s denied any relationship; this has recently been countered by Vera-Elisabeth Hirschmann who argues that there were significant links. cf. W. Schepelern (1929). *Der Montanismus und die phrygischen Kulte*. Tübingen: Mohr. See also V.-E. Hirschmann (2005). *Horrenda Secta. Untersuchungen zum frühchristlichen Montanismus und seinen Verbindungen zur paganen Religion Phrygiens*. *Historia Einzelschriften* 179. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

<sup>32</sup>T. Barnes (1971). *Tertullian*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>33</sup>Nasrallah (2003b), op. cit.

tive prophets of the past, the OT prophets, were in fact prophets of a false and evil god; it is quiet on the question of ongoing prophecy. Consideration of both of these aspects of prophecy was important for Christians who wished to establish a distinctive Christian identity in a period of great cultural uncertainty and flexibility – both in establishing how Christians related to Jewish prophecy of the past, and in how Christians should regulate the claims of prophets in their own times and in their own churches.

## ii Philo

The extraordinary variety of Philo's writings combined with his temporal and geographical position at the heart of Roman Egypt have meant that much has been written on him in a wide array of disciplines including ancient history, ancient philosophy, Jewish studies and patristics.

Biographies of Philo, which attempt to situate his diverse – and sometimes contradictory – exegetical and theoretical works in the context of 1<sup>st</sup> century Alexandria, include those by Erwin Goodenough,<sup>34</sup> John M.G. Barclay,<sup>35</sup> Daniel R. Schwartz,<sup>36</sup> and Maren Niehoff.<sup>37</sup> There is significant disagreement as to Philo's philosophical background and allegiances; while he is generally considered to be a Platonist, thoroughly hellenised, some feel that such a designation obscures his debt to and participation in Jewish intellectual traditions. The terms of the argument are not all that different from those concerning Origen.

Work specifically on Philo's influence on patristic writers includes a long essay by V. Nikiprowetsky which remains an important discussion of the subject.<sup>38</sup> David Runia's book, *Philo in Early Christian Literature* expands on Nikiprowetsky's work and is particularly good on Origen, although it functions perhaps more as a reference work than as any kind of sustained argument. Jennifer Otto's recent book on Philo and the construction of Jewishness in patristic thought makes the compelling argument that while early some Christian writers saw Philo primarily as a Jew, many instead focussed on the similarity of his thought to Christian thought. She argues in particular that Origen saw

<sup>34</sup>E. R. Goodenough (1962). *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

<sup>35</sup>See particularly Chapter 3 of J. M. G. Barclay (1999). *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE-117 CE)*. Edinburgh: University of California Press.

<sup>36</sup>D. R. Schwartz (2009). "Philo, His Family, and His Times". In: *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*. Ed. by A. Kamesar. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 9–31.

<sup>37</sup>M. R. Niehoff (2018). *Philo of Alexandria*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

<sup>38</sup>V. Nikiprowetsky (1984). "Philon d'Alexandrie: II Influence sur les Pères de l'Église". In: *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. Ed. by A. Solignac. Vol. 12, pp. 1366–1374.

Philo as a wise allegorical interpreter, and, therefore, in a significant sense, his predecessor from his own city.<sup>39</sup>

Although Origen only cites Philo by name three times in all of his extant works, this fits with his general citation pattern in which – particularly in the homilies – he is reluctant to name his extra-scriptural sources.<sup>40</sup> Significantly, one of the references is a defence of Philo’s use of allegory.<sup>41</sup> Another is a reference to Philo’s *On Dreams* – an important text for the argument of this chapter – which Origen deems ‘worthy of intelligent study by those who wish to find the truth’.<sup>42</sup> While dreams are frequently overlooked in scholarship on prophecy, Berchman has argued that Philo’s *On Dreams* is an absolutely essential text for understanding his overall thought, particularly as regards foreknowledge and ecstasy;<sup>43</sup> I make use of the text for understanding his view of prophecy.

Runia compiles a list of an additional twelve or thirteen anonymous references to Philo.<sup>44</sup> Many of these references include potential allegorical readings of scripture. Indeed as Runia argues, it is clear that Origen regards Philo primarily as a fellow exegete:<sup>45</sup> when Origen refers to Philo by terms other than his name, he uses the words ‘interpreter’, ‘teacher’, and ‘expositor’, terms which focus on Philo’s exegetical ability. Indeed, Runia conjectures that Origen would have taken a complete set of Philo’s works to Caesarea with him, which certainly seems likely given how easy it would have been for him to access Philo’s work in their shared hometown of Alexandria.<sup>46</sup>

More contested is how far Philo influenced Origen’s philosophical approach to doctrine, as opposed to specific verse-by-verse exegesis; that is to say, did Origen use Philo as a reference work for individual allegories, or was there a deeper affinity in their out-

<sup>39</sup>J. Otto (2018). *Philo of Alexandria and the Construction of Jewishness in Early Christian Writings*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>40</sup>cf. I. Ramelli (2012). “Philo as Origen’s Declared Model”. In: *Studies in Christian Jewish Relations* 7, p. 7. For a complete list of borrowings, see A. van den Hoek (2000). “Philo and Origen: A Descriptive Catalogue of their Relationship”. In: *Studia Philonica Annual* 12, pp. 44–121.

<sup>41</sup>*Against Celsus* 4.51.

<sup>42</sup>ἀξιόν φρονίμου καὶ συνετῆς παρὰ τοῖς φιλαλήθεσιν ἐξετάσεως. *Against Celsus* 6.21. The third reference is in *Commentary on Matthew* 15.3, to *On that the worse is accustomed to attack the better*.

<sup>43</sup>R. M. Berchman (1998). “Arcana Mundi: Magic and Divination in the de Somniis of Philo of Alexandria”. In: *Mediators of the Divine*. Ed. by R. M. Berchman. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, pp. 115–154.

<sup>44</sup>See D. T. Runia (1993). *Philo in Early Christian Literature*. Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 3. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, pp. 161–2. These include *Against Celsus* 5.5 and 7.20, *Selections on Genesis* 27 and 44, *Homilies on Exodus* 2.2, *Homilies on Leviticus* 8.6, *Homilies on Numbers* 9.5, *Homilies in Joshua* 16, *Homilies in Jeremiah* 14.5, *Commentary on Matthew* 10.22, 10.17 and fragment 25:30, and finally, in *Commentary on John* 6.25.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>46</sup>*ibid.*, p. 158. See also Otto (2018), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

look? Harnack certainly thinks there was, calling Origen ‘the Christian Philo’.<sup>47</sup> De Lubac, however, cautions against overstating their similarities, remarking that ‘the Law only has spiritual significance for Origen because it is Jesus who reads it to us.’<sup>48</sup> Indeed, argues De Lubac, the ‘entire Christian mystery’ separates Philo and Christ.

To assess such an issue we must understand something of Origen’s relationship to contemporary Jewish intellectual life. N.R.M. De Lange argues that Origen in fact had a rich interaction with Jewish culture and access to a number of Jewish texts.<sup>49</sup> Origen does occasionally make reference to his Jewish sources.<sup>50</sup>

Otto’s position is that Origen clearly did interact with and derive benefit from Jewish sources in his work both in Alexandria and Caesarea, chief among them Philo. However, she argues that this does not necessarily have to mean that Origen agreed entirely with Philo’s exegetical project – indeed, how could he? – but that he is somebody who ‘correctly perceived the hermeneutical depths of the narratives recorded in Israel’s scriptures’,<sup>51</sup> even if, as a Jew, he failed to see the ultimate step, Christ. Thus, argues Otto, Origen would believe himself to have more in common with Philo than with ‘pagans like Celsus, heretics like Marcion... and simple Christians who have not yet learned to ascend beyond the hermeneutical letter of the law.’<sup>52</sup>

There has additionally been work done specifically on Philo’s understanding of prophecy. Both Harry Wolfson and Erwin Goodenough argued that although Philo does not use the term ‘messiah’ at all in his corpus, it was nevertheless an important theme in his thought about prophecy.<sup>53</sup> Richard Hecht, on the other hand, later argued that there

<sup>47</sup>A. von Harnack (1961). *History of Dogma*. Trans. by N. Buchanan. Vol. 2. New York, NY: Dover, p. 11.

<sup>48</sup>H. de Lubac (1950). *Histoire et Esprit: L’intelligence de l’Écriture d’après Origène*. Paris: Éditions Montaigne, p. 164. Translation Runia’s, Runia (1993), op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>49</sup>In general, says De Lange, we may assume that Origen had access to all of Tannaitic literature – that is, the Mishnah, the Tosefta, and the majority of the Jerusalem Talmud – in a fuller form than we have it. N. De Lange (1976). *Origen and the Jews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>50</sup>cf. e.g. *Homilies on Joshua* 16.3. There is a great deal of conflict in the scholarship over who these sources are. R.P.C. Hanson has previously alleged that Origen means only Philo (and this is certainly the view of Daniélou), but De Lange and several scholars within Jewish studies take it to refer to the rabbinic tradition. cf. G. Sgherri (1982). *Chiesa e Sinagoga nelle Opere di Origene*. Studia Patristica Mediolanensia 13. Milan: Vita e Pensiero; E. Urbach (1960). “Rabbinic Exegesis and Origen’s Commentary on the Song of Songs and Jewish-Christian Polemics”. In: *Tarbiz* 30, pp. 148–170; A. Wasserstein (1977). “A Rabbinic Midrash as a Source of Origen’s Homily on Ezekiel”. In: *Tel Aviv* 46, pp. 317–138.

<sup>51</sup>Otto (2018), op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>53</sup>cf. H. A. Wolfson (1947). *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. Vol. 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 407ff. See also E. R. Goodenough (1938). *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

is in fact a distinct absence of any kind of messianic themes in Philo's understanding of prophecy.<sup>54</sup> Work has also been done on Philo's treatment of specific prophets: for example, Philo's portrayal of Balaam has been examined in some detail by Robert Hayward and Judith Baskin.<sup>55</sup> Nasrallah has, in her work on the Phrygians, additionally examined Philo's view of ecstasy.<sup>56</sup> Nasrallah argues that Philo sees ecstasy as an epistemically privileged mode of knowing, what she calls 'hyperrationality'.<sup>57</sup> Hauck also interprets Philo's view of prophecy as fully ecstatic.<sup>58</sup>

One debate in particular – which involves Philo – is relevant to the argument of this and other chapters. That is the debate over the figure of the 'godly man' (θεῖος ἄνθρωπος), an archetype discussed in relation to sages, holy men, and miracle-workers both in the Judaeo-Christian and pagan traditions. The contours of the discussion are something like this: in Greco-Roman pagan culture, there are several Hellenistic examples of philosopher-sages who are also prophets, holy men, and sometimes miracle workers. Chief among them are Apollonius of Tyana and Alexander of Abonuteichos. Some New Testament scholars have made the argument that – through the conduit of Hellenistic Jewish scholars' portrayal of Moses and other OT figures in a similar style – there existed an archetype for portrayals of Jesus Christ as a prophet, miracle worker, sage and holy man.

Carl Holladay deals with this trend in detail as it pertains to Philo.<sup>59</sup> Holladay argues that – contrary to what is regularly claimed – Philo did not provide a bridge between the Hellenistic Greek figure of the divinised holy man and early Christian accounts of Christ's shared divinity and humanity. Instead, as Holladay argues, Philo's notion of wise and holy men, particularly of Moses, did not make the claim that they participated in divinity themselves, merely that they were extraordinary sages. In this, he participates in a contemporary Hellenistic pattern of claiming the extraordinary moral virtue of prophetic sage figures. I follow Holladay in this argument. This category, of the prophetic sage, examined at the end of this chapter with reference to Philo, is important

<sup>54</sup>R. D. Hecht (1988). "Philo and Messiah". In: *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era*. Ed. by J. Neusner, W. S. Green, and E. S. Frerichs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 139–168.

<sup>55</sup>cf. R. Hayward (2010). *Targums and the Transmission of Scripture Into Judaism and Christianity*. Leiden: Brill, 35ff. See also J. Baskin (1983b). *Pharaoh's Counsellors: Job, Jethro and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Sources*. Brown Judaic Studies 47. Chico, CA: Scholars Press.

<sup>56</sup>Nasrallah (2003b), op. cit., pp. 36–44.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit., 33ff.

<sup>59</sup>C. H. Holladay (1977). *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology*. Vol. 40. SBL dissertation series, Missoula, Montana.

for my argument in Chapter 3, where I return to it in detail.

In this chapter I argue that while Philo didn't – and wouldn't, as a Jew – conceive of the Old Testament prophets in the way Origen does, as forerunners of Christ, the two exegetes nevertheless share the same foundational thinking in their estimation of the prophets as supremely moral, philosophically advanced sages. This is, as I shall argue, by no means a neutral position in either Jewish or Greek thought. In particular, Origen's conception of what sets the Israelite prophets apart from their pagan equivalents relies heavily on a Philonic understanding of the person and the inspiration of the prophet as a virtuous sage, a topic I return to at length in Chapter 7.

## II The Phrygians and Prophecy

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep (ἔκστασιν<sup>60</sup>) to fall upon the man, and he slept.<sup>61</sup>

The above verse, in the story of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib in Genesis 2:18–25, was crucial to the Phrygian understanding of prophecy. In particular, Phrygians and their opponents were interested the nature of the ecstasy that God cast upon Adam while taking his rib, and the nature of the sleep that followed this.<sup>62</sup>

Our clearest understanding of the Phrygian reading of this text comes from Tertullian's *On the Soul*, which deals with the question of the soul's nature and functioning. According to Tertullian, a supporter of the Phrygian movement, Phrygians take the ecstasy cast on Adam by God to be of a prophetic kind. Because Adam receives prophetic revelation while under the ecstasy, he knows who Eve is when he wakes up and sees her. This reading is also supported by one of our major anti-Phrygian sources, a passage of Epiphanius's *Panarion* believed to be compiled from a much older source.<sup>63</sup> This is an important concurrence of pro- and anti-Phrygian sources, indicating that this passage must have played an important role in Phrygian conceptions of prophecy. The anti-Phrygian source, a piece of direct polemic against Phrygian readings of the passage, takes this ecstasy to be of a quiet and passive kind, more akin to a dream state – a reading which has tended to dominate since.

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<sup>60</sup>LXX.

<sup>61</sup>Genesis 2:21.

<sup>62</sup>For a detailed analysis of this passage and its importance to the Phrygian movement, see Nasrallah (2003b), *op. cit.*, pp. 47–51.

<sup>63</sup>*Panarion* 48.1.4–13.8. For more on the source itself, cf. also *ibid.*, pp. 167–70

Fortunately, however, a number of Phrygian oracles directly discussing ecstasy also survive, of which sixteen are considered genuine by Kurt Aland.<sup>64</sup> The sixth oracle, supposedly delivered by Montanus himself and spoken in the voice of the Paraclete, participates in common tropes about prophetic ecstasy:

Behold, man is like a lyre,  
and I rush thereon like a plectrum.  
Man sleeps and I awake.  
Behold, the Lord is he who arouses the hearts of men,  
and gives heart to men.<sup>65</sup>

As we saw in the Introduction, other early Christian writers, including Athenagoras, use the metaphor of the prophet as an instrument on which the Holy Spirit plays.<sup>66</sup> However, despite the prevalence of such a metaphor, polemicists against the Phrygians almost universally pick up on their prophetic ecstasy as a negative thing, often claiming that it is alien to true prophetic inspiration.

Apollinarius, bishop of Hierapolis in the 170s, is quoted in Eusebius's *Church History* declaring that the ecstasy of Montanus is unnatural and does not follow established biblical tradition. On these grounds it is suspect:

The pseudo-prophet speaks in a state of unnatural ecstasy, after which all restraint is thrown to the winds... They cannot point to a single one of the prophets under either the Old Covenant or the New who was moved by the Spirit in this way.<sup>67</sup>

Another anti-Phrygian source quoted in Eusebius makes much the same claim, adding the accusation that Montanus's ecstasy was brought on by a demon, whom Montanus himself invited in:

[Montanus]... in the unbounded desire of his soul for power gave access to himself to the adversary. He became obsessed and suddenly fell into frenzy and convulsions. He began to be ecstatic and to speak and to talk strangely, prophesying contrary to the custom which belongs to the tradition and succession of the church from the beginning.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup>K. Aland (1960). "Bemerkungen zum Montanismus und zur frühchristlichen Eschatologie". In: *Kirchengeschichtliche Entwürfe*. Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlagshaus, pp. 143–148.

<sup>65</sup>Translation by Aune (Aune (1983), op. cit., p. 314).

<sup>66</sup>cf. p. 54.

<sup>67</sup>Apollinarius, quoted in Eusebius, *Church History* 5.17.

<sup>68</sup>Eusebius, *Church History* 5.16.

Such a claim of demonic possession is, of course, well-established in the early Christian tradition: narratives of exorcism of raving demons play an important role from the gospels onwards in Christian literature.<sup>69</sup> What is particularly interesting about this passage, which is highly representative of polemic against Marcionism, is, as David Aune points out, that it models its lurid description of Montanus's ecstasy on the *pagan* satirist Lucian and his mockery of the *pagan* prophet Alexander of Abonuteichos.<sup>70</sup> Although Lucian's intent is more explicitly humorous than Christian commentators,<sup>71</sup> his focus is nevertheless, like theirs, on the moral risk of false prophecy. Indeed, almost all polemical approaches to the Phrygians take the line that their inspiration is basically immoral on the basis of its ecstatic nature. That Origen does not do so – see Chapter 7 – implies that we must look elsewhere for the model by which he understands ecstasy.

First, let us turn to the other important question raised by the Phrygian movement: the debate over whether there was continuing prophecy after Christ's sojourn, what the nature of such prophecy might be, and whether the Phrygians were part of it. It is clear from what little evidence we have that the Phrygians did indeed claim to be part of a tradition of prophets after Christ, and, more strikingly, that they claimed to be the final link in the chain. Thus, the thirteenth extant oracle, delivered by Maximilla, in which she claims unambiguously the position as last of the prophets:

After me there will be no longer a prophet,  
but the consummation.<sup>72</sup>

The exact nature of the millennialism of the Phrygians remains contested,<sup>73</sup> but from this oracle at least it is clear that they did believe in the imminent coming of the end times. For Apollinarius, writing fourteen years after Maximilla's death, this is further evidence of their untrustworthiness:

The prophetic gift must continue in the whole Church until the final com-

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<sup>69</sup>See, for example, Origen *Against Celsus*, 7.4, Tertullian *Defence*, 23ff, or Justin Martyr, *Dialogue* 85.1-3.

<sup>70</sup>Aune (1983), op. cit., p. 313. cf. Lucian, *Alexander the False Prophet* 13. See also Aune p. 32: 'According to Lucian, Glykon-Asklepios, a tame snake which Alexander claimed was a theriomorphic incarnation of Asklepios, was fitted with a fake human head, through which an assistant would utter oracles using a concealed speaking tube.'

<sup>71</sup>And focusses primarily on the *fradulence* of Alexander's inspiration, not its demonic nature.

<sup>72</sup>Aune (1983), op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>73</sup>The Phrygian movement also had a particular focus on the Apocalypse of John and its prophetic-revelatory elements. cf. N. Denzey (2001). "What Did the Montanists Read?" In: *The Harvard Theological Review* 94.4, pp. 427-448. See also N. Cohn (1970). *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. London: Paladin.

ing, as the apostle insists. But they point to no one, though this is the fourteenth year since Maximilla's death.<sup>74</sup>

Strictly speaking, of course, this does not invalidate Maximilla's prophecy: indeed, the non-appearance of any other prophet might be taken to bolster her claim that she was the last. But I think Apollinarius's claim is twofold: first, that Maximilla's prediction of the 'consummation' (συντέλεια) or end-times, has not come true and is therefore suspicious. Second, given that the end has patently not come, Maximilla's claim to be the final prophet contravenes the declaration of the apostle that prophecy must continue to the end.

Not all who wrote on the Phrygians were suspicious of their millennial claims. Tertullian's approach is decidedly more favourable. Indeed Tertullian seems to have seen the Phrygians as a step forward in the progress of revelation; his teleological account presumes the development of greater levels of prophetic and revelatory understanding as time – and sacred history – move on:

Righteousness... was first in a rudimentary state, having a natural fear of God: from that stage it advanced, through the Law and the Prophets, to infancy; from that stage it passed, through the Gospel, to the fervour of youth: now, through the Paraclete, it is settling into maturity.<sup>75</sup>

This progression allows a clearer understanding of scripture with the passage of time:

[God] has now accordingly dispersed all the perplexities of the past, and their self-chosen allegories and parables, by the open and perspicuous explanation of the entire mystery, through the new prophecy, which descends in copious streams from the Paraclete.<sup>76</sup>

As Nasrallah argues, these claims participate in a wider discourse about the periodisation of history.<sup>77</sup> She notes that Tertullian's description here conforms with the general tendency in antiquity to use periodisations of history that rely on the metaphor of stages of the human life. This obviously teleological paradigm means that history goes through an ethical trajectory, in which involvement with the spirit develops over time.

<sup>74</sup>Apollinarius in Eusebius, *Church History* 5.17.

<sup>75</sup>Tertullian, *On Head Coverings for Virgins* 1.10. cf. Lieu (2015), op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>76</sup>*On the Resurrection of the Flesh* 63. See also *On Monogamy* 3.10–12, in which Tertullian makes much the same argument.

<sup>77</sup>Nasrallah (2003b), op. cit., p. 149.

This is, of course, by no means a neutral claim. I will argue in Chapter 8 that Origen's lack of engagement with the Phrygians rests on a fundamentally different conception of prophecy's relationship with time than that of Tertullian, and a different conception of the periodisation of sacred history.<sup>78</sup>

### III Marcionites and Prophecy

By the second century, the relationship between Judaism and Christianity had become quite complicated. In its earliest beginnings, Christianity had drawn its followers from among the Jews, and had largely and rightly been seen by those outside the Jewish population as a Jewish sect.<sup>79</sup> Yet by the second century, Christianity had differentiated itself from Judaism, both by its large and growing Gentile population, but also by the increasing hostility of Christian writers to Jewish customs and practices.<sup>80</sup> Thus while the focus of early Christian thought about Gentiles had been Mosaic Law – and whether Gentiles were obligated to follow it – by the second century, this preoccupation had largely fallen away, with almost no Gentile Christians adhering to Jewish food restrictions and other distinctively Jewish practices. Additionally, many Jewish Christians ceased following the Jewish Law, with Christian thinkers increasingly characterising the new faith as something quite separate from Judaism. Many early Church writers stressed the importance of small differences and specific examples of cultural divergence, encouraging their communities to accept much of the OT while rejecting characteristic and public practices as circumcision or sacrifices.<sup>81</sup> In the eyes of the Roman state, too, Christianity had become obviously distinct from Judaism; Christians were therefore not afforded the legal arrangements and protections that Jews were.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup>cf. pp. 255–264.

<sup>79</sup>Hurtado (2016), op. cit.

<sup>80</sup>This is a contested issue with a large scholarship: some see the 'separation' date as the Jewish revolts of 66-70 AD, some attribute it to the Bar Kokhba revolts of 135 (see M. Simon (1964). *Verus Israel: Étude sur les Relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Empire Romain (135-425)*. Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard). Judith Lieu argues that we should read the polemical works of Christians against Jews as not representative of real practice, and thus take a much later date of separation. cf. J. M. Lieu (1995). "The Parting of the Ways: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?" In: *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17, pp. 101–19.

<sup>81</sup>See Kruger (2017), op. cit. See also J. Z. Smith (2004). "Differential Equations: On Constructing the Other". In: *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion*. Ed. by J. Z. Smith. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 230–50. For specific work on antisemitism in the way in which Christians negotiated their relationship with the OT, see A. Davies, ed. (1979). *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*. New York, NY: Paulist Press.

<sup>82</sup>cf. e.g. Barclay (1999), op. cit.

Marcion and his followers were part of a wider trend in the changing relationship between Christianity and Judaism. In this sense, Marcion's alleged rejection of Judaism would have appeared to many laypeople to be in line with the Church view at large. However, other Christian writers, while rejecting Jewish practices, accepted the Jewish prophets as true prophets – arguing that their predictions of a Messiah were in fact predictions of Christ, and thus that the Jewish scriptures aligned with the new Christian scriptures. From the very first anti-Marcionite polemic, writers who considered themselves to be taking the orthodox position adopted the strategy of claiming the unity of these scriptures, with specific reference to the prophets. Thus Hegesippus, one of the first to write against Marcion:

In every succession, and in every city that is held which is preached by the law and the prophets and the Lord.<sup>83</sup>

If the Marcionites rejected OT prophecy, what, then, was prophecy in the Marcionite understanding? Clearly a great deal hangs on its precise meaning for understanding the Marcionite rejection of the Old Testament prophets. Andrew Hayes proposes the following as Marcion's definition:

[Prophecy is a] direct revelation of Christ to Paul and a mediation of it through Paul alone at the expense of all the Prophets (including Moses, John the Baptist, and even contemporary prophets) and their god the creator and god of Israel.<sup>84</sup>

It is certainly the case that any attempt to establish a feature of Marcionite thought is met, inevitably, with source issues that are even more intractable than those for understanding the Phrygians. As regards the Marcionite understanding of prophecy, we have two main methods of enquiry. First, we have what polemicists say directly. Second, we have what we can conjecture about Marcionite views of prophecy given what we know about their understanding of scripture and what can be reconstructed from the Marcionite Gospel.

Let us begin with the polemicists. We have several extant polemics against Marcionism. Some are contemporary, such as those of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, and some date from some time later, such as Origen's. By inspiring these polemics, Marcionism shaped a number of very important second- and third-century conversations around prophecy, Judaism, and scripture.

<sup>83</sup>Hegesippus, quoted in in Eusebius *Church History* 4.22.3.

<sup>84</sup>Hayes (2017), op. cit., p. 107.

For example, in the *Dialogue with Trypho*, one of Justin's major concerns is, argues Hayes, to consider the relationship between Christians and Judaism – and 'the ways in which Christianity is both within and without that community.'<sup>85</sup> The *Dialogue with Trypho* sets this question – of which prophecy is a major component – at the centre of a debate between two speakers: Justin himself, portrayed as a Greco-Roman philosopher, and Trypho, an unknown and probably fictional Jew.<sup>86</sup>

Justin makes the case that Trypho should be content with the Law and prophets, while he, Justin, is a philosopher; the implication is that Trypho, as a Jew, must deal with the claim that the prophets are the only source of true knowledge. In fact, the epistemological sections of *Dialogue 3* are designed to put forward the argument that the revelation of the prophets is the only epistemologically sound route to knowledge of God; the dialogue considers the question of whether such a method of knowledge can really be called a 'science' like music, arithmetic or astronomy. Justin concludes not, and sees his conclusion as a deeply anti-Marcionite argument. The fact that Justin believes this to be a powerful argument in rebutting the Marcionites – by arguing that they cannot even approach the question of theology if they throw out prophecy – corroborates the notion that the Marcionites rejected OT prophecy wholesale.

A more unusual testimony comes from Rhodo, a disciple of Tatian who was likely active in the 180s. Rhodo, some of whose work is preserved in Eusebius's *Church History*, lists several separate Marcionite sects who claim different numbers of 'sources', that is, different numbers of primary powers.<sup>87</sup> There are those who follow Marcion, according to Rhodo, in having two sources (presumably the demiurge and the true god). Interestingly, Rhodo sees their position as largely an attempt, unsuccessful in his view, to solve the problem of evil. However, the most interesting group for our purposes is those who claim one source:

One of their herd is Apelles, who prides himself on his mode of life and his grey hairs. He admits that there is a single source, but says that the prophecies come from a hostile spirit, relying on the prophecies of a demoniac girl

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>86</sup>The intended audience of the text is uncertain. For the argument that the *Dialogue* is intended for an exclusively Jewish audience, see T. G. Stylianopoulos (1975). *Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law*. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press. Alternatively, Nilson argues that the *Dialogue* is intended for pagans – cf. J. Nilson (1977). "To Whom is Justin's *Dialogue With Trypho* Addressed?" In: *Theological Studies* 38, pp. 538–56.

<sup>87</sup>Terminology is difficult here: it is contested as to whether we should refer to Marcion's two sources as two 'gods'; the Platonic language of powers, suggesting, as it does, a potential hierarchy between a true underlying power and a lesser demiurge, is probably most neutral. For more on the Marcionite conception of God see Lieu (2015), *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic*, 323ff.

named Philumene.<sup>88</sup>

Tertullian also attests to Apelles and Philumine;<sup>89</sup> while we know no more than the claim that Philumine was a prophet, this information certainly indicates that at least some among the Marcionites did believe in prophecy. However, as Rhodo goes on to confirm, Apelles did not extend this belief to the prophets of the OT:

[According to Apelles] the prophecies refuted themselves, as they had never once told the truth: they were inconsistent, false, and mutually destructive.<sup>90</sup>

The view of Apelles, then, seems to be that while there is only one god, the prophecies of the OT are actually inspired by demons. We might think that this would imply that Marcion was particularly polemical against Jewish religion. However, Lieu argues that the idea that Marcion was particularly antisemitic comes primarily from Tertullian, arguing that there is 'little' to suggest Marcion had much actual interest in the role of the Jews.<sup>91</sup>

Tertullian's own position, as we saw,<sup>92</sup> was influenced by his difficulty in defending the newness of the Phrygian movement while coherently rejecting the newness of Marcionism. Lieu argues that this difficulty – along with the fact that he had already written *Against the Jews* – led him to characterise Marcion's view of prophecy as basically Jewish.<sup>93</sup> In this context, she argues, we should see Tertullian's focus on Marcion's supposed belief in a later, Jewish messianic Christ as at least somewhat spurious.

The line that Tertullian draws between Paul's rejection of Jewish religion and Marcion's, then, may be fabricated: Paul, says Tertullian, was primarily interested in the ways in which the Christians could supersede and overtake Jewish practice, realising themselves to be living in a new era of theological time.<sup>94</sup> The Marcionite view, argues Tertullian, is both more basic and more aggressive: instead of Jews as incomplete Christians who have become impious through obsolescence, Marcion portrays them as worshippers of a different, malevolent God. This notion of supercession and obsolescence is why, argues Tertullian, Paul focusses on particular 'outdated' Jewish practices

<sup>88</sup>Rhodo, in Eusebius, *Church History* 5.13.2.

<sup>89</sup>cf. *On the prescription of heretics* 30.

<sup>90</sup>Rhodo, in Eusebius, *Church History* 5.13.6.

<sup>91</sup>Lieu (2015), op. cit., p. 413.

<sup>92</sup>cf. pp. 77–78.

<sup>93</sup>Lieu (2015), op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>94</sup>For further discussion of this point, see Chapter 8. cf. pp. 255–264.

such as circumcision, sacrifice, and feasts – the ephemera of Jewish life – rather than on Jewish theological or philosophical claims.

Whether Tertullian's approach to Marcionite views of Jewish religion is correct or not, we do know for certain that the Marcionites rejected the Jewish scriptures – at least as inspired texts. Thus Lieu:

For Marcion scripture... was a primary evidential authority, although not a moral or spiritual one.<sup>95</sup>

To understand exactly why this is significant, we must understand it in the wider context of the development of a Christian scriptural canon. In the centuries after Christ, Christian communities circulated, read, and regarded as holy a wide variety of different texts: common to nearly all groups were the four Gospels, of Luke, Mark, Matthew and John, the Acts of the Apostles, and (at least some of) the letters of Paul. There was conflict over the epistles of John, Peter, James and Jude and over Revelation. But a number of other texts were also considered to be divinely inspired by many Christians. These included the *Didache*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Apocalypse of Peter*. Most modern Christians and academic theologians now classify these latter texts as the works of the 'apostolic fathers'; that is to say, the earliest non-scriptural writings, with their dates not necessarily acting as the qualifier for canonicity. While our notions of what is scriptural have become time-honoured over 1600 years of fixed canon, lines between scriptural and non-scriptural texts were more flexible in pre-Nicene antiquity – both among Jews and, to a greater extent, Christians.

The Christian Greek Old Testament was fairly fixed. Most regarded the Septuagint as the canonical translation, and even among those that favoured the Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotian or other translations, the range and order of books included was agreed upon. While it differed somewhat from the Jewish Tanakh – the minor prophets had separate books rather than being combined, for example – it was in broad concordance with it.<sup>96</sup> But there was no parallel notion of a unified 'testament' of the new Christian writings – not until many years after Christ's death.<sup>97</sup> While histories of canonicity often focus on the agency of figures like Irenaeus and Justin Martyr, as BeDuhn argues,

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<sup>95</sup>Lieu (2015), op. cit., p. 357.

<sup>96</sup>The Old Testament of the Syriac Peshitta, probably translated from a lost sibling of the Septuagint in the early second century, is also in broad concordance, with the addition of Sirach.

<sup>97</sup>Bruce Metzger defines a canon as not just 'a collection of authoritative books' (such as Paul's letters), but an 'authoritative collection of books'. cf. B. Metzger (1987). *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 282

we would do better to look more closely at Marcion.<sup>98</sup> In constructing a set of ‘canonical’ Christian scriptures, Marcion was actively trying to reject the OT, to declare a ‘New Testament’ – a new covenant that overwrote the old. The difference in motivation of his approach must have been quite alarming to his opponents.

Marcion’s NT included versions of the Gospel of Luke, and ten of Paul’s letters (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon). It also had Marcionite versions of ps-Paul’s Epistle to the Alexandrians, and Epistle to the Laodiceans. All of the Epistles also have a short prologue, suspected by Harnack to have been written by Marcion himself.<sup>99</sup> While scholars disagree on the extent to which Marcion excised references to the OT from his NT, it is certainly clear that he vastly reduced the role of prophecy in his NT.<sup>100</sup> Notably, it is clear that Marcion altered the role of John the Baptist in the Gospels. Dieter Roth has shown that he was not completely excised, but that he was not mentioned until Luke 5:33 – that is to say, the entire narrative of John’s birth and prophecies of Christ were removed.<sup>101</sup> I return to the significance of this point in Chapter 8.<sup>102</sup>

Notions of scripture and scripturality were shaped by Marcion’s impact at a time when the process of defining Christianity was open to a great number of participants. As BeDuhn puts it: ‘[Marcion] made a permanent impact on the Christian Bible and the faith shaped by reference to it.’<sup>103</sup> Thus not only did Marcion shape the notion of an authoritative New Testament, but he also shaped the structure that still remains – the gospels along with the apostolic letters of Paul.

By rejecting the OT, Marcionism lay down the challenge to define exactly the relationship between the OT and the new Christian scriptures. The Christians who did not accept Marcion’s notions about scripture had on their hands a further twofold challenge: not only did they have to establish the relationship between the OT and more recent holy texts, but they also had to define *which* of their texts were scriptural – in particular, whether they would accept Marcion’s canon. The task of the polemicists was to operate both at a narrow textual critical level – to explain exactly why Marcion’s texts were flawed – and a wider ideological level. As Lieu points out, this required a complex

<sup>98</sup>BeDuhn (2013), op. cit.

<sup>99</sup>Harnack (1990), *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*.

<sup>100</sup>Harnack argued that Marcion excised everything that referred to the OT. Lieu, on the other hand, argues that Marcion did not remove *all* references to the OT: for example, Moses and Elijah are present at the transfiguration in Marcion’s gospel. cf. *ibid*. See also, Lieu (2015), op. cit., p. 230.

<sup>101</sup>Roth (2015), op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>102</sup>cf. pp. 249–255.

<sup>103</sup>BeDuhn (2013), op. cit., p. 7.

approach to the Marcionite view:

Marcion was being charged with rejecting a strategy for retaining and reading the scriptures that he himself, in part, had made necessary.<sup>104</sup>

One thinker would prove particularly effective at this task: Origen. As I argue more fully in Chapter 8, Origen's solution to the challenge posed by Marcionism was elegant, and drew upon strategies and currents of thought already present in the early Church. He would show systematically that the OT prophecies pointed forwards to Christ, and that many of the figures and stories in the OT were in fact allegories of Christ. Thus he could show that, both on the small and the large scale, the OT acted as an allegory for the NT; it was necessary for the Christians to believe in the OT, but not sufficient, as they had also to believe in the NT. The quotations of OT prophets in the gospels and in Paul were thus legitimations, both of the OT, and of the evangelists and Paul himself; the two-way reinforcement of prophecy and its fulfilment worked only through the lens of Christ. In order to do this, he relied heavily on a picture of the OT prophets as authoritative and moral sources of knowledge, which he got from Philo.

## IV Philo

Philo of Alexandria (20 BC - 50 AD) played an important role for many early Christian thinkers as a bridge between Greek philosophy and the Jewish scriptures. It is natural that the thinking of somebody like Origen on an issue such as prophetic inspiration would be heavily informed by his reading of his Alexandrine predecessor. It is also natural that, in responding to the Marcionite challenge to the integrity of the OT, somebody like Origen would base his defence of the worthiness of such a text on that of its most skilled exegete, Philo.

As discussed above, some scholars argue that Philo wholeheartedly endorsed ecstatic prophecy; others argue that for Philo, prophecy was primarily a rational experience. The terms are hard to define and the relevant texts are contradictory and difficult to construe. Here I argue that Philo has a rather ambiguous approach to prophetic ecstasy, in which it seems as though prophets less important than Moses *do* undergo some kind of ecstasy (thus *Who is the Heir*). But in the *Life of Moses* and *On Dreams* it is clear that Philo also has in mind a model in which the prophet has an intellectual engagement with

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<sup>104</sup>Lieu (2015), op. cit., p. 365.

their source of inspiration and – while loosely undergoing something we might want to call ‘ecstasy’ – retains an intellectual presence, playing something closer to the role of a Platonic philosopher or a Cynic-Stoic sage. This is most pronounced when it comes to Moses, who is a ‘friend’ of God and ‘converse[s]’ with him.

Instead of attempting to come to a comparative definition of ecstasy with reference to Philo and the Phrygians, I primarily wish to argue that this ambiguity and polyvalence in Philo’s concept of prophecy lays the ground for Origen’s de-centring of ecstasy *per se* in his own understanding of prophecy.<sup>105</sup> That is to say, it is not that Philo – or Origen – rejects the *possibility* of what we might think of as prophetic ecstasy. But for neither is it *the* deciding factor in separating legitimate from illegitimate prophecy, nor in understanding the divine inspiration of the prophets, nor the prophetic experience as a whole. This can be seen by looking at what Philo *does* say about ecstasy itself.

In *Who is the Heir*, Philo asserts that prophets undergo prophetic inspiration of a frenzied and ecstatic kind:

[O soul,] like persons possessed and corybants, be filled with inspired frenzy, even as the prophets are inspired. For it is the mind which is under the divine afflatus, and no longer in its own keeping, but is stirred to its depths and maddened by heavenward yearning, drawn by the truly existent and pulled upward thereto, with truth to lead the way and remove all obstacles before its feet, that its path may be smooth to treat – such is the mind, which has this inheritance.<sup>106</sup>

It is clear that Philo means by this that the prophet is evacuated from their own mind (‘no longer in its own keeping’). He explains the reason for this with reference to the interaction of divine and human:

The mind is evicted at the arrival of the divine spirit... mortal and immortal may not share the same home.<sup>107</sup>

Thus also in *On the Special Laws*:

For no pronouncement of a prophet is ever his own; he is an interpreter prompted by another in all his utterances, when knowing not what he

<sup>105</sup>cf. Chapter 7, pp. 204–209.

<sup>106</sup>*Who is the Heir* 14.69-70.

<sup>107</sup>*Who is the Heir* 53.264.

does he is filled with inspiration, as the reason withdraws and surrenders the citadel of the soul to a new visitor and tenant, the Divine Spirit which plays upon the vocal organism and dictates words which clearly express its prophetic message.<sup>108</sup>

Not wholly unreasonably, some scholars, such as Hecht and Feldman, take such statements as evidence that Philo had a fully ecstatic understanding of prophecy, in which all true prophecy happens under ecstatic conditions.<sup>109</sup> However, the above passage from *On the Special Laws*, for example, is in a specifically polemical context in which Philo is arguing against pagan inductive divination on the grounds that it is inferior to inspired divination; perhaps in such a context it would make sense for Philo to overemphasise the inspired nature of Israelite prophecy. Similarly, in other sections of *Who is the Heir*, Philo presents a model of prophecy with reference to Moses that contrasts with his descriptions of ecstasy:

Moses does not say “God said” or “God talked,” but “a voice of God came to him.” It suggests a loud, resonant, continuous sound, pitched so it spreads through the whole soul, so that no part is left empty of its share of instruction, but every part is completely filled with health-giving learning.<sup>110</sup>

In this description, inspiration is not an ‘*afflatus*’ into the vacated vehicle of the prophet’s body, but a sound that the prophet can hear – indeed, cannot help but hear – with his own sense organs and through the interpretation of his mind. The implication of this passage is also that the inspiration of God is ‘continuous’ for Moses, that is to say, that it is not an unusual, episodic state into which he is cast outside his control like an ecstasy, but a kind of elevated understanding which is always with him.

While I do not believe it is helpful or fair to try to force all of Philo’s statements on the subject into neat concordance – he appears, after all, notoriously contradictory on many subjects<sup>111</sup> – I believe this apparent contradiction can be eased significantly by turning

<sup>108</sup>*On the Special Laws* 4.49.

<sup>109</sup>cf. L. H. Feldman (2007). *Philo’s Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism*. Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 15. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. See also R. D. Hecht (n.d.). “Scripture and Commentary in Philo”. In: *SBL Seminar Papers, 1981*. Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 20. Chico, CA: Scholars Press.

<sup>110</sup>*Who is the Heir* 13.67. Translation my own.

<sup>111</sup>‘One soon learns in dealing with Philo not to be unduly upset at what appear to be inconsistencies in his thought, otherwise he becomes even more incomprehensible than he already is.’ Holladay (1977), op. cit., p. 106.

to other texts in which prophecy is of more central concern to Philo. I begin with *On Dreams*, for an important taxonomical distinction that Philo makes, before turning to *Life of Moses* in which he sets out a detailed excursus on the subject of prophecy and prophets.

*On Dreams* and *Life of Moses*, both of which have an explicit focus on prophecy and divination, should, I believe, be privileged over less directly focussed texts such as *Who is the Heir*. This is not to say that Philo is not saying what he really thinks in *Who is the Heir* – merely that an understanding of his views on prophecy should put more weight on his explicit taxonomical declarations, which are likely to be more considered and more comprehensive. By reading all three texts together, I will argue that for Philo ecstatic inspiration is just one aspect or type of prophecy, and that ecstasy is not hugely central to his thought, a view that goes against much of the scholarship. In Chapter 7, I will make a similar case for Origen.<sup>112</sup>

In the opening page of *On Dreams*, Philo sets up a distinction between two different types of dream. The first type, he says, are ‘visions’ (φαντασίας), which ‘God of his own motion sends to us’. The second type, on the other hand, require the active participation of the mind of the dreamer: they are those in which ‘our own mind’ (ὁ ἡμέτερος νοῦς) moves ‘out of itself together with the mind of the universe’ to become ‘possessed’ (κατέχεσθαι) and ‘god-inspired’ (θεοφορεῖσθαι).

Philo states that the second type of dream renders the human mind ‘capable of receiving some foreknowledge of things to come’ (προγινώσκειν τι τῶν μελλόντων). He does not specify that the first type does not allow prediction of the future, although the contrast is implied. While the treatise goes on to give some detailed examples of this second type of dream, we might ask what the distinction is between the two types, and why Philo draws it.

While the term ‘ecstasy’ may convey completely passive evacuation of the mind in English, as opposed to the more neutral ‘vision’, in Philo’s use it seems he is drawing the active/passive distinction the other way round. It is the ecstatic type of dream that requires participation of the dreamer’s mind. A similar classification – this time threefold but with the same basic structure – is ascribed to Posidonius in Cicero’s *On Divination*:

Now Posidonius holds the view that there are three ways in which men dream as the result of divine impulse: first, the soul is clairvoyant of itself because of its kinship with the gods; second, the air is full of immortal souls,

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<sup>112</sup>cf. pp. 200–209.

already clearly stamped, as it were, with the marks of truth; and third, the gods in person converse with men when they are asleep.<sup>113</sup>

This same structure appears almost exactly, with the same active/passive lines, in *Life of Moses*, this time explicitly with reference to prophecy. In this passage, Philo claims that there are three different kinds of divine utterance:

1. By God in his own person with prophet as interpreter.
2. Revelation through question and answer.
3. By prophet in his/her own person, when possessed by God and carried away out of him/herself.<sup>114</sup>

Philo goes on to elaborate on each of these kinds of prophecy. It is the distinction between the first type and the second and third types that I would like to draw attention to. The first type seems to accord to Philo's first type of dreams, that is, those that are visions presented to the mind by God's will without the interaction of the dreamer's own mind. The first kind seems to be lesser than the later kinds, and its dream analogue is certainly treated as such in *On Dreams*. In fact, Philo seems to find it problematic to count something so passive as prophecy:

They are delivered as if by an interpreter: interpretation and prophecy differ.<sup>115</sup>

Thus it is clear to Philo that only the second and third types should, in the strictest sense, be called prophecy:

The second kind I will at once proceed to describe, interweaving it with the third kind, in which the speaker appears under that divine possession in virtue of which he is chiefly and in the strictest sense considered a prophet.<sup>116</sup>

Hecht denominates the second and third types as 'ecstatic' prophecy.<sup>117</sup> However, Philo definitively does not describe these types as passive in *Life of Moses*. In fact in discussion of the second kind of prophecy, Philo points out that the prophet also is engaging by his own agency in the divine utterance:

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<sup>113</sup>Cicero, *On Divination* 1.30.64.

<sup>114</sup>*Life of Moses* 2.188ff.

<sup>115</sup>*Life of Moses* 2.191.

<sup>116</sup>*Life of Moses* 2.191.

<sup>117</sup>Hecht (n.d.), op. cit.

In the second kind we find combination and partnership: the prophet asks questions of God about matters on which he has been seeking knowledge and God replies and instructs him.<sup>118</sup>

In the third case, this feature is even more pronounced:

The third kind are assigned to the lawgiver himself: God has given to him of his own power of foreknowledge and by this he will reveal future events.<sup>119</sup>

Here the agency of the prophet is foremost. In this model, a prophet has a great degree of personal involvement and responsibility. Feldman agrees, stating that it is only in these cases that the prophet is ‘truly a prophet’ because they are ‘[not] merely a passive medium of a divine message’.<sup>120</sup> This points us less towards the notion of prophets as passive vehicles and more towards the notion, put forward explicitly much later in Jewish scholarship by Maimonides, that prophecy is something ‘which comes only to a superior person who has perfected his character, disciplined his imaginative faculties, and fully developed his rational mind.’<sup>121</sup> To understand what this kind of prophet might look like, we must turn to the rest of the *Life of Moses*, in which Philo sets out in detail an argument for why Moses should be regarded as the archetypal prophet.

The *Life of Moses* is a ‘thoroughly aretalogical’<sup>122</sup> text, which seeks to demonstrate Moses’ fitness for all his major offices: as lawgiver, leader, and prophet. Indeed, one of Philo’s arguments made over the course of the text is that Moses as prophet cannot be understood separately from Moses as leader, or Moses as lawgiver; all these offices are vested in the – highly virtuous – person of Moses.

Holladay argues that Philo’s deliberate purpose was to portray Moses as a sage, a Cynic-Stoic σοφός, noting that his virtues are described in highly similar to those in Dio Chrysostom’s kingship tractates.<sup>123</sup> I return in more detail in Chapter 3 to what exactly a sage is, and the intertwining of the figures of sage and prophet in Greek thought. For now, I turn to some specific examples from the *Life of Moses*.

First, Philo argues throughout the text that Moses’ virtues are extensive and wide-ranging. For example:

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<sup>118</sup> *Life of Moses* 2.190.

<sup>119</sup> *Life of Moses* 2.190.

<sup>120</sup> Thus Feldman (2007), op. cit., p. 191. The page contains an unfortunate typo, missing a ‘not’, but it is clear from the context of Feldman’s argument that he means this.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, p. 190. cf. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 2.37.

<sup>122</sup> Holladay (1977), op. cit., p. 112.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112–3.

These treasures were the repeated exhibition of self-restraint, continence, temperance, shrewdness, good sense, knowledge, endurance of toil and hardships, contempt of pleasures, justice, advocacy of excellence, censure and chastisement according to law for wrongdoers, praise and honour for well-doers, again as the law dictates.

Indeed, Philo refers to Moses as the ‘holiest man ever yet born’ (ὁσιώτατον τῶν πρόποτε γενομένων).<sup>124</sup> While, as Holladay argues, Philo stops short of implying that Moses is actually himself divine (θεῖος) or sinless, he notes that Philo ‘considerably’ censors the Biblical stories which paint Moses in a bad light.<sup>125</sup> Instead, Philo emphasises both Moses’ natural disposition and training towards both virtue and wisdom:

From his childhood and its very beginning he was not only blameless (ἀνεπιλήπτος) but extremely praiseworthy.<sup>126</sup>

His education is very clearly the education of a philosopher. According to Philo, while he was young Moses learned ‘arithmetic, geometry, the lore of metre, rhythm and harmony, and the whole subject of music’,<sup>127</sup> as well as what appears to be dialectic.<sup>128</sup>

While none of this is surprising, two things emerge from this depiction. First, Moses’ virtues are highly compatible with Greek philosophical notions of the sage or the perfectly wise person. Whether this is in part rhetorical or whether it is a natural result of Philo’s background and interests is hard to say.<sup>129</sup> In either case, it is a strategy which was to have a huge influence on Christian writers such as Origen.

Second, and more significantly, Philo explicitly links Moses’ virtues and his ability to prophesy. Thus, for example, Philo portrays Moses’ chastity as a necessary ingredient in his ability to act as a prophet:

This [sex] he had disdained for many a day, almost from the time when, possessed by the spirit, he entered on his work as a prophet, since he held it fitting to hold himself always in readiness to receive the oracular messages.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>124</sup>*Life of Moses* 2.192.

<sup>125</sup>Holladay (1977), op. cit., p. 175. For example, he mentions neither the murder of the Egyptian (Exodus 2:12), nor ‘Moses’ grumbling and doubting prior to the (second) miraculous quail feast’.

<sup>126</sup>*Life of Moses* 2.1.

<sup>127</sup>*Life of Moses* 1.23.

<sup>128</sup>‘The philosophy conveyed in symbols’ and also ‘the rest of the regular school course’, *Life of Moses* 1.23.

<sup>129</sup>Boys-Stones analyses the rhetorical strategies used in Jewish apologetic to portray Greek philosophy as ultimately derived from the Jewish patriarchs, a trend in which Philo was a key figure. cf. Boys-Stones (2001), op. cit., pp. 90–95.

<sup>130</sup>*Life of Moses* 2.69.

Similarly, Moses is described as fasting regularly, sometimes for up to 40 days at a time.<sup>131</sup> What is very clear is that Philo considers Moses to be the greatest of all the prophets, referring to him variously as ‘the archprophet’ (ἀρχιπροφήτης),<sup>132</sup> as well as ‘the most perfect of the prophets’ (ὁ τελειότατος τῶν προφητῶν),<sup>133</sup> and even, on two occasions the ‘prophet word’ (ὁ προφήτης λόγος),<sup>134</sup> a description which he does not elaborate on but which must have had electrifying resonances for Origen.

## V Conclusions

Both the Phrygian movement and the Marcionite movement elicited, in their different ways, a degree of moral panic among their opponents. In the case of the Phrygians, it centred on their ecstatic prophesying, often drawing out lurid comparisons with pagan practice. We might expect Origen to follow the same line of attack – pagan debates over prophecy, with which he was quite familiar, could act as a perfect comparandum to discredit both the Phrygian and pagan oracles for their patent demonic possession and their recourse to ecstasy as proof thereof. Instead, as I will argue in Chapter 7, he decentres ecstasy and focusses on prophetic morality. Part of the reason for this is that he draws on a more complex Philonic understanding of prophetic ecstasy which does not cast ecstasy as the dividing line between true and false prophecy.

In the case of the Marcionite movement, it was the probing and irreverent questions they asked about scripture and its ancient prophets. Polemicists with their own very different approaches to scripture and prophecy – such as Tertullian and Origen – had to find ways both to legitimise the OT prophets and argue for the fulfilment of their prophecies in Christ.

Philo’s portrayal of prophecy and prophets would prove instrumental for Origen. Philo had considered the question of ecstasy at length, and, as I have argued, accepted that while ecstasy could be an important feature of true prophecy, the most important prophets – such as Moses – were marked out instead by their supreme virtue. This virtue was what made them indistinguishable from sages and philosophers, and allowed their minds unencumbered and active engagement with God.

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<sup>131</sup>*Life of Moses* 2.70.

<sup>132</sup>*On the Change of Names* 103, 125; *On Dreams* 2.189; *Questions on Genesis* 4.8.

<sup>133</sup>*On the Decalogue* 175.

<sup>134</sup>*On the Preliminary Studies* 170; *On the Migration of Abraham* 151.



## Chapter 3

# Greek Prophecy

ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τῇ πάσῃ τῆς ἐφύϊας δυνάμει σου ἐβουλόμην καταχρήσασθαι σε τελικῶς μὲν εἰς Χριστιανισμὸν... καὶ τάχα τοιοῦτό τι αἰνίσσεται τὸ ἐν Ἐξόδῳ γεγραμμένον ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ. ἵνα λεχθῇ τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ αἰτεῖν παρὰ γειτόνων καὶ συσκήνων σκεύη ἀργυρᾶ καὶ χρυσᾶ καὶ ἱματισμὸν· ἵνα, σκυλεύσαντες τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους, εὔρωσιν ὕλην πρὸς τὴν κατασκευὴν τῶν παραλαμβανομένων εἰς τὴν πρὸς θεὸν λατρείαν.<sup>1</sup>

I wish to ask you to extract from Greek philosophy whatever is a preparation for Christianity... And perhaps something of this kind is foreshadowed in what is written in Exodus from the mouth of God, that the Israelites were ordered to seek from their neighbours silver and gold vessels and clothing – so that, by stealing from the Egyptians, they might have material for the journey in preparation for the service of God.

Origen wrote the above words in a letter to his young pupil Gregory Thaumaturgus. The metaphor, of the fleeing Israelites plundering the Egyptians for gold to fund their journey as a metaphor for Greek philosophy, is one that made an impact on thinkers after Origen,<sup>2</sup> and has continued to lie at the centre of modern discussions about patristic engagement with Greek philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

The conventional explanation of the metaphor is that Origen is instructing Gregory that a course of Greek (traditionally pagan) education can be of great value and use to a young Christian. Just as the gold was useful to the Israelites in their flight, providing

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<sup>1</sup>*Letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus* 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Augustine uses the same explanation of the metaphor, for example, in *On Christian Doctrine* 2.40.

<sup>3</sup>For a complete history of this metaphor in patristic thought, cf. J. S. Allen (2008). *The Despoliation of Egypt: In Pre-Rabbinic, Rabbinic and Patristic Traditions*. Leiden: Brill.

money for food and other essentials, so too can Greek education provide assistance on a spiritual journey to union with God. Yet, just as the Israelites would have been wrong to see the acquisition of gold – rather than the reaching of Zion – as the object of their quest, so the educated Christian should not be distracted by pagan learning, which should be seen as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. It is worth bearing this metaphor in mind as we examine Origen's engagement with Greek philosophical and institutional understandings of prophecy. This chapter will consider this relationship: the terms of the debate in Greek culture, and the ways in which they influenced Origen's framing of the question of prophecy.

In the previous chapter I argued that Origen was concerned with refuting both the Phrygians and the Marcionites by answering the foundational questions they posed about prophecy. I also argued that Philo's hellenised Jewish understanding of prophecy was the essential background to Origen's thinking on these topics – both his understanding of the Old Testament prophets as virtuous sages and of his understanding of prophetic ecstasy and inspiration. I will return to how these issues are dealt with and resolved in Origen's texts in Chapters 7 and 8.

In this chapter, I explore the Greek models of prophecy which lie behind Philo's ideas – as well as those which influence Origen directly. As in Jewish and Christian religious life, prophecy played a central role in Greek pagan religion. As we saw from the examples of the Marcionites and the Phrygians, the central issues in conceptions of prophecy could differ between philosophical notions of prophecy and everyday practice, and were often the site of conflict. Similarly in the pagan world, constructions of prophecy in different spheres of life could have quite significant differences. For this reason I will briefly survey some Greek literary, practical and philosophical constructions of prophecy, before focussing on a specific development of the first and second centuries AD: an increasing focus on the personal virtue of the prophet and an increasing overlap in the roles of prophets and sages.

I focus primarily on Greek and Greek-language – as opposed to Roman or Latin-language – texts and institutions in this chapter. While I do make reference to some specifically Roman features of thought about prophecy, these are peripheral to my analysis and argument; this is because Origen as a Greek-speaker would primarily have experienced and understood pagan thinking about prophecy through a Greek lens.

My argument is as follows. Prophets in traditional Greek pagan religion have a variety of roles, characters, and levels of personal virtue or morality. Their relationships with the gods are also varying, with no uniform model of how prophetic inspiration

or foreknowledge works. I will argue that while some prophets of the Archaic and Classical periods do claim all-encompassing knowledge (such as Calchas in the *Iliad*), this claim is rarely linked to personal virtue. Additionally, Archaic and Classical texts about prophecy usually emphasise the general unknowability of both fate and the will of the gods; prophecy is presented as a highly unusual and morally ambiguous ability to receive flashes of insight from above. Because of this, the prophet's role is usually socially peripheral: many prophets have physical disabilities or social circumstances that set them apart from society. Additionally, many prophets in this period are also explicitly described as practitioners of technical forms of divination such as ornithomancy or hepatomancy.

However, in the first and second centuries AD there were a number of prominent prophets who made claims not only – as prophets of all periods do – to knowledge outside the normal human remit, but also to extraordinary virtue; moreover, these two features are explicitly linked in texts about such prophets. We saw in Philo's portrayal of Moses the notion that he was not merely a lawgiver with an occasional prophetic role, but that his roles of prophet, moral leader, and wise man were all assimilated into the language of the Cynic-Stoic sage. In this chapter I examine these categories and the wider Greek background of this portrayal, focussing particularly on the example of Apollonius of Tyana in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

I argue that Apollonius is representative of a period in which individual prophets claim a much wider role than previously, as both future-tellers and moral exempla, sages who can 'see all levels of reality'.<sup>4</sup> These prophet-sages have a different epistemic status from earlier prophets; instead of having a morally ambiguous ability to occasionally penetrate the world of the gods and a mixture of inspired and technical methods of doing so, in the later model, full metaphysical knowledge becomes the prerogative of the prophet, who is not set apart from his or her peers by unfortunate circumstances, but set above them by personal virtue. I return to Origen's use of this model in Chapter 7.

## I Literature

In the Introduction, I discussed a number of the scholarly taxonomies of prophecy and divination.<sup>5</sup> One distinction was the inspired versus inductive split as found in the work

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<sup>4</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>5</sup>cf. pp. 48–49.

of Pierre Bonnechere. However, it is worth bearing in mind that even for the Greek context for which it was formulated, this split can be misleading. As Sarah Iles Johnston has pointed out, many Greek sites associated with natural divination have aetiological myths connected to practitioners of technical divination.<sup>6</sup> For example, the oracle at Daunia, which specialised in incubation, where a visitor slept overnight to receive prophetic (that is, inspired) dreams, was said to be founded by the Iliadic figure Calchas, an ornithomancer and soothsayer (that is, an inductive diviner).

Two works have been particularly helpful guides through this maze. The first is Aune's *Prophecy in the Mediterranean World*,<sup>7</sup> a tightly-organised compendium of the various types of prophecy and divination, both inspired and inductive, practised in the ancient Jewish, Greco-Roman, and early Christian worlds. Perhaps wisely, Aune does not offer any overall narratives, and is critical about many of those offered by others.<sup>8</sup>

The other work is Hauck's book on Origen. While, as I discussed in the Introduction,<sup>9</sup> Hauck's paradigm is ultimately too reductive for Origen, his background chapters, particularly those on the Greco-Roman context, are where he is at his strongest. His analysis of Plato's approach to prophecy is, for example, an excellent introduction to the topic.<sup>10</sup> I largely agree with Hauck's reading of Plato's approach to prophecy as centrally concerned with prophetic ecstasy, which he takes to be similar to poetic ecstasy. The implications for comparative reading of the Israelite prophets with this theory of inspiration are discussed by Abraham Avni.<sup>11</sup> Nasrallah also discusses Plato's notion of ecstasy, again coming to the conclusion that Plato endorses a fully ecstatic model of prophecy.<sup>12</sup> There has been some disagreement on Plato's view. Donald Lateiner argues that Plato's real position on prophets emerges in the *Republic*, in which he purportedly rejects all forms of prophecy except the Delphic oracle (*Republic* 427b-c). Indeed, Lateiner claims that Plato refers to other so-called prophets as beast-like (θηριώδεις) and argues in *Republic* 364b-e that they should be refused burial.<sup>13</sup> While Lateiner is correct to identify

<sup>6</sup>S. I. Johnston (2008). *Ancient Greek Divination*. Blackwell Ancient Religions. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

<sup>7</sup>Aune (1983), op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>cf. Introduction, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup>cf. pp.40–41.

<sup>10</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit., 17ff.

<sup>11</sup>A. Avni (1968). "Inspiration in Plato and the Hebrew Prophets". In: *Comparative Literature* 20.1, pp. 55–63.

<sup>12</sup>Nasrallah (2003b), op. cit., pp. 32–36.

<sup>13</sup>D. Lateiner (1993). "The Perception of Deception and of Gullibility in Specialists of the Supernatural (Primarily) in Athenian Literature". In: *Nomodeiktēs: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald*. Ed. by R. M. Rosen and J. Farrell. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, pp. 179–195, 195n32.

Plato's intense contempt for those he considers charlatans, I think Lateiner's insistence that we should understand all ancient prophets, diviners and so on as charlatans influences his reading unduly here.

Scholars generally agree with one of Plutarch's suggestions for the decline of the oracles in his own time, that it was due to the expansion of the Roman Empire and thus the decline of the political role of oracles. Thus Athanassiadi,<sup>14</sup> who notes a resurgence in the Antonine period, including the foundation of a new oracle at Abonuteichos. There is a tendency in the scholarship to take Plutarch as a detached source; however, Rainer Hirsch-Luipold has argued that Plutarch's dialogues should be read carefully for their theological content. In particular, he identifies a soteriological argument running through *On the E at Delphi*; Plutarch uses the dialogue to show the transcendence of God – that is to say, that the E at Delphi serves as a symbol, as a Platonic means to a more abstract understanding God as 'the principle of being and truth'.<sup>15</sup>

As regards particular prophets, institutions and trends across time in prophecy, there is a considerable literature. Kai Trampedach's important work on the authority and social status of seers in Homer – including Calchas and Teiresias – shows that they are in many other ways indistinguishable from their elite comrades, observing no particular ascetic or seclusionary practices.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, as Sabina Mazzoldi has established, the prophet Cassandra is portrayed as a much more ambiguous figure, both in epic and later in tragedy.<sup>17</sup> Mazzoldi argues that differing portrayals of Cassandra in epic and tragedy may be representative of an increasing status afforded to inspired over inductive divination over the course of the 6th and 5th centuries BC.<sup>18</sup> Both of these arguments form a starting-point for my argument in this chapter, first, that the prophet's own virtue becomes increasingly important, and second, that there is an increasing emphasis placed on intuitive divination. While Mazzoldi's work traces an earlier incarnation of this shift, there has additionally been work done on the same trend in a later period. A.J. Festugière's model of religiosity in later antiquity, in which the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD

<sup>14</sup>P. Athanassiadi (1992b). "Philosophers and Oracles: Shifts of Authority in Late Paganism". In: *Byzantion* 62, pp. 45–62.

<sup>15</sup>R. Hirsch-Luipold (2014). "Religion and Myth". In: *A Companion to Plutarch*. Ed. by M. Beck. Wiley-Blackwell. Chap. 11, p. 164.

<sup>16</sup>K. Trampedach (2008). "Authority Disputed: The Seer in Homeric Epic". In: *Practitioners of the Divine: Greek Priests and Religious Officials from Homer to Heliodorus*. Ed. by B. Dignas and K. Trampedach. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>17</sup>S. Mazzoldi (2002). "Cassandra's Prophecy between Ecstasy and Rational Mediation". In: *Kernos* 15.

<sup>18</sup>S. Mazzoldi (2001). *Cassandra, la vergine e l'indovina: identità di un personaggio da Omero all'Ellenismo*. Filologia e critica 88. Pisa: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali.

saw a huge increase in personal rather than public religiosity, has not been fashionable for some time.<sup>19</sup> There are – of course – many problems with Festugière’s thesis. But the vast increase in work on figures such as Apollonius or Alexander of Abonuteichos in recent years has certainly validated the notion that there is something *different* about the holy men of the post-Hellenistic age.

Ewen Bowie’s work on Apollonius in the 1970s began this trend, establishing a serious body of work on the historical Apollonius;<sup>20</sup> following him, Marc Van Uytfanghe argues that Apollonius should be seen within the wider context of hagiographic writing, particularly looking to later similar portrayals in Christian antiquity.<sup>21</sup> There is also a trend of examining Apollonius in comparison with other seers such as Alexander of Abonuteichos through the lens of charlatanry. Thus comparative work on Apollonius by Ken Dowden compares him unfavourably to Teiresias.<sup>22</sup> However, I take a more standard line in this chapter, focussing on how Philostratus portrays Apollonius; Hauck’s chapter on Apollonius provides a thorough reading of Philostratus’ apologetic, noting the strategies Philostratus uses to portray Apollonius as virtuous and divine.<sup>23</sup> I follow Hauck on many points here, including his comparison of Philostratus’ Apollonius with Philo’s Moses. However, somewhat oddly, Hauck does not compare Origen’s portrayal of individual prophets with this trend – which I do in Chapter 7.

## II Prophecy in Literary Texts

In the beginning, the Titan Prometheus gave poor shivering humans prophetic abilities, along with counting, writing, and various other intellectual arts, in order to protect us from the vacillations of the gods. Prophecy, hoped the Titan, would give us some defence against the savage gods by showing us that, despite their apparent power, they too were subject to fate:

I marked out many ways by which they might read the future, and among

<sup>19</sup>A. Festugière (1954c). *Personal Religion Among the Greeks*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>20</sup>E. Bowie (1978). “Apollonius of Tyana: tradition and reality”. In: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 16.2, pp. 1652–99.

<sup>21</sup>M. van Uytfanghe (2009). “La Vie d’Apollonius de Tyane et le discours hagiographique”. In: *Theios Sophistes: Essays on Flavius Philostratus’ Vita Apollonii*. Ed. by K. Demoen and D. Praet. Mnemosyne Supplements. Leiden: Brill, pp. 335–74.

<sup>22</sup>K. Dowden (2015). “Kalasiris, Apollonios of Tyana, and the Lies of Teiresias”. In: *Holy Men and Charlatans in the Ancient Novel*. Ancient Narrative Supplementum 19. Groningen: Barkhuis, pp. 1–16.

<sup>23</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit.

dreams I first discerned which are destined to come true; and voices baffling interpretation I explained to them, and signs from chance meetings.<sup>24</sup>

Here, Aeschylus' Prometheus specifically designates prophecy as a science, a τέχνη with which human beings can leverage their intellect against the gods. Yet in much of Greek literature, the salvific or ameliorating qualities of prophecy as a way of reading the future remain ambiguous at best. The Oedipus myth, perhaps the most famous case of prophecy-as-curse, contains three prophecies made by the Delphic oracle in its incarnation in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*: first, to Laius, that his son will kill him; second, to Oedipus, that he will kill his father and have children with his own mother; and third, to Oedipus, that the murderer of Thebes' former king must be punished to expiate the city and save it from an outbreak of plague. An additional prophecy is made by the blind prophet and soothsayer Teiresias, who reveals to Oedipus that he, Oedipus, is the killer, and prophesies that Oedipus will become blind. While Oedipus purportedly respects and trusts Teiresias, it is clear that he is a deeply ambiguous and unwelcome figure.<sup>25</sup> His blindness – a source of much dramatic irony in the play, given that he is the only character who can 'see' what is going on – only serves to make him more peripheral.

The roles of prophets and seers in the Homeric epics are also unusually complicated. Take, for example Calchas, the founder of the oracle at Daunia mentioned above, who features in the opening book of the *Iliad*. First, prior to the events of the *Iliad*, he is the prophet who orders the sacrifice of Iphigenia, setting several mythological trains in motion. Second, in the opening scenes of the *Iliad*, he orders that Achilles' concubine Chryses must be returned to her father, an order which sets off the events of the whole epic.

However, the *Iliad* also presents a radically different model of prophecy in the figure of Cassandra, the Trojan priestess. Mythological accounts claim that she was originally granted her prophetic ability by Apollo: she refused to sleep with him and so he cursed her to be eternally disbelieved. While her divinatory techniques have some overlap with those of Calchas – divination by birds, by livers, by stars, and by random flashes of inspiration – she enjoys none of his status or acclaim. When Troy falls, she is raped by Ajax, and taken captive by Agamemnon, whose death at the hands of Clytemnestra she prophesies, along with her own. Cassandra is said to have instructed her twin brother

<sup>24</sup>Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 484ff. Among the types of divination mentioned are oneiromancy, ornithomancy, pyromancy, and haruspicy.

<sup>25</sup>S. Lattimore (1975). "Oedipus and Teiresias". In: *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 8, pp. 105–111.

Helenus in prophecy – who was, unlike her, always believed.<sup>26</sup>

From these few examples from Greek literature we can already see that there is a variety of competing claims of various characters and figures to prophetic authority, and competing models of what a true prophet or seer should look or act like. Homer's examples of Calchas and Cassandra make it very clear to us that the fate of prophets is not even or uniform: for various reasons, including divine retribution, social standing, gender, and plain bad timing, some prophets are overlooked while some achieve acclaim and trust from those around them. That these factors are often at odds with (or unrelated to) their actual abilities is a question that exercised Greek thinkers from Homer onwards. Some prophets (such as Teiresias) have a high degree of social standing and act as moral exemplars to their communities; other prophets (such as Cassandra) are reviled by their communities and are used as examples of the moral failure of such communities.

### III Philosophy of Prophecy

While reflections of common ideas in literature tell us something about the Greek context in which Origen understood prophecy, it is essential to consider explicit considerations of the subject in the Greek philosophy that was directly part of Origen's intellectual training. In this section I discuss explicit considerations of prophecy, focussing on two key thinkers: Plato and Plutarch, both of whom were in wide circulation in Origen's period.

#### i Plato

While Plato's dialogues deal with a vast array of topics, prophecy crops up in only a relatively small number. The works that are most relevant to the question of prophecy are *Phaedrus*, some sections of the *Republic*, and *Timaeus*. I argue in this section that while Plato begins to distinguish between inductive prophecy and inspired prophecy, putting inspired prophecy above inductive, his primary focus is on the mechanism of inspiration. He does not discuss the content of prophecies in any real detail, nor is he particularly interested in the personal characteristics or morality of the prophet. He is certainly not at all concerned with questions of fate and free will.

In *Phaedrus*, Socrates takes it as obvious that oracles can tell the future and that they frequently do so:

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<sup>26</sup>cf. ps-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.12.5; Hyginus, *Fables* 93; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1212.

And if we should speak of the Sibyl and others, who have by prophecy foretold many things to many people and directed their future, it is clear we shall be speaking for a long time.<sup>27</sup>

His focus in this discussion of prophecy, then, is not so much what its object is – in this case taken simply as ‘the future’ (τὸ μέλλον); instead he is interested in the source and process of inspiration. His first instinct is to make an etymological argument. He argues that ‘prophecy’ (μᾶντική) and ‘madness’ (μᾶνική) are really the same word; the τ that separates them is the result of modern speakers ‘tastelessly inserting [it]’.<sup>28</sup>

Socrates gives a similar etymological argument concerning divination by the means of ‘birds and other signs’ (διὰ τε ὀρνίθων ... καὶ τῶν ἄλλων σημείων)<sup>29</sup> which is that it comes from ‘thought’ (οἴησις) and is thus called the *oionistic* art. He concludes, therefore, that since divine madness is superior to human rationality, the ancients considered prophecy (which is inspired) superior to divination (which is inductive) – and so should we.<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the dialogue there is a comparison drawn between poetic and prophetic mania. For example, near the start of the dialogue, Socrates switches from talking about prophecy to making jokes about poetic inspiration.<sup>31</sup> This comparison, which still works perfectly in modern English,<sup>32</sup> indicates that the mechanism of inspiration is Plato’s central focus in *Phaedrus*.

Though he distinguishes fairly clearly between inductive divination and inspired prophecy in *Phaedrus*, the only detail that Plato gives about the precise mechanism of prophetic inspiration is in an aside made by Socrates half-way through the dialogue, while discussing a prophetic misgiving that he is feeling:

How prophetic is the soul! For something troubled me for a long time while I was giving that speech.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>*Phaedrus* 244b.

<sup>28</sup>*Phaedrus* 244c.

<sup>29</sup>*Phaedrus* 244c.

<sup>30</sup>*Phaedrus* 244d.

<sup>31</sup>Socrates pokes fun at Phaedrus for reading Lysias’ speech on the subject of lovers as if he is in a ‘divine frenzy’ (θείας κεφαλῆς. *Phaedrus*, 234d). Later on, the joke is repeated, less obviously as a joke, when Socrates makes his own speech and notes that his speech has adapted to the pattern of dithyrambics (*Phaedrus* 238d).

<sup>32</sup>‘Inspiration’, is, after all, used primarily to refer to the creative process but still carries some connotations of hard-to-pin-down supernatural or external influence.

<sup>33</sup>*Phaedrus* 242c.

The role of the soul in prophesying is the focus of Plato's discussion in *Timaeus*. In this dialogue, Plato's interest in divination is in the context of the composition and functions of various parts of the body, and as such he treats prophecy as a natural function of the body. Although Hauck uses the *Timaeus* to argue that Plato believed the body to be a limiting factor in divinatory experience,<sup>34</sup> if we look closely at the text, we will see that this is not strictly the case.

Although the first mention of prophecy in the *Timaeus* is a brief reference to the inner fire during dreaming,<sup>35</sup> the first substantial point is made during a discussion about the liver:

In the night [the liver] passes its time sensibly, being occupied in its slumbers with divination, seeing that in reason and intelligence it has no share.<sup>36</sup>

Timaeus argues that the liver was designed specifically to counter 'the vile part of us' (τὸ φαῦλον ἡμῶν) by laying some hold on truth.<sup>37</sup> He also believes that divination is only possible through sleep:

This is a sufficient token that god gave man's foolishness the gift of divination: no man achieves true and inspired divination when in his rational mind, but only when the power of his intelligence is fettered in sleep or when it is disturbed by disease or by reason of some divine inspiration.<sup>38</sup>

However, Timaeus reserves a role for intelligence in prophecy by arguing that the interpretation of prophetic dreams must be done with the aid of waking reason.<sup>39</sup> His concept of divination at this stage seems very broad: dreams can 'signify things' (σημαίνει) and can apply to the 'past, present or future' (μέλλοντος ἢ παρελθόντος ἢ παρόντος).<sup>40</sup> Timaeus argues that either the prophet cannot interpret his own prophecies until his frenzy has ceased, or the interpretation should be done by another person:

It is not the task of the person who has been (and still remains) in a state of frenzy to judge the apparitions and voices that he has seen or uttered.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit., 19ff.

<sup>35</sup>*Timaeus* 46a.

<sup>36</sup>*Timaeus* 71d.

<sup>37</sup>*Timaeus* 71e.

<sup>38</sup>*Timaeus* 71e.

<sup>39</sup>*Timaeus* 72a.

<sup>40</sup>*Timaeus* 72a. This is a near-quotation of Homer, in reference to Calchas, who saw 'things that were, that were to be, and that had been' (ὄς ἤδη τά τ' ἔόντα τά τ' ἐσσόμενα πρό τ' ἔόντα, *Iliad* 1.70).

<sup>41</sup>*Timaeus* 72a.

The grounds for this decision are that the person receiving the visions is ‘out of his senses’ ((οὐ) σώφρονι μόνῳ).<sup>42</sup> Timaeus instead calls on those who interpret visions – ‘the race of prophets’ (τὸ τῶν προφητῶν γένος)<sup>43</sup> – as the natural interpreters of dream visions. On this basis, he argues, they should not be referred to as ‘diviners’ (μάντις) but as ‘prophets of things divined’ (προφηταὶ δὲ μαντευομένων).<sup>44</sup> Timaeus here seems to be playing with the etymology of προφητής from πρό and φημί.<sup>45</sup>

Here Plato still has the distinction between inspired and inductive divination, but in this passage prophecy is not being identified as inspired, but as technical interpretation (that is, as inductive). Even more strikingly, Timaeus seems to be making the case that the two practices are carried out by different people. Thus we see that while Plato does distinguish between inspired and inductive definition, he does not have a fixed position on what prophecy is, and which type of divination it falls under. We must be careful, therefore, about assuming that Greek thinkers are referring specifically to inspired divination when they use the term ‘prophecy’ (προφητεία), especially given the extensive Greek technical vocabulary of divination.

For Timaeus, the importance of bodily organs – and the relative unimportance of the person – in divination mean that it is possible for a dead person’s liver still to receive prophetic inspiration, although he cautions that this is not very effective:

When deprived of life it becomes blind and the divinations it presents are too much obscured to have any clear significance.<sup>46</sup>

Strictly speaking, then, we can see that the body is not the limiting factor as Hauck argues, as the body by itself can actually carry out divination, even if it is inaccurate. Yet it is striking that for Timaeus, the importance of inspiration, and its mechanism through the organs of the human body, are so central that the role of the prophet as a person is peripheral. From this it is easy to see why he would distinguish two roles: that of the person receiving the inspiration (who is little more than a vehicle) and the person interpreting. Nevertheless, this is, as we shall see, quite different from later theories of prophecy.

Overall, Plato’s works are in general concordance on the topic of prophecy, which he largely takes to be ecstatic inspiration and future-telling. However, in *Timaeus*,

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<sup>42</sup> *Timaeus* 72a.

<sup>43</sup> *Timaeus* 72a.

<sup>44</sup> *Timaeus* 72b.

<sup>45</sup> See the Glossary, pp. 41–45.

<sup>46</sup> *Timaeus* 72b-c.

prophecy designates not this kind of future-telling but its interpretation. While it can appear that Plato is using a technical vocabulary – such as when he draws distinctions between inspired and inductive divination in *Phaedrus* – his terminology is actually very inconsistent.

## ii Plutarch

Plutarch (45 – 120 AD) is an important witness to the later phases of Greek prophetic culture. He served as a priest at Delphi for the last thirty years of his life, and thus was intimately familiar with the functioning of the site. This fact, combined with his interest and background in Platonic philosophy, makes him uniquely placed to consider both functional and philosophical features of Greek prophecy.<sup>47</sup>

In this section I argue that for Plutarch, ecstasy is far less important than it is for Plato. Instead, Plutarch's interest is more in the theological and soteriological significance of prophecy. Additionally, Plutarch's notion of what prophecy encompasses is wider, and pays more attention to the person of the prophet and the importance of morality.

Plutarch wrote several treatises on the oracles and on prophecy more generally. These include *On the E in Delphi* (117) and *On Why the Oracles are Silent* (88). Plutarch's overall view of prophecy is a moderate and nuanced one. While he rejects Plato's rather uncritical notion of ecstatic inspiration, he still firmly believes in the traditional set-up of divinely-inspired oracles; indeed, as priest at Delphi he could hardly fail to.<sup>48</sup> However, like Plato, he has no fixed terminology when it comes to demarcating prophets and diviners: for example, he refers to Apollo as a prophet occasionally,<sup>49</sup> and the Pythia as a prophet at other times.

While Festugière does not mention Plutarch, he might take Plutarch's *Why the Oracles are Silent* as indicating not – as it is mostly read – a change in political situation, but a turning inwards of religious sentiment. In this text, Plutarch puts forward a number of different suggestions for the decrease in oracle activity that he has witnessed even in his own time as a priest at Delphi. He claims that at its height, Delphi had three Pythias

<sup>47</sup>For a discussion of Plutarch's own references to his role as priest at Delphi, see A. Casanova (2012). "Plutarch as Apollo's Priest at Delphi". In: *Plutarch in the Religious and Philosophical Discourse of Late Antiquity*. Ed. by L. R. Lanzillotta and I. M. Gallarte. Brill, pp. 151–157.

<sup>48</sup>For a discussion of the physical centering of Delphi in Plutarch's works, see Hirsch-Luipold (2014), loc. cit. See also pp.107–109.

<sup>49</sup>*On the E* 2.

who worked full time – I will return to exactly what this means in the next section of the chapter<sup>50</sup> – but by his own time it only needed one. One of Plutarch's theories for what had caused this decline is a political and demographic argument: the combination of population decline across the Greek world, along with the lack of Greek political autonomy under the Roman state, removed much of the need for the oracles. While in the Classical period the oracles were hubs of political activity, by Plutarch's period this had become untenable in a centrally-controlled Roman bureaucracy with its own state diviners and its own separate oracle traditions.

But if we look to Plutarch's discussion of the character and role of prophecy we will see that it is not just the practical functioning of the oracle that had changed between Plato's day and his own. Plutarch was much less concerned with inspiration as a mysterious process; his concerns were instead more metaphysically abstract. Indeed, Plutarch makes a clear statement against fully ecstatic possession of a kind in which the prophet's mind is totally evacuated – as happened with the Phrygians in the previous chapter:

Certainly it is foolish and childish in the extreme to imagine that the god himself, after the manner of ventriloquists... enters into the bodies of his prophets and prompts their utterances, employing their mouths and voices as instruments. For if he allows himself to become entangled in men's needs, he is prodigal with his majesty and he does not observe the dignity and greatness of his pre-eminence.<sup>51</sup>

We see here that Plutarch's objection to ecstasy is that he considers it undignified, not just for the prophet, but also for the god. Plutarch's various definitions of prophecy given in *On the E* – an unusual text which discusses the physical form of dedications at the Delphic temple alongside the famous maxim ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ – have a similar character.

One definition of prophecy, given by Plutarch's friend Theon, is the following:

The prophetic art deals with that future which is to come out of things present or things past. Things which come into being follow things which have been, things which are to be follow things which now are coming into being, all bound in one continuous chain of evolution. Therefore he who

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<sup>50</sup>cf. pp. 107–109.

<sup>51</sup>*On Why the Oracles are Silent* 414E.

knows how to link causes together into one, and combine them into a natural process, can also declare beforehand things.<sup>52</sup>

Theon's argument is that the EI stands for the 'if' of a protasis in a syllogism – and by it, Apollo is showing us that knowledge of the future, gained through oracles, is really a form of dialectic reasoning.

Other arguments for the EI mostly revolve around the fact that epsilon stands, in the Greek alphanumeric system, for the number five – and thus many of the speakers attempt to give an account for why five might be the most important number (Aristotelian elements,<sup>53</sup> Platonic universes,<sup>54</sup> human senses,<sup>55</sup> harmonic consonances,<sup>56</sup> sages of Greek mythology,<sup>57</sup> and so on). The only other arguments that takes EI as a word are those of Nicander, who again takes it to mean 'if', here as a reminder to consultants to ask open questions, and Ammonius, who gives the following:

My own view is that the letter signifies neither number, nor order, nor conjunction, nor any other omitted part of speech; it is a complete and self-operating mode of addressing the God; the word once spoken brings the speaker into apprehension of his power. The God, as it were, addresses each of us, as he enters, with his “KNOW THYSELF”, which is at least as good as “Hail”. We answer the God back with “EI” (Thou Art), rendering to him the designation which is true and has no lie in it, and alone belongs to him, and to no other, that of BEING.

Overall, we see that while Plutarch like Plato before him did not have a technical or specialised vocabulary of prophecy, he differs from his predecessor in his approach. While Plato considered prophecy a type of frenzy analogous to poetic inspiration – and similarly mysterious – Plutarch rejects prophetic ecstasy, instead proposing a number of complex abstract definitions of prophecy which focus on its metaphysical and soteriological facets.

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<sup>52</sup>*On the E* 6.

<sup>53</sup>*On the E* 6.

<sup>54</sup>*On the E* 11.

<sup>55</sup>*On the E* 11.

<sup>56</sup>*On the E* 12.

<sup>57</sup>*On the E* 7.

## IV Prophecy in Practice

Anyone beginning to examine Greek prophetic practices soon encounters a bewildering range of different actors in the mantic marketplace. Priests, astrologers, hepatomancers, sibyls, mantic families, dream-interpreters, shamans, chresmologues, magicians, miracle-workers, necromancers and lot-casters are all to be found in the pages of Greek literature, philosophy and history.

Prophecy was used for many different purposes.<sup>58</sup> Examples include: in regional politics, as part of the powerful dynasties of mantic families;<sup>59</sup> in military contexts;<sup>60</sup> in *polis* politics, with state-sponsored diviners and haruspices;<sup>61</sup> as the subject of respectable academic study, in the case of astrology;<sup>62</sup> by magicians and necromancers in religious rituals;<sup>63</sup> and as a livelihood by practitioners, either those with fixed stalls in marketplaces or travelling chresmologues (oracle-sellers) who moved around the cities and towns of the Mediterranean.<sup>64</sup> Engaging with this unruly menagerie is not necessary for my argument, but it is important to remember that Greek prophecy in practice was extremely diverse. However, one set of institutions symbolises Greek prophecy more than any other: the oracles.

### i The Oracle at Delphi

From the archaic period until well into the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century AD there was a functioning network of oracle sites across the Mediterranean. The major ‘infallible’ oracles in Greek antiquity were Delphi, Dodona, and Olympia in Greece, and Siwah in the Libyan desert. Delphi stands out as the oracle *par excellence* in ancient descriptions and depictions on account of its size and political importance; in the late archaic period, it became a cultural touchstone in a fragmented Greek world, playing as much of a political role as it did a religious one. Indeed, it was known as the *omphalos* (navel) of the inhabited world. For

<sup>58</sup>An excellent overview is provided by Aune. cf. Aune (1983), op. cit.

<sup>59</sup>We know of several mantic clans in the Greek world, including the Iamidae of Elis. For more on this fascinating family, see M. A. Flower (2008a). “The Iamidae: A Mantic Family and Its Public Image”. In: *Practitioners of the Divine: Greek Priests and Religious Officials from Homer to Heliodorus*. Ed. by B. Dignas and K. Trampedach. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 187–206.

<sup>60</sup>e.g. Tisamenus of Elis at the battle of Plataea in 479 BC, who was one of the Iamidae.

<sup>61</sup>cf. M. Foster (2018). *The Seer and the City: Religion, Politics, and Colonial Ideology in Ancient Greece*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>62</sup>cf. T. Barton (1994). *Ancient Astrology*. London: Routledge.

<sup>63</sup>cf. D. Ogden (2001). *Greek and Roman Necromancy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>64</sup>Freelance prophets and oracle-sellers included some recognised dynasties, such as the Etiobutidae. cf. Aune (1983), op. cit.

ancient geographers and in the popular consciousness, Delphi was the centre of human life, a fact supposedly reflected in its physical uniqueness. Descriptions from Pausanias and Strabo focus in detail on the ‘vapours’ that arise in the centre of the site, marking it out as a unique and supernatural location.<sup>65</sup>

The Pythia, the priestess and seer, sat on a bronze cauldron above the fissure in the *adyton* (entrance chamber) of the temple, above the rising vapours.<sup>66</sup> From here, visitors would deliver questions to her, either spoken or written on tablets. The Pythia, inspired by Apollo, would speak a response, which then might require additional clarification from the male priests, or *prophetai*. The site was designed specifically to induce an air of mystery; the chamber of the Pythia herself would be dark and smoky, and the visitor would not be able to see her clearly.<sup>67</sup>

The oracles only operated on the seventh day after the new moon, and not in the winter months, meaning the oracle site was only actually open to consultants for nine days each year. By the classical period, the queues of consultants were so great on these days that several Pythias worked on shifts – sometimes as many as three at once, as noted above. The Pythias themselves were unusual figures: they were usually women of modest status, chosen by a process that we know little about. Scholars have often assumed that since the Pythias were generally uneducated, perhaps even illiterate, that their delivered responses to important military and political enquiries were in fact prepared beforehand by the educated male *prophetai*.<sup>68</sup> Joan Connelly rejects this as a cynical and prejudicial assumption, arguing that the Pythias actually had a high degree of auton-

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<sup>65</sup>‘They say that the seat of the oracle is a cave hollowed out deep in the earth, with a rather narrow mouth, from which arises breath that inspires a divine frenzy; and that over the mouth is placed a high tripod, mounting which the Pythian priestess receives the breath and then utters oracles in both verse and prose, though the latter too are put into verse by poets who are in the service of the temple.’ Strabo, *Geography* 9.3.5. See also Pausanias 10.5.6. While modern scholarship has largely discredited the descriptions of the vapours in these accounts, archaeo-geological surveys undertaken in the 1990s have proved that two faults do in fact meet beneath the temple, through which ethylene may have escaped, inducing altered states of consciousness in those who breathed it for a long time: ‘This fracture breaks through a bituminous limestone formation from which hydrocarbon gases, including ethylene, could have escaped in antiquity.’ J. Connelly (2007). *Portrait of a Priestess*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 72. See also J. de Boer and J. Hale (2000). ‘The Geological Origins of the Oracle at Delphi, Greece’. In: *The Archaeology of Geographical Catastrophes*. Ed. by W. M. et. al. 171. Geological Society, pp. 399–412.

<sup>66</sup>There is no evidence that the vapours were particularly meant to enter her vagina, as Origen alleges in *Against Celsus* 7.3; I will return to this point – cf. p. 206.

<sup>67</sup>For the psychological aspect of oracle sites, particularly the terrifying oracle of Trophonius, see D. Kouretas (1967). ‘The Oracle of Trophonius: A Kind of Shock Treatment Associated with Sensory Deprivation in Ancient Greece’. In: *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 113 (505), pp. 1441–1446.

<sup>68</sup>e.g. Donald Lateiner, who rejects all sorts of Greek mantic figures as comen in sneering terms, cf. Lateiner (1993), op. cit., p. 194.

omy.<sup>69</sup> Even if the responses were not wholly prepared by the Pythias, it seems clear that their relationship with the *prophetai* was not simply that of puppets and puppet-masters.

There are a number of reported cases of forced or non-inspired speech of the Pythias, some of which are illustrative of the general lack of cynicism among Greek thinkers about oracles. The two most interesting are the cases of Philomelus the Phocian and Alexander the Great. In the former case, an account from Diodorus Siculus<sup>70</sup> describes how Philomelus, seeking urgently an answer to his question, forced the Pythia to speak against her will. She entered the trance, prophesied a terrible fate for Philomelus, and promptly died. In the latter case the Pythia did not actually prophesy, but instead made a remark in her own voice.<sup>71</sup> Alexander the Great took the remark to be prophetic and acted upon it, with disastrous consequences.

These examples get at an important distinction discussed earlier in this chapter: the inspired versus inductive distinction. The case of Alexander the Great suggests that the power of special insight was not grounded in the Pythia herself, and that remarks made off-duty, as it were, had no particular claim to truth – that is, she had to be suitably inspired to prophesy. The case of Philomelus suggests, more sinisterly, that not only could the Pythia not control her entry into the trance state, but that other human beings might have been able to influence it – whether directly, or by goading Apollo. This is an example which once again proves problematic for the inspired versus inductive distinction. If somebody can force the Pythia into a trance, that implies a certain degree of inductiveness to the process. Yet as with Aune's example of prophets using hallucinogens, mentioned in the Introduction,<sup>72</sup> from the Pythia's point of view it is certainly inspired. For a prophet who complicates these categories even further, let us turn to Apollonius of Tyana.

## ii Apollonius

Apollonius of Tyana, born in around 15 AD, was the subject of a *Life* written by the Athenian sophist Philostratus, a rough contemporary of Origen's.<sup>73</sup> As such, the text forms a fascinating parallel for Origen's developing notions of what made somebody a

<sup>69</sup>Connelly (2007), loc. cit. For further criticism of this scholarly trope, see also M. A. Flower (2008b). *The Seer in Ancient Greece*. Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, pp. 4–6.

<sup>70</sup>*Bibliotheca* 16.27.1

<sup>71</sup>Plutarch *Life of Alexander* 14.6-7.

<sup>72</sup>cf. pp. 49–49.

<sup>73</sup>Philostratus was born possibly in 172 in Athens, and died in around 250 in Tyre.

prophet. While we can't know for sure if Origen had read Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius*,<sup>74</sup> Philostratus is very much a pagan analogue of Origen, part of the same cultural and intellectual context.

The *Life of Apollonius* presents Apollonius as a prophet, philosopher and sage, and claims to put his wisdom and his predictions of the future into the full context of his life and actions. In this section, I continue the argument I began in discussing Plutarch, that there was, in the late Hellenistic period and beyond, a shift in the purview of prophets and the range of knowledge a prophet was expected to have. In classical literary portrayals and in the actual practice of oracles most prophets were figures who for a diverse range of reasons experienced flashes of insight into the future or the true nature of reality. While some sages had a claim to permanent and superior understanding of the world, such as Calchas, these were the exception rather than the rule, and were examples within a more diverse range of prophets. However, in the figure of Apollonius as portrayed by Philostratus, the role of prophet had become so expanded as to be hardly distinguishable from the sage, the philosopher, or the religious ascetic. For this reason I argue that Apollonius exemplifies this shift.

In the previous chapter I discussed the similar portrayal of Moses by Philo, and followed Holladay in arguing that Philo was deliberately attempting to portray Moses as a Cynic or Stoic *σόφος*, or sage. What does this mean? This term had in the ancient world both a general meaning (simply any wise person) and a technical one (somebody who had achieved philosophical and, crucially, *ethical* perfection). Julia Annas defines the sage as the 'ideally virtuous person,'<sup>75</sup> noting that the Stoic sage in particular is somebody who is both embedded in the everyday world but also rises above it by their steadfastness and indifference to emotion. In my comparisons of the prophets to sages in this thesis I do not mean this technical Stoic sense, in which a sage is externally indistinguishable from the people around him.<sup>76</sup> What I do mean is the sense common to all Greek philosophical schools, of the sage as the preeminently wise person who has a complete *philosophical*

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<sup>74</sup>But it does seem plausible: Philostratus's patron was Julia Domna, mother of Caracalla and maternal aunt of Julia Mamaea, the one-time patron of Origen. It is known that Julia Domna and her sister Julia Maesa, the mother of Julia Mamaea, were extremely close. For more on Origen's meetings with Julia Mamaea, see J. Secord (2017). "Julius Africanus, Origen, and the Politics of Intellectual Life under the Severans". In: *Classical World* 110.2, pp. 211–235.

<sup>75</sup>J. Annas (2008). "The Sage in Ancient Philosophy". In: *Anthropine Sophia: Studi di filologia e storiografia filosofica in memoria di Gabriele Giannatoni*. Ed. by F. Alesse. Naples: Bibliopolis, p. 12.

<sup>76</sup>cf. *ibid.*, p. 18. For example, clearly neither Philo nor Origen would consider the sage in the same political terms as e.g. Diogenes Laertius (cf. *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* 7-8).

understanding of the world around them.<sup>77</sup>

Philostratus' Apollonius makes an explicit claim that he is an inspired and not an inductive prophet. He makes reference to those he considers his forerunners, Pythagoras, Democritus, and Socrates, declaring that they 'never stooped to τέχνη'.<sup>78</sup> Like these inspired forerunners, Philostratus claims the clarity of Apollonius' visions on a number of occasions.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, Apollonius expresses contempt for obscure or cryptic oracles, declaring that they are a sign of falsity.<sup>80</sup> However, despite his insistence that he is inspired, Apollonius is not portrayed as ecstatic – at least not in the sense of the Phrygians. Many of the deeds of Apollonius that Philostratus considers worthy of praise – including his prophetic acts of perception – are neither ecstatic nor future-telling. These include, as Hauck notes, the ability to perceive malevolent spirits:

In his travels Apollonius encounters several apparitions and, unlike ordinary folk, is able to discern the phantom and chase it off. Near the Indus, Philostratus tells us, the φάσμα of a goblin appeared to Apollonius and his party, shifting and changing forms. Apollonius, undaunted, insulted it and it fled.<sup>81</sup>

Philostratus is fully aware that Apollonius is considered by many to be a magician (γοητής) and is defensive against criticism of him, noting early on in the work that there are those who do not believe that Apollonius had 'foreknown things by means of wisdom' (τὸ κατὰ σοφίαν προγιγνώσκειν).<sup>82</sup> From the very start of the *Life of Apollonius*, then, Philostratus makes a series of sustained claims: 1) that Apollonius' wisdom is of a 'special character', 2) that it is by means of this special wisdom that Apollonius becomes possessed and inspired (in a prophetic sense), and 3) that Apollonius' words and acts, and their chronology, bear some important relationship to his wisdom – that is to say, that Apollonius' wisdom is related to his character and conduct more generally. Philostratus thus makes a triple claim for Apollonius, not only that he was in fact an inspired prophet, but also that he was a sage, and that his status as a sage was related to his personal moral virtue. These are the same claims that Philo makes for Moses in the

<sup>77</sup>For a discussion of the comparative use of this term in this sense for both Greek and Jewish figures, see E. Uusimäki (Nov. 2018). "The Rise of the Sage in Greek and Jewish Antiquity". In: *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 49.1, pp. 1–29.

<sup>78</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 1.2.

<sup>79</sup>e.g. *Life of Apollonius* 1.9, 3.42.

<sup>80</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>81</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 2.4. Other similar instances include 6.27 and 4.10.

<sup>82</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 1.2.

*Life of Moses.*

What are these personal virtues of Apollonius? Philostratus details several of Apollonius' virtues throughout the biography, using both Apollonius's own words and the accounts of others. The first virtue that plays a recurring role is Apollonius's highly restricted diet. Philostratus explains in the opening book of the *Life* that Apollonius 'refrained from flesh' and 'ate dried fruits and herbs'.<sup>83</sup> Apollonius' decision not to eat meat was not unparalleled in antiquity: for example, we have a detailed treatise on the virtues of vegetarianism by Plutarch (*On the Eating of Flesh*).<sup>84</sup> However, Apollonius' dietary restriction seems to be more extreme, and also included forgoing any kind of animal products – in modern terms, he is a vegan:

He made it his style to go barefoot, and he wore linen, and refrained from wearing any animal products, refusing them.<sup>85</sup>

Philostratus gives various reasons why Apollonius refrains from animal products. In some passages, Apollonius' objection seems to be a moral one concerned with the killing of animals. Thus his refusal to participate in a hunt is on the grounds that he believes wild animals should not be killed for fun, nor should they be enslaved, a line of reasoning that echoes Plutarch.<sup>86</sup> However, Philostratus' Apollonius gives an additional reason that his diet promotes purity of the body and soul. So for example, Apollonius describes meat negatively in terms of purity, saying that it is 'impure, and makes the mind sluggish' (παχυνούσας), whereas he claims that fruit and vegetables do not, since 'whatever the earth itself gives' is 'pure' (καθαρὰ).<sup>87</sup> Similarly, his explanation of how his diet is related to his prophetic abilities seems to indicate that the decision is primarily motivated by concerns over purity:

This [my diet], majesty, keeps my senses in a kind of mysterious atmosphere, and prevents any kind of cloudiness from affecting them. It lets me discern everything that is and will be, like a reflection in a mirror.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 1.8.

<sup>84</sup>For a full discussion of the ethical position of Plutarch's rather remarkable text, see S. T. Newmyer (1995). "Plutarch on the Moral Grounds for Vegetarianism". In: *The Classical Outlook* 72.2, pp. 41–43.

<sup>85</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 1.8.

<sup>86</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 1.38.

<sup>87</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 1.8

<sup>88</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 8.7.

In any case, Apollonius certainly regards purity as an essential characteristic for the attainment of prophetic ability. His friend Iarchus, speaking in praise of Apollonius, gives the following advice:

Consequently I consider that one who would foresee events must be healthy in himself, and must not have his soul stained with any sort of defilement nor his character scarred with the wounds of any sins; so he will pronounce his predictions with purity, because he will understand himself and the sacred tripod in his breast.<sup>89</sup>

Other methods of attaining the kind of purity necessary for prophetic activity include abstinence from alcohol, and sleeping in garments that are not made from animal products.<sup>90</sup> This totalising focus on the role of the prophet which encompasses the moral exemplar, the sage, and the philosopher all in one, builds towards the conclusion that ‘as a prophet, Apollonius is able to see clearly into all levels of reality.’<sup>91</sup>

## V Conclusions

In the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Plutarch, picking up on a change in religious sensibilities, mentioned in his *On the Pythian Responses* that those around him were becoming increasingly hostile to crypticness and obscurity in prophets.<sup>92</sup> Indeed the satirist Lucian, around 50 years later, would base his ridicule of the prophet Alexander of Abonuteichos on this theme:

[Alexander’s oracles are] sometimes obscure and ambiguous, sometimes downright unintelligible, for this seemed to him in the oracular manner.<sup>93</sup>

As we saw in Chapter 2, early Christian writers used many of the same themes in their criticism of the Phrygian movement.

I have argued in this chapter that in Archaic and Classical Greek literature and philosophy, prophets and their prophecies came in a variety of forms, often with no clear lines drawn between inductive and inspired divination. In the major prophetic institutions

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<sup>89</sup>*Life of Apollonius* 3.42.

<sup>90</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>92</sup>*On the Pythian Responses* 407 A.

<sup>93</sup>Lucian, *Alexander* 22.

such as the oracles, prophecies were expected to be cryptic, ecstatic, and mysterious, strange messages from another metaphysical plane. Yet in the late- and post-Hellenistic periods we see a change in the nature of debates about prophecy, which begin to focus much more on the person of the prophet, characterised by Hauck as follows:

For the critics, there are skeptical arguments against prophecy in general, but also attacks on the ambiguity of the opponent's prophecy, charges of sorcery, and the issue of phantoms and apparitions. For the defenders of specific prophets, the clarity of their visions, the virtue of their lives and discipline, the power they exercise over intervening influences, and the pure and divine nature of their souls provide the weapons of defense.<sup>94</sup>

Thus, as we have begun to see both in the Greek and early Christian contexts, while an important focus of debate was the question of inspiration – in short, whether inspiration was ecstatic or calm – there is an increasing focus on the personal virtue of the prophet. While Apollonius and his followers claim his divinity and subsequent apotheosis in a way that Philo does not for Moses, both of them bring the role of the prophet from the realm of the patchy religious experience of human beings in a harsh and difficult world to the confidence of philosopher-sages who can and do know the true nature of the cosmos.

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<sup>94</sup>Hauck (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 39.

## Chapter 4

### Fate

And, I say, no man has escaped from his fate, neither good nor bad, once he has been born.<sup>1</sup>

In a famous scene in the *Iliad*, Sarpedon, the only son of Zeus on the battlefield at Troy, is losing in single combat with Patroclus. On Olympus, Zeus and his wife Hera discuss Sarpedon's fate – which is to be killed. Zeus expresses the wish to save his son, and Hera, shocked, cautions him against it in no uncertain terms:

You want to release a mortal man, long doomed by fate, from mournful death? Go on; but all the other gods will not applaud you for it.<sup>2</sup>

Hera's argument is that if Zeus were to save Sarpedon, it would set a precedent – such that the other gods would all want to follow suit in saving their favourite mortals. She does not specify precisely why this would be a problem, but her tone throughout implies that it is, on some cosmic scale, wrong for the gods to meddle with what has been fated. Interestingly, Hera's line of argument necessarily implies that Zeus is capable of altering fate should he want to.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the unalterable nature of fate in the Oedipus myth. In Sophocles' version, both Laius and Oedipus unsuccessfully attempt to thwart or evade the prophecies made about them. Laius abandons his infant son to die, but Oedipus's survival means that his unawareness of the identity of his true father leaves the prophecy open to accidental fulfilment. Similarly, Oedipus, on learning of the second prophecy, leaves his adoptive parents in order not to kill his father, but in doing so

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<sup>1</sup>Homer *Iliad* 6.488-9.

<sup>2</sup>Homer *Iliad* 16.441-3.

makes it possible to encounter his birth father. In both cases, the characters are certain that their evasive actions have been successful until it is too late.

This behaviour, in which characters seem to treat prophecies as the initial offers in a set of negotiations with the gods, is prevalent throughout the play. Indeed, argues Eidinow, the poignancy of the tragedy derives from the fact that the prophecies are in fact simply bald and chilling statements of the future that the characters are unable to cope with.<sup>3</sup> This psychological reading of prophecy foregrounds the notion that the libertarian struggle – the uneasiness with the already-settled future – is inherent in human beings, not in prophecies.

This chapter, which forms a pair with Chapter 3, focusses specifically on the portrayal of fate, fulfilment, foreknowledge, and free will in Greek and early Christian thought. While the previous chapter focussed on the institutional and moral aspects of prophecy, arguing that there was a development in the scope of the role of the prophet, this chapter will consider those technical questions that concern what it means metaphysically to make a true prophetic statement about the future. This was a question that would be of serious concern to Origen: he deals with fate and free will in several of his major texts, devoting much consideration to the problem of preserving human free will in a world in which God has infallible foreknowledge of the future. I return to Origen's discussion of these issues in Chapter 6; this chapter examines the philosophical background of the problem prior to Origen.

As we see above, early Greek literary portrayals of fate corroborate the view expressed in the previous chapter that Archaic and Classical Greek religious thought largely took fate as an opaque fact of the universe, a sphere over which human beings had little control or understanding. When we examine philosophical discussions of fate, we should, therefore, bear in mind that philosophers – especially philosophers of different periods – may not have been approaching the subject from the same standpoint. I will argue that to understand the background of Origen's thought on the subject of free will and foreknowledge, we must distinguish sharply between three types of problem: a) logical problems that concern the possibility of making true statements about the future, b) the problem of how human beings can have free will (and thus have moral responsibility) in a system of deterministic physics, c) the problem of how human beings can have free will if (the) god(s) can have true and certain foreknowledge of the future.

The majority of this chapter will focus on Greek philosophical approaches to these

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<sup>3</sup>E. Eidinow (2010). *Luck, Fate and Fortune: Antiquity and its Legacy*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 53ff.

three categories. I will attempt to show where and why these different conceptions of free will differ, and why these distinctions matter. I examine first the puzzles set and answered by Aristotle and Diodorus Cronus concerning the logical problem of future contingent statements. Then I examine the claim that it was Epicurus who invented the ‘free will problem’, following Pamela Huby in arguing that Epicurus did indeed formulate the problem of free will versus determinism, but that this must be distinguished from the problem of free will versus foreknowledge. I argue that Epicurus’ motivation to find a philosophical solution for reconciling physical determinism with human free will was fundamentally concerned with claiming the meaningful ethical agency of human beings. Additionally, I will argue, with reference to the work of Susanne Bobzien, that Stoic approaches – which differed in their conclusions to Epicurean approaches – were also largely motivated by the same ethical concerns.

I then make the case that it is only in the work of the Aristotelian commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias that we find an approach to free will that explicitly identifies the fact that the notion of divine foreknowledge itself contains the Aristotelian logical problem about future contingency which threatens human free will. Alexander’s particular understanding of the ‘free will problem’ – not as an ethical-metaphysical problem of determinism as it is in Epicureanism and Stoicism, but as a logical-metaphysical problem – is, I argue, the closest parallel to Origen’s framing of the problem. While they come to different solutions – Alexander denies the possibility of divine foreknowledge while Origen must uphold it – their understanding of what is at stake is strikingly similar.

Finally, as part of my case that Origen was aware of his pagan near-contemporary Alexander’s version of the problem (or had read it directly), I survey some other early Christian texts on free will. In this final section of the chapter I show how all major Christian writers prior to Origen (and prior to Alexander) frame the free will problem, not as Origen and Alexander do, as a logical-metaphysical problem, but in line with the more traditional Stoic ethical framing.

## I Literature

Modern metaphysicians working on free will and foreknowledge often state without much argumentation that Augustine invented the notion of free will as we now conceive of it.<sup>4</sup> Many of the modern philosophical works on free will include a historical précis

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<sup>4</sup>See for example, Hugh McCann’s opening statement in his otherwise excellent collection of essays on the topic: H. J. McCann, ed. (2017). *Free Will and Classical Theism: The Significance of Freedom in*

of sorts, which often uses the terminology of modern debates: ancient thinkers are sometimes claimed to be determinists, libertarians, or compatibilists, to ascribe to the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP), or to put forward Frankfurt-style objections.<sup>5</sup> In general, historians of ancient philosophy object to this use of terminology on the basis that it can obscure the difference between modern and ancient ways of thinking:

It becomes clear quickly that under the surface of superficial resemblance to modern discussions of the free will problem (which sometimes is wrongly increased by the use of certain theory-laden terms in translations of the sources) a very different ontological framework lurks...<sup>6</sup>

There is a considerable literature specifically on the subject of free will in ancient thought that attempts to understand ancient thinkers on the topic on their own terms. One particular problem that is part of this confusion of terminology is the use of the term ‘free will problem’ to refer to at least two quite different problems.<sup>7</sup> One of these problems is, broadly speaking, the metaphysical question of whether human beings can make choices free from physical causes in a universe with deterministic physics: this variant of the problem is most studied in its ancient form in Epicurean physics, and in its modern form in the philosophy of neuroscience.

The second ‘free will problem’ – which is really itself two problems combined – relates to a) the logical question of whether one can make true statements about the contingent future, and b) the metaphysical problem of how such statements can be made infallibly by (the) god(s), (through intermediaries) in a universe in which human beings are presumed to be able to make free choices which are not divinely caused. In its second incarnation, the problem is still studied in modern times by philosophers of language, and also by metaphysicians and theologians. When it was first formulated is more contested, as I shall explain in what follows.

A great deal of has been done on the first type of free will problem (that is, as it pertains to determinism). The problem, in this context, is formulated something like

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*Perfect Being Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. xi. This view is also sometimes put forward by those who work on the history of philosophy. Thus Albrecht Dihle: ‘It is generally accepted in the study of the history of philosophy that the notion of will, as it is used as a tool of analysis and description in many philosophical doctrines from the early Scholastics to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, was invented by St. Augustine.’ (A. Dihle (1982). *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, p. 123).

<sup>5</sup>I am exaggerating slightly for effect.

<sup>6</sup>S. Bobzien (1998a). *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>This has been recognised in the scholarship for some time. cf. e.g. P. Huby (1967). “The First Discovery of the Freewill Problem”. In: *Philosophy* 42.162, p. 353.

this: in a world in which things happen deterministically because of unending chains of cause and effect, how can human beings meaningfully have free choice – and, if they do not have free choice, then can people be morally responsible for their actions? Generally speaking, the first formation of this particular problem – and the first attempt to solve it – is attributed to Epicurus. Cyril Bailey was among the first to argue this position in the 1920s,<sup>8</sup> and was followed by Pamela Huby in the 1960s<sup>9</sup> and David Sedley and A.A. Long in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> Huby’s argument includes the explanatory claim that – while we might assume Aristotle to be the originator of such a problem, given his discussions elsewhere of fate and determinism – this particular formation of the problem was unknown to Aristotle:

Aristotle’s thought was dominated by a teleological view of causality, in which the paradigm of what guides change is the tendency of an organism to develop into a certain kind of thing. This made the idea of a causal chain in which the future is entirely determined by the past strange and irrelevant.<sup>11</sup>

Richard Sorabji has defended Aristotle from what he sees as unfair criticism, but ultimately, in my view, comes to the same fundamental conclusion as Huby; that is, that Aristotle’s notion of causation – in which coincidences remain uncaused – does not lead him to develop any notion of strict causal determinism.<sup>12</sup>

Most scholars, therefore, treat Aristotle not as a participant in the discussion about determinism, but as somebody approaching the question of fate from a purely logical perspective. The most important text for this position is Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*. There are two major interpretive camps in the scholarship on this work. The first, represented by Dorothea Frede,<sup>13</sup> W.D. Ross,<sup>14</sup> and Martha Kneale,<sup>15</sup> is that Aristotle concluded that future contingent propositions do not possess antecedent truth values.

<sup>8</sup>C. Bailey (1926). *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus: A Study*. New York, NY: Russell & Russell, Inc. Bailey’s argument was partly based on that of Carlo Giussani. cf. C. Giussani (1896). *Studi Lucreziani*. Torino: Loescher.

<sup>9</sup>Huby (1967), op. cit.

<sup>10</sup>A. A. Long and D. Sedley (1987). *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. See also D. Sedley (1988). “Epicurean Anti-Reductionism”. In: *Matter and Metaphysics: Fourth Symposium Hellenisticum*. Ed. by J. Barnes and M. Mignucci. Bibliopolis. Chap. 11, pp. 295–327.

<sup>11</sup>Huby (1967), op. cit.

<sup>12</sup>R. Sorabji (1980). *Necessity, Cause, and Blame: Perspectives on Aristotle’s Theory*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>13</sup>D. Frede (1970). *Aristoteles und die ‘Seeschlacht’: das Problem der Contingentia Futura in De Interpretatione* 9. Vol. 27. Hypomenata. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht.

<sup>14</sup>W. Ross (1923). *Aristotle*. London: Methuen.

<sup>15</sup>M. Kneale and W. Kneale (1967). *The Development of Logic*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The second position, held by G.E.M Anscombe,<sup>16</sup> Colin Strang,<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Rescher,<sup>18</sup> and Jaakko Hintikka,<sup>19</sup> is that Aristotle did not deny the truth value of such propositions but their necessity. That is to say, while a proposition *does* have a truth value, that truth value is not necessary, and so does not imply determinism must hold. An excellent summary of these – and other – positions and a thorough analysis of the text itself is to be found in the work of William Lane Craig.<sup>20</sup> In this chapter, I side with the first of these positions as I think it is the more sensible; however, my overall argument is compatible with both major positions.

There have been a few dissenting voices in this general picture. Tim O’Keefe argued in 2005 that Epicurus actually formulated his theory of the swerve as a response to the same logical problems that were of interest to Aristotle.<sup>21</sup> Part of his argument rests on the fact that Cotta in Cicero’s *On the Nature of the Gods* implies that this is the case.<sup>22</sup> Even if this is what motivated Epicurus – which I do not think is the case, for reasons I shall explain below – it is clear that no Epicurean notion of the problem of free will could have at its centre any question about the transmission of divine foreknowledge through prophets or oracles, given the fact that Epicurean theology posits the gods as remote and detached from humanity.

Where, then, do we turn for a version of the argument which sets the problem of free choice against the logical problem of divine foreknowledge? Michael Frede makes the case that the notion of a ‘free will’ is a technical innovation – a specific philosophical notion that rests on a number of non-trivial propositions about the world and our relation to it.<sup>23</sup> If we accept his arguments, *a fortiori* the free will and foreknowledge (FWFK) problem is a technical problem. Susanne Bobzien argued in a long article in 1998 that the first appearance of the FWFK problem was in Alexander of Aphrodisias’ *On Fate*, written some time between 198 and 209.<sup>24</sup> Her argument rests quite solidly on the back

<sup>16</sup>G. Anscombe (1956). “Aristotle and the Sea Battle”. In: *Mind* 65, pp. 1–15.

<sup>17</sup>C. Strang (1960). “Aristotle and the Sea Battle”. In: *Mind* 69.276, pp. 447–465.

<sup>18</sup>N. Rescher (1968). “Truth and Necessity in Temporal Perspective”. In: *The Philosophy of Time*. Ed. by R. Gale. London: Macmillan, pp. 183–220.

<sup>19</sup>J. Hintikka (1964). “The Once and Future Sea Fight: Aristotle’s Discussion of Future Contingents in *De interpretatione* 9”. In: *Philosophical Review* 73.4, pp. 461–492.

<sup>20</sup>W. L. Craig (1988). *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 2–5.

<sup>21</sup>T. O’Keefe (2005). *Epicurus on Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>22</sup>*On the Nature of the Gods* 1.25.69–70.

<sup>23</sup>M. Frede (2011). *A Free Will: Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*. Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup>S. Bobzien (1998b). “The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem”. In: *Phronesis* 43.2, pp. 133–175.

of her extensive work on the history of Stoic approaches to fate, and her careful sorting of exactly *which* problems Chrysippus, Posidonius and others dealt with – that is to say, her position that Alexander was the first to formulate the FWFK problem is based on her previous demonstrations that prior Stoics did *not* formulate the FWFK problem, but other, related problems.<sup>25</sup> In this chapter, I follow Bobzien’s argument.

The first original claim I make in this chapter, continued in Chapter 6, is that Origen based his understanding of free will and divine foreknowledge on Alexander of Aphrodisias’ FWFK problem, and, crucially, that this was a divergence from other Christian thinkers at the time, who understood free will as a basically moral category.

Had Origen read Alexander of Aphrodisias? Ilaria Ramelli has claimed on a number of occasions that he had, and that the reading of Aristotle through commentaries, such as those of Alexander, was frequently practised in Origen’s intellectual training.<sup>26</sup> Christian Hengstermann also claims that Origen was, at least, aware of Alexander’s work on the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

There could be little doubt that Origen was familiar on the basis of his own reading with the influential testimony which his contemporary Alexander of Aphrodisias — holder of the chair of Peripatetic philosophy set up by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius — had systematically set forth.<sup>27</sup>

Hengstermann also notes the similarity of Origen’s arguments to those of Alexander’s *On Fate*, calling *On First Principles* a ‘counterpart’ (ein Pendant) to it.<sup>28</sup> Even if the precise details of Ramelli’s argument may not hold up, it does seem to me highly likely that Origen would have been aware of Alexander’s work, given Alexander’s prominent position and the fact that Origen himself visited Athens.

There has not been a huge amount of work done directly on free will in patristic thought. As part of wider works, some scholars have considered the positions of individual writers on the question. For example, Denis Minns argues that Irenaeus’ view of

<sup>25</sup>See idem (1998a), *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*.

<sup>26</sup>Ramelli (2009b), “Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Re-Thinking the Christianisation of Hellenism”, 247ff.

<sup>27</sup>C. Hengstermann (2017a). *Origenes und der Ursprung der Freiheitsmetaphysik*. Adamantiana 8. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, p. 25n34: ‘Es dürfte kaum einem Zweifel unterliegen, dass Origenes mit dem einflussreichen Zeugnis, das insbesondere sein Zeitgenosse Alexander von Aphrodisias, der Inhaber des von Kaiser Mark Aurel eingerichteten Lehrstuhls für peripatetische Philosophie, in systematischer Absicht dargelegt hatte, aufgrund eigener Lektüre vertraut gewesen ist.’

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 20n25.

free will revolves primarily around the human ability to choose evil.<sup>29</sup> In a more extensive discussion, Emily Jane Hunt's work on Tatian makes the case that for both Justin Martyr and Tatian, free will was an essential part of their theology.<sup>30</sup> She notes that for Justin, free will is a fact of the world, and places salvation within the grasp of human beings. Tatian, whose theology depends on the grace of God, places the emphasis on the *telos* of free will, that is, the meaning to be found in the final result of either punishment or reward. I essentially agree with Hunt's analysis.

As part of a wider work on Stoic free will, Michael Frede argues that the earliest Christians easily adopted these traditional Stoic ethical understandings of free will, universal providence, and divine order.<sup>31</sup> Frede sees Tatian as a particularly instrumental figure in this adoption, arguing that Tatian was a philosopher with a Stoic education before his conversion to Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Frede is clearly correct that early Christian discussions on whether an action is free or not were fundamentally motivated by concern for the agent's ethical status. The second original claim in this chapter is that we can extend Frede's position by demonstrating that the particular concerns of early Christian writers on the subject of free will cluster around two explicitly Christian elements: first, the question of free will in relation to the final judgement of God; second, the question of free will in relation to the problem of evil.

Therefore I argue in the final section of this chapter that Christian libertarian views, especially those of Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Clement of Alexandria, framed the question of free will in distinctively Christian ways around the notions of prophecy, judgement and the problem of evil. In Chapter 6 I make the case that this distinctively Christian framing influenced Origen, and meant that Origen's take on the FWFK problem as posited by Alexander was highly innovative, and, crucially, that it put prophecy at the centre of the discussion about free will.

## II Terminology

The Greek lexicon of free will and its related concepts is complex and overlapping, and does not reflect the later clarity that would be imposed on the FWFK problem by Alexander of Aphrodisias and others: 'freedom', in the truest sense, is represented by

<sup>29</sup>D. Minns (1994). *Irenaeus: An Introduction*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 80ff.

<sup>30</sup>E. J. Hunt (2003b). *Christianity in the Second Century: The Case of Tatian*. London: Routledge, 65ff.

<sup>31</sup>Frede (2011), op. cit., 102ff.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

the Greek word ἐλευθερία, most commonly used in political and social contexts in contrast to slavery, δουλεία. But the term most commonly used to mean what we denote by ‘free will’ is τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, a complicated prepositional phrase that carries the notion of autonomy and agency – the notion of what is ‘up to us’. There are also the related concepts of ‘willing(ly)’ and ‘unwilling(ly)’, ἐκὼν, ἐκουσίως and ἄκων, ἀκουσίως, and the Stoic ἐξουσία αὐτοπραγίας – to do something fully of one’s own will. Then too there is the verb ἔξεστι (dative of person) [infinitive], ‘it is possible (for x) [to do y]’.

Susanne Bobzien traces these terms and others in order to elucidate the precise differences between different conceptions of free will espoused at different times by different writers in antiquity.<sup>33</sup> I return to her argument concerning Alexander of Aphrodisias later;<sup>34</sup> for now it is important to note that the language used by different Greek authors carries quite different connotations for their understanding of ‘free will’ as a category.

### III Determinism and Free Will

Democritus and Leucippus, the first atomists, quite regularly talk about ‘necessity’ (ἀνάγκη), but in what is extant of their work, it does not appear that they dealt with the question of free will. It was instead in the work of the later atomists – in particular, Epicurus – that the question first arose of how necessity might function in a system of physics in which all things were caused by undending chains of atomic motion.

#### i Epicurus

Nothing provokes the ridicule of Epicurus so much as the art of prophecy.<sup>35</sup>

A generation or so after Aristotle, Epicurus, none of whose works survive in full, developed the Democritan and Leucippian atomic system extensively. In his *Letter to Menoeceus*, some of which is extant, Epicurus makes a defence of the notion that some events must be caused by something other than necessity or chance:

λέγει ἐν ἄλλοις γίνεσθαι ἃ μὲν κατ’ ἀνάγκην, ἃ δὲ ἀπὸ τύχης, ἃ δὲ παρ’ ἡμᾶς,  
διὰ τὸ τὴν μὲν ἀνάγκην ἀνυπεύθυνον εἶναι, τὴν δὲ τύχην ἄστατον ὄραν, τὸ

<sup>33</sup>Bobzien (1998b), “The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem”, p. 134.

<sup>34</sup>cf. pp. 131–132.

<sup>35</sup>Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.65.162.

δὲ παρ' ἡμᾶς ἀδέσποτον, ᾧ καὶ τὸ μεμπτὸν καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον παρακολουθεῖν πέφυκεν.<sup>36</sup>

[The wise man] affirms that some things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency. For he sees that necessity destroys responsibility and that chance is inconstant, whereas our own actions are autonomous, and it is to them that praise and blame naturally attach.

Since Epicurean physics posited the existence only of atoms and void, all phenomena were purportedly explicable with reference to the physical interactions of atoms moving through void. Therefore, in order to preserve the notion that human beings could make decisions that were not deterministically fixed, Epicurus invented the doctrine of the 'swerve'. This consists of the random movement of an atom which breaks the causal chains that bind all other interactions. Epicurus himself never specified how often the swerve happened, or whether it happened to a single atom at a time or groups of atoms in concatenation. Lucretius, his later follower, is vague on the subject.<sup>37</sup> As such, it has been the subject of a great deal of scholarly conjecture, particularly given that the texts directly describing it do not survive.

On the whole, using Lucretius' account, we may take the swerve to work broadly as follows: at any moment, an atom travelling naturally downwards (towards the centre of the universe) may swerve unexpectedly into a parallel trajectory. Usually, this has no effect.<sup>38</sup> However, in more unusual cases, a large group of atoms belonging to a rational soul may simultaneously swerve. Sedley argues for a metaphysical ability of the volition to guide this motion, but the precise details are rather unclear.<sup>39</sup>

Regardless of the precise details of the mechanics of the swerve, which are beyond the remit of this thesis, it is quite clear that the root of the doctrine is the solution of the problem of reconciling a fully materialistic, deterministic physics with a commitment to the possibility of human free choice. That this is the case is evident from the work of Long and Sedley, who have made sense of the Epicurean fragments.<sup>40</sup> One such fragment, LS 20C<sup>41</sup> shows that Epicurus engaged in debates with Democritan determinists, pointing out the problem of free will specifically as a problem of moral responsibility.

<sup>36</sup>Letter to Menoecus 133.

<sup>37</sup>cf. *On the Nature of Things* 2.216-224.

<sup>38</sup>cf. e.g. J. S. Purinton (1999). "Epicurus on 'Free Volition' and the Atomic Swerve". In: *Phronesis* 44.4, pp. 253-299.

<sup>39</sup>Sedley (1988), op. cit.

<sup>40</sup>Long and Sedley (1987), op. cit., pp. 18-162.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 105-6.

Similarly, LS 20B explicitly declares the behaviour of rational animals to be attributable to their ‘developments’ (τὰ ἀπογεγεννημένα) and not to their atoms, making them worthy of moral judgement.<sup>42</sup>

## ii Chrysippus and the Stoics

[The Stoics] were positive about the existence of fate everywhere, employing some such example as the following: that just as a dog, supposing him attached to a cart, if indeed he is disposed to follow, both is drawn, or follows voluntarily, making an exercise also of free power, in combination with necessity, that is, fate; but if he may not be disposed to follow, he will altogether be coerced to do so.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most popular and long-lasting models of fate and free will in Greek philosophical thought was the Stoic position, illustrated by the above metaphor. The origin of the metaphor is variously ascribed, sometimes to early Stoic thought – in particular to Chrysippus – and sometimes to Cleanthes and the later school.<sup>44</sup> Regardless of its origin, the image captures pointedly the ambivalence of the later Stoic attitude to free will.

As far as we know, Stoic positions all agreed on the existence of fate. The position of Chrysippus is the only one we know in any great detail. Although it does not exist in any surviving texts, it can be reconstructed from the summaries of Chrysippus’ positions in other authors, particularly in Cicero’s *On Fate* and Plutarch’s *On Stoic Self-Contradictions*.

Bobzien argues that – as with the Epicureans – the motivation for Stoic thinking about free will was the consideration of moral responsibility. She makes the case that for thinkers who are concerned with establishing whether an agent X is morally responsible for an action A, it is a necessary condition, for praising or blaming an agent for an action, that it was X *and not something else* that was causally responsible for whether A occurred.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup>ibid., pp. 104–5. cf. D. Sedley (1983). “Epicurus’ refutation of determinism”. In: ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΙΣ: *studi sull’ epicureismo greco e romano offerti a Marcello Gigante*. Naples: Gaetano Macchiaroli editore, p. 17.

<sup>43</sup>Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 1.18.

<sup>44</sup>For a rejection of the traditional argument that the position is Chrysippean, see Bobzien (1998a), *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, pp. 357–8.

<sup>45</sup>Idem (1998b), “The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem”, 135ff.

For example, if Brutus collides with Caesar and causes him to fall over, whether we hold Brutus morally responsible will depend on whether Brutus was in some way externally compelled to collide with Caesar: if he was not, we would judge him responsible; but if Brutus had been pushed by Cassius and that had caused him to fall into Caesar, we could not reasonably hold Brutus responsible for knocking Caesar over. Bobzien argues that considerations of this kind dominate Stoic thinking about freedom, determinism, and ethics:

With an autonomy based concept of moral responsibility, [philosophers] tend to face the problem of the compatibility of autonomy and determinism: how can I, the agent, be held responsible for my actions/choices, if everything, including my actions/choices is determined, predetermined, or necessitated by god, fate, providence, necessity, or various other external and/or internal causal factors?<sup>46</sup>

Much of Chrysippus' argumentation, concludes Bobzien, revolves around refuting the specific notion that fate destroys moral responsibility, an argument made widely in antiquity.<sup>47</sup>

## IV Logic and Foreknowledge

A number of ancient thinkers, foremost among them Aristotle, discussed foreknowledge in a specifically logical context. Their focus was on the problem of future contingents, that is to say, whether and how statements about the contingent future can be true or false. In this section I examine Aristotle's discussion of future contingent statements in *On Interpretation*. I then discuss his understanding of causation and of the will more generally in order to show why the logical questions in *On Interpretation* are fundamentally about the rules of logic and language, not a genuine challenge to the notion of free will.

In *On Interpretation*, Aristotle discusses a problem which has come to be known as the 'sea-battle argument'. This would later be adapted by Diodorus Cronus into a similar argument known as the 'master argument'.<sup>48</sup> Aristotle begins with the following premise:

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 135–6.

<sup>47</sup>Idem (1998a), *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*, 250ff.

<sup>48</sup>Although we know very little about Diodorus Cronus himself, the argument survives in Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2.19.1.

If someone declares that a certain event will take place, while another declares it will not, one will clearly be speaking the truth while the other as clearly will not. Both predicates cannot belong to one subject with regard to the future.<sup>49</sup>

This is on the grounds that Aristotle takes all predicates necessarily to have a truth value, and becomes known as the Law of the Excluded Middle.<sup>50</sup> If this is the case, says Aristotle – given the hidden premise that we are able to know which of the two predicates is true – then how can the event truly be contingent? Does logic itself not force us to conclude that if the predicate is true, the event *must* therefore happen (or the predicate was false all along). But, of course, as Aristotle knows, this is impossible – it is a matter of universal and undeniable experience that some events are potential and their happening or not happening depends on the action of human beings:

Events are not caused or prevented by someone's affirming or denying that at some future time they would happen.<sup>51</sup>

Thus it becomes clear that there is some basic incompatibility between the idea that predicates about the future can have an antecedent truth value, and the idea that all things are not causally determined. If we look at the specific example of future-telling prophecy, I think it becomes clear that Aristotle is trying to push through the problem:

If through the ages the nature of things has been such that a certain prediction was true, that prediction must needs be fulfilled: and the nature of all things was such that events came about of necessity. For any event anyone in the past has once truly predicted must needs in due course come about, and of that which has once come about it was true at all times to affirm that it would in due time come about.<sup>52</sup>

This is, to Aristotle, ridiculous, and for him its ridiculousness is only highlighted by considering extremely long time lapses in between the prediction and the event. Thus he moves on to an example that can expose the problem as being part of the logical system rather than the world around us:

<sup>49</sup>*On Interpretation* 9.18a. Translation from Aristotle (1938). *Categories. On Interpretation. Prior Analytics*. Trans. by H. Cooke and H. Tredennick. Loeb Classical Library 325. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>50</sup>cf. also *Metaphysics* 2, 996b 26–30.

<sup>51</sup>*On Interpretation* 9.19a.

<sup>52</sup>*On Interpretation* 9.19a.

For example, a sea-battle must either take place on the morrow or not. No necessity is there, however, that it should come to pass or should not. What is necessary is that it either should happen tomorrow or not.<sup>53</sup>

For those scholars who see the argument as about necessity, that is, the second camp described above, this passage is the point of disagreement.<sup>54</sup> The final sentence is clear enough: Aristotle is saying that tomorrow, on the day itself, it is absolutely necessary that either: a) a sea battle happens, or b) no sea battle happens. What he is saying in the preceding sentence depends on a scholar's interpretation of the whole chapter. I agree with Lane Craig that the sense of the whole argument is as follows:

Suppose that predicates about the contingent future are either true or not true.

Therefore, if somebody predicts that a sea-battle will happen tomorrow, the sea-battle must happen.

However, it is not inherently necessary that a sea-battle will happen tomorrow *and* it is also not inherently necessary that a sea-battle will not happen tomorrow. i.e., whether the sea-battle happens tomorrow is not a matter of necessity but of chance or human choice or some other cause.

Therefore, we reach a contradiction.

Aristotle's response is – I believe – to reject his first premise, that all affirmations and denials have a truth value:

There is evidently, then, no necessity that one should be true, the other false, in the case of affirmations and denials.

The logical extension of this is a scepticism, which Aristotle probably had, about the possibility of true prediction about the future. This is not a hugely problematic conclusion in the case of the human side of things. But, as we will see, it becomes much more problematic when we consider divine foreknowledge.

To understand what this argument does – and does not – include, we must understand something both about Aristotle's notion of causation. My claim here is that Aristotle's

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<sup>53</sup>*On Interpretation* 9.19b.

<sup>54</sup>Hintikka and Rescher, for example, both argue that this passage is crucial for understanding the whole chapter. cf. Hintikka (1964), op. cit. See also Rescher (1968), op. cit.

notions of causation mean he could not have formulated the problem as being about divine foreknowledge against free will, despite the fact that arguments of the ‘sea-battle’ type are used by modern metaphysicians in relation to that problem.<sup>55</sup> I will begin with his notions of cause.

Aristotle’s theory of causation famously includes four types of cause. They are, in brief, material (the material cause of a table is wood), formal (the formal cause of a table is the carpenter’s plan for what it will look like), the efficient cause (the efficient cause of a table is a carpenter and his tools), and the final cause, or *telos* (the final cause of a table is to put other objects on it). This language of causation does not see ‘cause’ as a strict notion of physics, but instead as a mix of physical, biological, and metaphysical concerns. In this system, where the most important cause, the *telos*, is an object’s purpose, its reason-for-coming-into-being, the direction of causality is not strictly from past to future.

This already makes it difficult to see how Aristotle would find a notion of determinism as an unbroken chain of efficient causes in which causes further back along the chain fix events later along the chain to be satisfactory. If we look at his understanding of human choice, we see that it is highly incompatible with any notion of ‘free will’ that we would recognise as part of a ‘free will problem’.

Aristotle treats the issue of voluntary and involuntary actions in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Huby argues that this is primarily about establishing whether an action is voluntary or involuntary for the purposes of legal liability.<sup>56</sup> Frede argues that Aristotle’s conception of the will is much more specific than the way in which the term is used in English (or even Latin) for ‘to want/desire’; instead, he claims, Aristotle uses it specifically to refer to the desires of the rational soul:

Thus it is assumed that there is such a thing as a desire of reason and hence also that reason by itself suffices to motivate us to do something.<sup>57</sup>

This principle, says Frede, is also accepted by Plato, the Stoics, and those that are later influenced by those schools of thought. In this model, the distinction between rational and nonrational desires is therefore not the same as the distinction between reasonable and unreasonable desires: a person could desire a pint of beer and simultaneously know that her desire is unreasonable (because, say, she is already drunk). For Aristotle, if she

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<sup>55</sup>William Hasker’s extensive set of arguments about Clarence and his omelette are adapted versions of the sea-battle, with the additional premise of divine infallibility. cf. W. Hasker (1989). *God Time Knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>56</sup>Huby (1967), op. cit., p. 354.

<sup>57</sup>Frede (2011), op. cit., p. 21.

decided *not* to have the pint, that would mean she willed not to have it – as her will acted in accordance with reason, that is, with the good. However, if she falsely believed, because she was drunk, that she should have the pint of beer, and did in fact drink it, then this would not count as an act of will but as an act of appetite; the reasons for it would include lack of training, discipline, and ability to act in accordance with the true will.<sup>58</sup> Clearly no notion of ‘free will’ can come from this model.

## V Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will

Alexander’s *On Fate*, published some time in the period 198-209 AD during Origen’s youth,<sup>59</sup> was an attempt to synthesise Aristotle’s somewhat vague positions on fate, divinity, and causation with the positions of the Stoics. Alexander discusses both the classic Chrysippean Stoic position, which is concerned with the compatibility of moral responsibility of the first kind with universal causal determinism, and a Peripatetic position which is (partially) libertarian and maintains that at least some things in the world are causally undetermined, and thus can be truly up to us. The treatise fits, in this sense, into a longstanding dialogic tradition in Greco-Roman philosophical treatises: it presents two sides of a conflict like in Cicero’s *On Divination*, in which a similar underlying doctrinal disagreement is never resolved.<sup>60</sup>

In this section I argue that Alexander formulated the question of fate, God, foreknowledge, prophecy and their relationship explicitly as a problem for the first time. This problem, the FWFK problem as we find it in Origen, runs something like this: if God has certain knowledge of the future, and human beings have freedom to choose otherwise, then either the future is not truly contingent, or God does not have certain knowledge of the future, or neither. There are no other metaphysically consistent options.

We saw in discussion of the Stoics the primary focus on moral responsibility: that is to say, in establishing whether the cause of an event A was agent X *or some other cause*. The problem for the Stoics, formulated most clearly in Chrysippus, was, then, how to reconcile the incompatibility between the fact that we know *everything* is determined

<sup>58</sup>For more detail and examples see *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup>The dedication of the work is addressed to the emperors Severus and Caracalla; their joint reign was between 198 and 209. Therefore it is safe to assume the work was written in this period, although it is not possible to narrow this down further.

<sup>60</sup>For more on how to read texts of this kind, cf. M. Beard (1986). “Cicero and Divination: The Formation of a Latin Discourse”. In: *The Journal of Roman Studies* 76, pp. 33–46.

with the fact that human beings clearly can be moral agents in the ways in which we assent to or quash our impulses.

Bobzien argues that there is quite a different concept of moral responsibility at play in Alexander's formulation of the problem. Instead of arguing that we must establish that it was the agent and not something else that was responsible for the action, Alexander's version of moral responsibility claims that is a necessary condition for praising or blaming an agent for an action that the agent could have done otherwise.<sup>61</sup> This latter notion is, Bobzien emphasises, significantly different from the type of moral responsibility that the Stoics were concerned with.<sup>62</sup> It is a fundamentally different question to ask how an agent can be responsible for an action that seems like it is externally causally determined from asking how you can balance two incompatible facts: that you have freedom to do otherwise from what you do, and that what you do is predetermined.

Bobzien points out that there are a number of subtleties to the noun-phrase τὸ ἐφ' ἑμῖν that may help to explain this divergence. She divides it into two types of meaning: one-sided (I caused this to happen, it was up to me) and two-sided (it is up to me, in my power / capability, whether I do A or not A at any given time X). Note that in the one-sided use, you may be the cause of an action A, but you may not be the cause of not-A, whereas in the two-sided version you are necessarily the cause of whichever of A and not-A happens. From here, she can distinguish how the two types of moral responsibility fell out quite naturally. If you are thinking in a one-sided way, then you will conceive of moral responsibility as being cause-driven. If you are thinking in a two-sided way, you will conceive of moral responsibility as to do with accountability *because* you have an ability to choose between options, even if those options are only A and not-A for any given A.

The notion of having freedom to do otherwise is, argues Bobzien, the first of a trio of increasingly specific notions of free will:

1. 'freedom to do otherwise' (it is possible for me to do A or not to do A),<sup>63</sup>
2. 'freedom of decision' (specifically, it is possible for me to decide to do A or not to do A), and
3. 'freedom of the will' (specifically, it is possible for me to decide to do A or not to

<sup>61</sup>Bobzien (1998b), "The Inadvertent Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem", p. 135.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>63</sup>This, also known as the Principle of Alternate Possibilities (PAP) is often the key factor in contemporary libertarianist positions. For a full articulation, see Hasker (1989), *op. cit.*

do A using the faculty of the will, independently of my desires and beliefs).<sup>64</sup>

I discussed above how Aristotle's notion of choice could not lead to a notion of free will – by this I strictly mean the third of Bobzien's categories, 'freedom of the will'. Indeed, no modern philosophical notion of free will posits a faculty of the will such that it would satisfy the third type of free will: from Alexander onwards, the key feature of 'free will' as that term is usually used is the freedom-to-choose-otherwise. If we turn to the text of Alexander's *On Fate* we can see a little more clearly how his innovation takes place.

The first sections of *On Fate* present a Stoic position on the subject. It is clear from Alexander's explanation of the Stoic side of the argument that he is aware that the Stoics use the one-sided sense of ἐφ' ἡμῖν. Thus he discusses fate as an 'efficient cause',<sup>65</sup> applying the Aristotelian theory of causation to the Stoic position. He also puts forward, on the Stoic side, the argument that since fate can be hindered or thwarted, it is not a threat to free will. He uses an example that is also found in Ptolemy, that of medical intervention:

the body...is affected both in disease and in death in accordance with its natural constitution, but not of necessity; for treatments...and doctors' orders...are sufficient to break such a pattern. And in the same way in the case of the soul.<sup>66</sup>

Because of this framework, Alexander claims, the Stoic position sees prophecy as a science no different to medicine or physiognomy, which are inherently conjectural.<sup>67</sup> However, later in the treatise, when Alexander moves on to critique a determinist position, he gives a formulation that clearly shows he is using the two-sided notion of free will, which he believes to be present in Aristotle:

It is clear even in itself that 'what depends on us' (ἐφ' ἡμῖν) is applied to those

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<sup>64</sup>These are the most commonly-used models. Bobzien lists a few other forms that can fit either indeterminist or un-predeterminist notions of freedom: 4) a notion of un-predeterminist freedom (there are no causes that determine that I do A, but given the same circumstances, if I have the same desires and beliefs, I would always do A); 5) freedom from compulsion (I do A and nothing internally (e.g. madness) or externally (e.g. physical force) is forcing me to do A); 6) freedom from determination by external causal factors (given situation X, I am not compelled by external factors always to do A); and 7) freedom from determination by internal causal factors (given situation X, I am not compelled by my own beliefs and desires always to do A). cf. Bobzien (1998b), *op. cit.*, pp. 133–4.

<sup>65</sup>*On Fate* 3.

<sup>66</sup>*On Fate* 170.15 (translations adapted from Alexander of Aphrodisias (1983). *On Fate*. Trans. by R. Sharples. London: Duckworth). cf. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 2.1.

<sup>67</sup>cf. *On Fate* 171.10.

things over which we have the power of also choosing the opposite things.<sup>68</sup>

and so:

We have this power of choosing the opposite and not everything that we choose has pre-determining causes, because of which it is not possible for us not to choose this.<sup>69</sup>

And so, when Alexander comes to make a statement about divine foreknowledge, he begins with the following:

To say that it is reasonable that the gods should have foreknowledge of the things that will be... and, assuming this, to try and establish... that all things come to be out of necessity and in accordance with fate – this is neither true nor reasonable.<sup>70</sup>

Crucially, Alexander is not arguing that the gods have foreknowledge of all chains of cause and effect and therefore know what will happen, even if something appears to be under the scope of human free will. He is arguing directly from the two-sided concept of ἐφ' ἡμῖν:

It is impossible for [the gods], in the case of that which has in its proper nature the possibility of both coming to be and not [i.e. is contingent], to have foreknowledge that at all events it *will* be or that all events it *will not* be.<sup>71</sup>

Alexander's conclusion is to accept that if the gods have foreknowledge of contingent events, it is only knowledge of them as contingent – that is, he makes a probabilistic argument as above. Alexander's argument across the treatise, then, preserves a number of classical Chrysippean arguments for determinism, but ultimately rejects them in the name of Aristotelianism – although, as Bobzien shows, he is mixing two different concepts of free will in doing so.

Thus the notion of the FWFK problem such as it is treated in modern philosophy relies on a technical notion of free will as freedom to choose otherwise that did not

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<sup>68</sup> *On Fate* 181.5.

<sup>69</sup> *On Fate* 180.26-8.

<sup>70</sup> *On Fate* 200.12.

<sup>71</sup> *On Fate* 200.25.

emerge until relatively late – indeed, not until Origen’s lifetime. Although Alexander of Aphrodisias was the first person to discuss the problem as we conceive of it, Origen was almost certainly the second – and the first Christian.

Had Origen read *On Fate*? It is clear that Origen’s textual critical work for the *Hexapla* brought him into very close contact with the commentary tradition of the grammarians at Alexandria. Ramelli additionally argues that Origen’s *On First Principles* may be based on a text of the same name by Alexander.<sup>72</sup> While Alexander’s work only exists in an Arabic recension and is not complete,<sup>73</sup> her analysis of the structural similarity between the two works certainly raises interesting possibilities.

## VI Early Christian Understandings of Free Will

From the earliest period of Christianity, we find references in Christian texts to free will. Sometimes they use the standard term ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, and sometimes the more technical noun ἀυτεξουσία<sup>74</sup> or the noun-phrase ἐλευθερία τῆς προαιρέσεως.<sup>75</sup> Free will and judgement are very closely connected in most patristic discussions on the subject; indeed, for many patristic writers, the issue of free will only comes up in the rhetorical context of an exhortation to moral behaviour with an eye to future judgement. Thus we have from the apostolic fathers onwards a tendency to assert that human beings have free will as a logical step towards encouraging the exercise of Christian morality and the avoidance of sin.<sup>76</sup>

Ignatius, for example, cautions Christians on what will happen if they exercise their free will poorly, emphasising the causality of human action over human final destiny:

...and there is set before us life upon our observance [of God’s precepts], but death as the result of disobedience, and every one, according to the choice he makes, shall go to his own place; let us flee from death, and make choice of life.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup>Ramelli (2009b), loc. cit.

<sup>73</sup>There is no English translation, but the work is available in a critical edition: Alexander of Aphrodisias (2001). *Alexander of Aphrodisias on the Cosmos*. Ed. by D. Genequand. Vol. 44. Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies. Leiden: Brill.

<sup>74</sup>This term is regularly used by Justin Martyr.

<sup>75</sup>cf. Tatian *Oration to the Greeks* 7.1.

<sup>76</sup>The issue comes up in, e.g. the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Interestingly, later patristic writers such as John Cassian reflect on *Hermas* as a seminal text for the understanding of the very earliest attitudes to free will. cf. John Cassian *Conferences*, 13.12.

<sup>77</sup>Ignatius, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, ch.5, long version.

Irenaeus also asserts human free will through the frame of human moral responsibility.<sup>78</sup> He makes the point that it is not just human beings but also angels who have free will, thereby emphasising its role in the general cosmic order.<sup>79</sup> For him, the relationship between prophecy and free will is a simple one: prophets act as a channel for God's counsel to keep human beings aware of their place in the system and on the right track.

Clement of Alexandria also focusses on the need for human beings to make free choice of salvation. Matyáš Havrda has argued that Clement clearly thinks it is essential that this must be a freedom to choose otherwise,<sup>80</sup> but it is nevertheless clear that for Clement the focus is divine grace rather than God's foreknowledge.<sup>81</sup>

The clearest and subtlest early exposition of the subject comes from Justin Martyr. He argues that the whole structure of human experience of punishment and reward would not make sense if we were not free:

We have learned from the prophets, and we hold it to be true, that punishments, chastisements, and rewards are rendered according to the merit of each man's actions. Otherwise, if all things happen by fate, then nothing is in our own power. For if it be predestined that one man be good and another man evil, then the first is not deserving of praise or the other to be blamed. Unless humans have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions – whatever they may be...<sup>82</sup>

Additionally, as Justin points out, in a deterministic system, people would not be able to transition from good to bad or vice versa, which we know to happen.<sup>83</sup> Justin's argu-

<sup>78</sup>See J. Lawson (1948). *The Biblical Theology of Saint Irenaeus*. London: Epworth.

<sup>79</sup>"But because man is possessed of free will from the beginning, and God is possessed of free will, in whose likeness man was created." cf. Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, 4.37.

<sup>80</sup>M. Havrda (2011). "Grace and Free Will According to Clement of Alexandria". In: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 19.1, p. 27.

<sup>81</sup>cf. e.g. *Salvation of the Rich Man* 21.

<sup>82</sup>Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 43.

<sup>83</sup>Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 43. This is followed up by a much subtler point, in which Justin claims that the very taxonomy of the world into good and evil requires the absence of fate: 'But not even would some be good and others bad, since we thus make fate the cause of evil, and exhibit her as acting in opposition to herself; or that which has been already stated would seem to be true, that neither virtue nor vice is anything, but that things are only reckoned good or evil by opinion; which, as the true word shows, is the greatest impiety and wickedness. But this we assert is inevitable fate, that they who choose the good have worthy rewards, and they who choose the opposite have their merited awards.' The argument that Justin is making here is the following: we must throw out the whole concept of good and bad if we hold to fate, because without any choice, what's 'good' and 'bad' is simply a matter of spin. Obviously this is counter to all Christian thought and is, in Justin's view, false and impious.

ments follow a basically Stoic contour in arguing that the most important criterion for understanding free choice is human moral responsibility – like the Stoics, he is bothered by the notion that evil might not be a matter of choice. Indeed, alongside the question of moral responsibility and judgement, many Christian writers used the subject of free will as an introduction to the problem of evil. Tatian is instrumental in establishing this as a common trope in Christian writing, linking the problem of evil with the question of free will explicitly in his work:

...our free will has destroyed us...Nothing evil has been created by God; we ourselves have manifested wickedness.<sup>84</sup>

As we see, the focus of Christian authors is primarily on moral concerns. While they consider a number of subtle questions concerning free will and judgement and the problem of evil, no Christian thinker prior to Origen formulates a specific problem about God’s foreknowledge – and certainly no Christian thinker considers prophecy in this context.

## Conclusions

Because of his proficiency in writing in the commentary form, Alexander of Aphrodisias was known in philosophical circles simply as ‘the exegete’ (ὁ ἐξηγητής).<sup>85</sup> It is perhaps baseless speculation to wonder what Origen – a rather different kind of exegete – would have made of this. Yet the similarity in their framing of the problem of free will and foreknowledge, despite their totally opposite positions on the problem, does at least suggest that Origen was aware of Alexander’s work.

In this chapter, I have aimed to show how it is, perhaps unintuitively, not until Alexander that we find a formulation of the FWFK problem as a logical-metaphysical problem concerned with divine foreknowledge. Prior to that, and in the rest of the Christian writers who lived before Origen, the problem is – as it is for Epicureans and Stoics – fundamentally concerned with protecting a meaningful notion of human moral responsibility against the threat of a totally deterministic world. In Chapter 6 I return to Origen’s discussion of this problem.

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<sup>84</sup>Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 11.

<sup>85</sup>E. Kessler (2008). “Alexander von Aphrodisias. Exeget der aristotelischen Psychologie bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts”. In: *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis Enarratio De anima ex Aristotelis institutione*. Ed. by E. Kessler. Trans. by H. Donatus. Stuttgart: Bad Cannstatt, p. 12.

In Part I, I have attempted to pick some threads out of the backdrop of early Christian, ancient Jewish and Greek thought that will be necessary for understanding Origen on prophecy. In Part II, I turn to Origen himself in order to argue for a potential structure using which he might have thought about the issues raised in Part I: his tripartite exegetical hermeneutic.



## Part II



## Chapter 5

# Exegesis

ζητει δὲ καὶ σὺ πᾶν τὸ ἐν τοῖς παλαιοῖς γράμμασι σημεῖον τίνος ἐν τῇ καινῇ γραφῇ τύπος πράγματός ἐστι, καὶ τὸ ἐν τῇ καινῇ διαθήκῃ ὀνομασθὲν σημεῖον τίνος ἐστὶν ἢ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι αἰῶνι δηλωτικὸν ἢ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ὕστερον γενεαῖς μετὰ τὸ γεγονέναι τὸ σημεῖον.<sup>1</sup>

You must ascertain of what thing in the New Testament each sign in the Old Testament is a type. And that which is called a sign in the new scripture is indicative of something either in the future age, or in later generations after the sign has happened.

Origen was condemned as a heretic in the Second Council of Constantinople of 553. The case against him, brought under the Emperor Justinian, included various anathemata said to be drawn from Origen's beliefs, including his doctrine of the pre-existence of human souls and his belief in potential universal salvation.<sup>2</sup> Some of the anathemata are drawn directly from Origen's work. Others, however, were formulated by later thinkers – either later followers of Origen who developed his thought in new directions, or polemicists who misrepresented him in their criticisms.

The condemnation, unusually long after Origen's death, was the result of two so-called Origenist controversies. These controversies were both sets of complex doctrinal struggles that encompassed many voices and positions. Despite the focus in the Council's anathemata on specific theological doctrines, central to the controversies themselves was the more general question of correct scriptural exegesis: in particular, the proper role

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<sup>1</sup>*Commentary on Matthew* 12.3.

<sup>2</sup>For the full documents cf. P. Schaff and H. Wace, eds. (1900). *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Vol. 14. 2. Christian Literature Publishing Co.

(if any) of allegory in an exegete's reading of the Bible. Both for his detractors and his defenders, Origen's name came to stand as a synonym for vibrant allegorising; many of his detractors argued that he afforded insufficient respect to the literal meaning of scripture. Neither 'literal', nor 'allegorical', of course, has a straightforward definition. In both controversies, the conflicts frequently played out through personal enmities, accusations, and discussions of matters wholly unrelated to exegesis and Origen.<sup>3</sup>

Because of this, it has become remarkably difficult to discern Origen's own position outside the lens of these various later – sometimes quite polarised – positions. It is around this problem that much 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century scholarship on Origen has circled. This chapter will attempt to engage with this problem, and then tease out some further particulars of the relationship between exegesis and prophecy in Origen's thought. I begin with a discussion of the relevant scholarly literature, followed by a discussion of the definition and history of allegory and its role in the Origenist controversies. Having thus laid the foundations, I make the following argument in the rest of the chapter.

As many scholars have argued, Origen has a tripartite exegetical hermeneutic which consists of three types or layers of reading: somatic, or historical, readings; psychic, or moral, readings; and pneumatic, or mystical, readings. I explore the senses of these readings in detail below.

Not wholly unreasonably, scholarship so far has focussed entirely on the application of this tripartite hermeneutic to scripture. However, in this chapter I make the case that there is a solid and overlooked textual basis for arguing that Origen means the hermeneutic to be applicable to other objects as well – in particular, for the 'reading' of philosophical constructs or branches of knowledge. The evidence for this is to be found in the *Commentary on Song of Songs* where Origen applies the tripartite hermeneutic to traditional Greek intellectual training, arguing that different branches and methods of knowledge correspond to different readings or layers in the hermeneutic.

I would like to suggest that Origen's use of the hermeneutic in this way shows that he may well have understood other concepts and phenomena as taxonomically separable and legible in the same manner. I propose, in the second half of this chapter, that prophecy was one such concept. I argue that the tripartite hermeneutic applies to prophecy in two ways, or modes. First, and most obviously, it applies to prophecy as scripture. Origen takes scriptural verses that are explicitly prophecies as particularly

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<sup>3</sup>For analysis of the controversy and its rhetorical construction, see E. A. Clark (1992). *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. I will return to the controversy in more detail at pp. 151–152.

conducive to analysis under the tripartite hermeneutic; I provide some examples of this type of analysis. Additionally, he appears to consider each and every verse of scripture to be, in at least one of its three readings, a prophecy.

The second mode of application is more general and has wider implications: I will argue that, as with the Greek intellectual arts, Origen's tripartite hermeneutic applies to prophecy, not just as the sum of all prophecies, but also as a phenomenon of related methods and branches of knowledge. Under this understanding, the disparate and sometimes conflicting models of prophecy negotiated in the various different discourses in Part I of this thesis become not competing absolutes, but layers in a tripartite 'reading' of the whole phenomenon of prophecy.

## I Literature

One of the most popular topics in Origen scholarship in the last century has been his exegetical method. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, work on the subject was largely polemic in nature, condemning Origen's exegesis as inappropriately allegorical and thus subjective when judged against the standards of the historical-critical method. This view is adopted by Eugène De Faye<sup>4</sup> and, to some extent, R.P.C. Hanson, who nevertheless provided an early and sophisticated analysis of the tripartite hermeneutic.<sup>5</sup>

However, scholars such as Henri de Lubac<sup>6</sup>, Jean Daniélou,<sup>7</sup> and Henri Crouzel,<sup>8</sup> abandoning the strictures of such an approach, began to focus instead on the question of the consistency of Origen's exegetical method – that is to say, not whether Origen was right, according to some historical-critical standard, but whether his theory and his own exegetical practice were consistent with one another. This focus prevailed for much of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, represented in the 1980s and 90s by the work of Karen Jo Torjesen<sup>9</sup> and Rowan A. Greer.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup>De Faye (1926), op. cit., pp. 37–52.

<sup>5</sup>R. Hanson (1959). *Allegory and Event*. Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 246ff.

<sup>6</sup>de Lubac (1950), op. cit. and H. de Lubac (1998). *Medieval Exegesis, The Four Senses of Scripture*. Trans. by M. Sebanc. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

<sup>7</sup>J. Daniélou (1973). *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*. Trans. by J. A. Baker. London: Darton, Longman & Todd.

<sup>8</sup>Crouzel (1989), *The Life and Thought of the First Great Theologian*.

<sup>9</sup>K. J. Torjesen (1986). *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. cf. also K. J. Torjesen (1985). "Body', 'Soul', and 'Spirit' in Origen's Theory of Exegesis". In: *Anglican Theological Review* 67.1, pp. 17–30.

<sup>10</sup>R. A. Greer (1986). "The Christian Bible and Its Interpretation". In: *Early Biblical Interpretation*. Ed. by R. A. Greer and J. L. Kugel. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, pp. 107–208.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, scholarship on Origen's exegetical method has taken on a less polemical and more reflective tone. The work of Peter W. Martens, for example, examines Origen's exegetical hermeneutic through a biographical lens of his life as an exegete and teacher.<sup>11</sup> Morwenna Ludlow's work examines Origen's approach to exegesis and reading in terms of the history of reading and textuality from antiquity to postmodern literary theory.<sup>12</sup> J. Christopher King focusses on Origen's hermeneutics in the context of his nuptial theology.<sup>13</sup>

Most scholarly examinations of Origen's exegetical method focus on *On First Principles* 4, in which Origen considers scripture and its place in Christian theology. There have, however, been attempts to examine other texts on the subject: Elizabeth Dively Lauro argues that Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* is a critically important text for understanding his exegetical method, particularly the psychic sense of scripture. Indeed, Dively Lauro attempts in her work on the psychic sense to clear up a lot of the confusion of previous scholarship over exactly what claims Origen makes about his exegetical hermeneutic. Although she aligns closely with the 20<sup>th</sup> century debates over internal consistency, coming down very squarely in defence of Origen's consistency, she advances the conversation considerably by increasing the range of Origen's texts examined on the question.

Her argument revolves around the psychic sense and its presence in Origen's practical exegesis. According to Dively Lauro, Origen sets forward in his theoretical work the notion that there are three senses of meaning in any given biblical verse – a 'literal' sense, and two 'allegorical' senses. Since Origen frequently only advances *two* separate readings of a passage when it comes to his exegetical practice in the homilies and commentaries, some argue that Origen's scheme was only ever meant as advisory – and that the middle sense, the psychic sense, is the most likely candidate to be the absentee in Origen's actual exegesis.<sup>14</sup> This is taken to its logical conclusion by Karen Jo Torjesen, who argues that Origen's practice takes precedence over his theoretical statements.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, she retroflects this insight onto *On First Principles* and argues that Origen never intended to lay out a separate psychic sense, but rather a sort of alternative flavour of the pneumatic

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<sup>11</sup>Martens (2012), op. cit.

<sup>12</sup>M. Ludlow (2011). "Anatomy: Investigating the Body of Texts in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa". In: *Reading the Church Fathers*. Ed. by S. Douglass and M. Ludlow. Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, pp. 132–153.

<sup>13</sup>J. C. King (2005). *Origen on the Song of Songs as the Spirit of Scripture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Greer (1986), op. cit.

<sup>15</sup>Torjesen (1986), *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen's Exegesis*.

sense – which she takes to be the mystical, and only allegorical sense.

The majority of scholars accept that there are in Origen's theory, if not his practice, three senses. However, what exactly Origen means by 'somatic', 'psychic' and 'pneumatic' is the subject of some debate. Some scholars use the terms 'literal' and 'allegorical', drawing a dividing line between the somatic sense – which is literal – and the psychic and pneumatic senses – which are allegorical. Some scholars divide the psychic and pneumatic senses into the 'moral' and the 'mystical' sense; some, however, read the pneumatic sense as ecclesiological. Mark Edwards takes the somatic sense to be fundamentally concerned with morality, the psychic sense to be concerned with natural philosophy, and the pneumatic sense to be theological and christological, and argues that the senses are related to the classical rhetorical categories of metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche.<sup>16</sup>

To engage with any of these terms and debates requires an understanding of what is taxonomically at stake. In the next section I discuss allegory, typology, literalism, and their complex grammatical and scholarly histories, their relationship to metaphor and text, and how we might unravel the tangle of Origen's exegetical hermeneutic.

A considerable amount of work on Origen's reading of scripture – and on ancient exegesis more generally – has hung around a supposed distinction between allegory and typology.<sup>17</sup> Jean Daniélou first set forward a definition of the two terms purportedly with reference to Origen in 1946.<sup>18</sup> In a later article he gave the following definition:

The object of typology is the research of the correspondences between the events, the institutions, and the persons of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament, which is inaugurated by the coming of Christ and will be consummated by his *parousia*.<sup>19</sup>

Daniélou thus contended that what distinguished typology – which was, in his view, a successful form of nonliteral reading – from allegory was the former's focus on Christ.

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<sup>16</sup>M. J. Edwards (2003). "Origen on Christ, Tropology, and Exegesis". In: *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions*. Ed. by G. Boys-Stones. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>17</sup>A compact and very sensible article by Peter Martens traces the history of this debate in the scholarship on Origen and examines some of the evidence from Origen's own writings. I follow the contours of its argument here; I return to an explicit consideration of Martens' conclusions at p. 147. See P. W. Martens (2008). "Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: the Case of Origen". In: *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16, pp. 283–317.

<sup>18</sup>J. Daniélou (1946). "Traversée de la Mer Rouge et Baptême aux premiers siècles". In: *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 33, pp. 402–30.

<sup>19</sup>J. Daniélou (1951). "Qu'est-ce que la typologie?" In: *L'Ancient Testament et les chrétiens*. Ed. by P. Auvray. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, p. 199.

Nonliteral readings could be ecclesiological, christological, mystical, soteriological or eschatological, but as long as they pointed to Christ they were typological.<sup>20</sup> There were, he argued, two varieties of typology present in the New Testament: Matthean, which looked for figurings of the events of Jesus' life in the Old Testament; and Johannine, which looked for figurings of the 'mysteries' of Christ. In Daniélou's view Origen favoured the Johannine version.

In contrast to typology, allegory, claimed Daniélou, derived from pagan and Jewish traditions of nonliteral readings. According to him, the Alexandrine school followed Philo in interpreting the 'symbolic' sense of scripture as containing meaning about the cosmos, the intelligible world, and the soul. Therefore while Origen engaged in both typological and allegorical readings, the scholar should keep the two very firmly separate.

Henri de Lubac objected to Daniélou's distinction on the grounds that it did not accurately convey the terminology used either in scripture or in the patristic writers, arguing that 'allegory' was a term widely used by patristic writers to refer to Pauline forms of nonliteral reading.<sup>21</sup> Daniélou accepted de Lubac's criticism on the anachronism of the terminology, but maintained that it was a clear and important distinction. The majority of scholars have agreed with Daniélou on this point.

However, as Martens points out, views of what separates allegory from typology have been surprisingly varied.<sup>22</sup> Some have followed Daniélou in the – unfair and arguably rather antisemitic – allegation that allegory is an inferior and 'foreign' influence on Christianity from Jewish exegesis, whereas 'pure' christological typology developed, as it were, internally.

R.P.C. Hanson introduces a different criterion for distinguishing the two, this time based on the appropriateness and similarity in the analogous relationship:

Typology is the interpreting of an event belonging to the present or the recent past as the fulfilment of a similar situation recorded or prophesied in scripture. Allegory is the interpretation of an object or person or a number of objects or persons as in reality meaning some object or person of a later time, with no attempt made to trace a relationship of "similar situation"

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<sup>20</sup>See also Beryl Smalley, who defines typology tightly as an example of when '[the] Old Testament prefigures or foreshadows the New: *omnia in figura contingebant illis*' B. Smalley (1983). *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*. Revised. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup>H. de Lubac (1947). "'Typologie' et 'Allégorisme'". In: *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 34, pp. 180–226.

<sup>22</sup>Martens (2008), op. cit.

between them.<sup>23</sup>

Allegory was, then, for Hanson, inferior not because of its origins, but in its structural functioning – its connections were weak and arbitrary.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, Walter Bienert argued, like Daniélou, that the distinction lay in the differing origins of allegory and typology, although the actual origins were, in his view, rather different from Daniélou's suggestions: allegory came from the pagan Stoic tradition, whereas typology came from Jewish messianic thought. But for Bienert there was a further distinction:

Allegory is the vertical manner of interpretation, since it establishes unhistorical-timeless relationships between images (allegories) and their spiritual archetypes; typology, in contrast, is the horizontal manner of interpretation, since it transports the historical events of the past into the present and future.<sup>25</sup>

On this interpretation, the primary distinction in the functioning of allegory and typology is their approach to time.<sup>26</sup> Frances Young, who also puts typology above allegory, claims a different set of origins of the divergence, associating typology with Antiochene exegesis and allegory with Alexandrian. Young distinguishes between typological interpretations, which she claims '[require] a mirroring of the supposed deeper meaning in the text taken as a coherent whole', whereas allegorical readings split off individual words or phrases and 'arbitrarily [refer] to other realities'. In doing so, claims Young, they '[destroy] the narrative, or surface, coherence of the text.'<sup>27</sup>

In his article, Martens points out that many of these scholarly definitions of allegory and typology do not accord very well at all with Origen's own usage. In particular, while most scholars posit a hierarchical dichotomy with typology as strictly superior to allegory, no such distinction shows up in Origen's work.<sup>28</sup> Martens is too polite to speculate on the cause of this discrepancy, but Edwards, who also favours a non-dichotomous model, suggests that it may be more to do with scholars' own views of scriptural exegesis

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<sup>23</sup>Hanson (1959), op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>24</sup>Martens notes that the conjunction 'and' in the title of *Allegory and Event* is meant to convey a certain opposition between the two: for Hanson, allegory is *not* linked as coherently to event as typology is. cf. Martens (2008), op. cit., p. 289.

<sup>25</sup>W. Bienert (1972). "Allegoria" und "Anagoge" bei Didymos dem Blinden von Alexandria. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, p. 42. Translation Martens'.

<sup>26</sup>See also R. S. Edgecombe (1995). "Typology and After: A Taxonomy of Variants". In: *Religion & Literature* 27.2, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup>F. M. Young (1997). *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Chirstendom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 162.

<sup>28</sup>Martens (2008), op. cit.

than Origen's.<sup>29</sup> It is at the very least notable that scholars often seem *embarrassed* by Origen's views on allegory, a sentiment that contains a kind of value judgement which may be connected to his condemnation – and is, in any case, a barrier to understanding him on his own terms.

While Martens does not scrutinise the very notion of a hierarchy of 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' readings of scripture, literary critics tend to give much less loaded judgements in their definitions. The well-worn definitions of allegory and typology according to Northrop Frye and Erich Auerbach, for example, both focus primarily on the temporal components and structures of typology rather than on their supposed differing theological merits.<sup>30</sup>

## II Hermeneutics and Exegesis

The term ἀλληγορία originates in the Greek philological vocabulary to describe the practices of the grammarians. Allegorising was understood as a tool in the grammarian's toolbox for the explication of passages, alongside detail-focussed technical practices such as textual criticism (διορθωτικόν), investigation of the meaning of words (γλωσσηματικόν) and metrical analysis (μετρικόν), but also alongside other forms of literary and formal criticism, including historical analysis (ιστορικόν) and aesthetic and moral evaluation (κρίσις ποιημάτων).<sup>31</sup> Allegory in the Greek tradition was always part of a wider set of interpretive tools and layers of reading for making sense of a text; in its technical sense allegory was a category of the Hellenistic grammarians.

Typology is, on the other hand, an easier term to define. In Romans 5:14, Paul refers to Adam as a 'type' (τύπος) of the one who was to come, Christ. Many early Christians also took Paul's words in Colossians 2:16–17 of the 'shadow of things to come' (σκιὰ τῶν

<sup>29</sup>Thus Edwards: 'For C. H. Dodd, an incomparable exponent of typology in the New Testament..., allegory is merely the *ignis fatuus* of the Catholic tradition, and therefore casts no spell upon the natural and unprejudiced perceptions of a twentieth-century British Nonconformist.' (Edwards (2003), op. cit., p. 236).

<sup>30</sup>Northrop Frye defines typology as 'a figure of speech that moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the future' (N. Frye (1982). *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York, NY: Harcourt, p. 81). Erich Auerbach claims that in a typological reading, the 'figural structure preserves the historical event while interpreting it as revelation; and must preserve it in order to interpret it' (E. Auerbach (1959). *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature: Six Essays*. New York, NY: Meridian, p. 68).

<sup>31</sup>Martens (2012), *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, p. 42. For studies of the methods of the grammarians, see R. A. Kaster (1988). *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press and T. Morgan (1998). *Literate Education in the Roman and Hellenistic Worlds*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

μελλόντων)<sup>32</sup> as a programmatic statement. In addition, the term ‘antitype’, sometimes used to denote the thing signified by the type, is also attested in the NT (1 Peter 3:21) in reference to baptism.<sup>33</sup> Thus among early Christian writers it became common to read passages of the OT or Jewish cultural practices or paraphernalia as ‘types’ for their Christian ‘antitypes’. Typological reading usually, but not always, focusses around the identification of an OT or Jewish ‘type’ who or which symbolically represents Christ.<sup>34</sup>

Aside from terminology, the systematic figurative reading of texts for philosophical reasons has an important history of its own. In particular, many ancient writers practised allegorical reading of Homer. Theagenes of Rhegium, a writer of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, was often credited by the ancients with the invention of such a practice,<sup>35</sup> although scholars have argued that it could be even older.<sup>36</sup> Other early allegorists include Pherecydes of Samos, and, in the scientific tradition, Anaxagoras, Metrodorus and Democritus. Plato refers to the practice in the *Republic*, when he speaks of those who read Homer ‘allegorically’ (ἐν ὑπονοίᾳς).<sup>37</sup> Among Platonist and Pythagorean thinkers, the journey of Odysseus was sometimes read as a moral allegory for the progress of the soul.<sup>38</sup> Origen himself was aware of the tradition of Pythagorean allegorical exegesis of Homer.<sup>39</sup>

What is less clear to us is *why* ancient writers began practising allegorical exegesis. Some scholars understand allegorical exegesis of Homer to be motivated by a desire to rehabilitate Homer’s impious portrayal of the gods by showing that apparent misbehaviour on their part is actually to be understood as a sign for something else, not as a literal account.<sup>40</sup> A Homeric scholion that mentions this as the motive of Theagenes

<sup>32</sup>SBLGNT.

<sup>33</sup>The type in question is the survival of Noah’s family in the ark pericope.

<sup>34</sup>Origen uses the term type reasonably frequently. e.g. ‘One should not conceal the burning, intelligible lamp of the soul, but place it on a lampstand. Moses “placed” a type of this lampstand “in the tent of witness”’ (*Homilies on Luke* fragment 121).

<sup>35</sup>See Theagenes 8 fragment 2 (Diels-Kranz).

<sup>36</sup>See J. Pépin (1958). *Mythe et Allégorie: Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes*. Paris: Éditions Montaigne, M. Détienne (1962). *Homère, Hésiode et Pythagore: Poésie et philosophie dans le pythagorisme ancien*. Brussels: Latomus, R. Lambertson (1986). *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, F. Buffière (1956). *Les Mythes d’Homère et la pensée grecque*. Paris: Belles Lettres.

<sup>37</sup>*Republic* 378D.

<sup>38</sup>cf. e.g. Porphyry *On the Cave of the Nymphs* which is one of the most elaborate allegorical readings of *Odyssey* 13. For its wider context, see M. J. Edwards (1996). “Porphyry’s ‘Cave of the Nymphs’ and the Gnostic Controversy”. In: *Hermes* 124.1, pp. 88–100.

<sup>39</sup>cf. *Against Celsus* 7.7.

<sup>40</sup>See Lambertson (1986), op. cit.

certainly points in this direction.<sup>41</sup> However, George Boys-Stones, in his account of later Stoic allegorical reading, warns that we should not think of this as the uniform motivation of ancient allegorists. Nor, he argues, should we think that ancient allegorists viewed the Homeric poems as quasi-scriptural, with all the connotations of divine infallibility that such a notion carries. In his view, most philosophical allegorists ‘believed that Homer was a philosopher’ and that ‘his interests were their interests’, and thus they sought ways of reading him which were in concordance with their own philosophical understanding of the world.<sup>42</sup>

As Boys-Stones has argued, the Stoic school, in particular, had a huge influence on Origen and on early Christian practices of allegorical exegesis more generally. We know for example that one of the authors Origen read in some detail was Lucius Annaeus Cornutus:

[Origen] was always consorting with Plato, and was conversant with the writings of Numenius, Cronius, Apollophanes, Longinus, Moderatus, Nicomachus, and the distinguished men among the Pythagoreans; and he made use of the books of Chaeremon the Stoic and Cornutus, from which he learnt the allegorical mode of the Greek mysteries and applied this to Jewish writings.<sup>43</sup>

Boys-Stones argues that Cornutus, a first century Stoic figure whose theoretical work on the allegorical interpretation of Greek mythology was highly influential, was part of an established Stoic allegorical tradition. This tradition was quite specifically motivated by the belief that the very earliest human beings had a highly advanced philosophy, traces of which remained – whether accidentally or through deliberate concealment<sup>44</sup> – in traditional mythology, both of the Greeks and other cultures of great antiquity. Whether the Jews were included in this designation is a complicated matter.<sup>45</sup>

While Jewish and later Christian exegetes did, of course, have the principle of scriptural infallibility to contend with in their allegorical readings, it is worth bearing in mind

<sup>41</sup>cf. Boys-Stones (2001), op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 32ff.

<sup>43</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.19.8.

<sup>44</sup>Opinions vary among Stoic thinkers. cf. Chapters 2 and 3 of Boys-Stones (2001), op. cit.

<sup>45</sup>Boys-Stones makes the case that Chaeremon, another Stoic philosopher on Origen’s reading list, while often quite sympathetic to the Jews, took the view that the Jews were Egyptian in origin. This view, which seems to be quite common, encompasses both a version that claims that Jews were ethnically Egyptian, and another version that while they might have been ethnically distinct, theologically their beliefs were a derivative – and thus corrupt – version of Egyptian religion. This view is shared by Apion, the target of Josephus’ apologetic work *Against Apion*. See *ibid.*, pp. 81–82.

the diversity of possible motivations and types of allegorical reading. What is, however, clear, is that Christian thinkers, instructed in these approaches to allegory as part of their participation in traditional intellectual curricula, applied them to examination specifically of scripture from a very early period.<sup>46</sup> Owing to the twin influences of Philo and the grammarians, this fondness for the use of allegorical readings was particularly associated with Alexandria in the first centuries of Christian thought. Following his Alexandrian predecessors Philo and Clement, Origen advised a particularly ambitious educational syllabus for any would-be exegete: knowledge of geometry, music, rhetoric, astronomy and philosophy would all be desirable, alongside an extensive training in grammar and philology – and in particular, familiarity with the process of constructing allegorical readings.<sup>47</sup>

Yet despite the widespread prevalence of traditional Greek practices of allegorical reading among Christian exegetes, many felt that allegory should be reserved as an occasional tool for the resolution of particularly intractable passages. Others, like Origen, applied allegory more freely, seeing it as a type of reading that could and should be used frequently alongside other types of reading. In the Origenist crises, these methodological distinctions came to the forefront, with the sphere of disagreement over whether allegory should be seen as a routine part of the exegete's practice, or a last-resort option. In the course of these discussions, some Origenists argued that allegorical readings were superior to literal readings, and were a sphere for the exercise of 'freewheeling' creativity by the exegete.<sup>48</sup>

The first Origenist controversy broke out in monastic Egypt in the 390s, among two neighbouring communities of monks, the Nitrians, and the Scetans. The Nitrians, fond of allegory, found themselves in conflict with the Scetans, who preferred a more literal approach to scripture.<sup>49</sup> Epiphanius, at the time the overseer of the Palestinian monasteries, waded into the conflict as a fierce opponent of the Nitrians and their 'Origenist' allegorising; his enemy John, bishop of Jerusalem, countered with a diatribe against the errors of an approach to exegesis that is too literal. Other figures in the debate include Origen's translators, Jerome and Rufinus. Formerly friends, the two men became enemies when Jerome renounced his support of Origen under pressure from anti-Origenist

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<sup>46</sup>The texts of the Apostolic Fathers (particularly the the *Shepherd of Hermas*) are rich in allegorical understandings. See, for example, A. Tagliabue (2017). "Learning from Allegorical Images in the Book of Visions of The Shepherd of Hermas". In: *Arethusa* 50.2, pp. 221–225.

<sup>47</sup>cf. Introduction p. 20.

<sup>48</sup>de Lubac (1998), *Medieval Exegesis, The Four Senses of Scripture*, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup>For a summary of the debates, see Clark (1992), op. cit.

monks. Another former Origenist, Theophilus of Alexandria, ended up being a driving force in the condemnation of Origen's works at the Council of Alexandria in 400.

A second Origenist controversy broke out in the first decades of the sixth century, again among monks. This time, the monks of Jerusalem, perhaps under the influence of the pantheist Stephen Bar-Sudaili, began supporting Origenist allegorising. They were supported by the bishops of Ancyra and Caesarea, Askidas and Domitian. Finally, the controversy reached the emperor Justinian, who drafted a tract against Origen. Although the politics of Justinianic Constantinople in the 550s certainly cannot be ignored as a major driver of this move,<sup>50</sup> the questions that the controversies had opened about exegesis and allegory cast their shadow over the Church for many centuries to come.

Throughout the Origenist controversies, participants on both sides exhibit an anxiety about the proper mix of allegorical and literalistic interpretation of scripture, and what this means. To nearly all parties it was clear that some passages – for example, the Ten Commandments – could be taken straightforwardly and literally as morally edifying requirements; similarly, to nearly all participants it was clear that scripture contains at least *some* symbolic mysteries. Almost all exegetes, for example, agreed that there must have been *some* symbolic resonances to the tabernacle and its description. The sphere of conflict was not therefore over whether allegory was ever appropriate, but over what exactly it encompassed, and the degree to which it should be used. To understand Origen's own position, let us turn to *On First Principles*.

### III Origen's Tripartite Hermeneutic of Exegesis

ὁ μὲν ἀπλούστερος οἰκοδομῆται ἀπὸ τῆς οἰοῦναι σαρκὸς τῆς γραφῆς, οὕτως ὀνομαζόντων ἡμῶν τὴν πρόχειρον ἐκδοχὴν, ὁ δὲ ἐπὶ ποσὸν ἀναβεβηκῶς ἀπὸ τῆς ὡσπερὶ ψυχῆς αὐτῆς, ὁ δὲ τέλειος... ἀπὸ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ νόμου, σκιὰν περιέχοντος τῶν μελλόντων ἀγαθῶν. ὡσπερ γὰρ ὁ ἄνθρωπος συνέστηκεν ἐκ σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ ἡ οἰκονομηθεῖσα ὑπὸ θεοῦ εἰς ἀνθρώπων σωτηρίαν δοθῆναι γραφή.<sup>51</sup>

The simple person may be edified by the flesh of the scripture, as it were,

<sup>50</sup>For discussion of Justinian's relationship to the Church, particularly to the Bishop of Rome, as context for Origen's condemnation, see J. Meyendorff (1968). "Justinian, the Empire and the Church". In: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 22, pp. 43–60.

<sup>51</sup>*On First Principles* 4.2.4. Quotations in this chapter of *First Principles* are from Origen (2017b). *On First Principles*. Ed. by J. Behr. Vol. 2. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

since that is what we may call the straightforward reading; the man who has advanced some way may be edified by the so-called soul of scripture; and the person who is perfect...<sup>52</sup>... may be edified by the spiritual law which has “a shadow of the good things to come.”<sup>53</sup> For just as a human being consists of body, soul and spirit, so in the same way does scripture, which has been prepared by God to be given for human salvation.

In this metaphor, Origen uses the Pauline notion of the tripartite human person to explain the tripartite nature of scripture.<sup>54</sup> The somatic sense acts as the body of scripture, being its outward part, the part that is visible and obvious. The psychic sense is the soul of scripture, the invisible and hidden part concerned with the will, morality, and virtue; to access the soul / the psychic sense, one must engage with the person / scripture, and understand that it lies behind or inside the body. The final sense, the pneumatic sense, is the spirit of scripture. This part, which, like the soul, is also hidden and invisible, is the divine part, the image of God in the person – and thus it is concerned with the recognition of deep mystic truths.

This metaphor, as mentioned, is used in many scholarly analyses not just as a microcosm of the tripartite structure, but the total explanation of it.<sup>55</sup> Yet evidently this is far too limited an approach – like any metaphor, the person metaphor is not a perfect mapping. The metaphor comes in Chapter 4 of *On First Principles* as part of a lengthy discussion of the pitfalls of wrong exegesis and how to avoid them. Since it is generally agreed in the scholarship that *On First Principles* was most likely written for an audience of presbyters and other Church instructors, the text and its method of constructing arguments often presuppose a deep familiarity with scriptural examples.<sup>56</sup>

To understand the subtleties of Origen's hermeneutic, we cannot rely just on the metaphor, but should examine the whole text in detail. The first chapter of *On First Principles* 4, on the divine inspiration of scripture, we can set aside for the moment.<sup>57</sup> It is with the second chapter, on the dangers of false exegesis, that we shall begin.

Origen starts the chapter with a warning: those who read scripture wrongly end up

<sup>52</sup>According to the definition of 1 Corinthians 2:6–7.

<sup>53</sup>cf. Hebrews 10:1.

<sup>54</sup>1 Thessalonians 5:23.

<sup>55</sup>De Lubac, cautioning against the narrowness of such an approach, censoriously mentions a whole list of other scholars who make this mistake, including, most notably, Jean Daniélou. de Lubac (1998), op. cit., p. 144. See also Dively Lauro (2005), op. cit., pp. 46–47.

<sup>56</sup>cf. p. 33.

<sup>57</sup>I return to this chapter in Chapter 8, p. 257ff.

falling into difficulties. His first and direst warning is that the Jewish exegetical method is so overly literal – particularly concerning prophecies – that Jews refuse to acknowledge Christ as Saviour. Although they believe they are ‘keeping closely to the language of the prophecies’,<sup>58</sup> Origen implies that this means they are failing to understand the wider sense of these prophecies.

Therefore, says Origen, the Jews refuse to acknowledge the fulfilment in Christ of OT prophecies concerning the release of captives,<sup>59</sup> the building of the city of God,<sup>60</sup> the cutting off the chariots of Ephraim,<sup>61</sup> or the eating of curds and honey.<sup>62</sup> All of these prophecies are regularly used by Christian exegetes as textbook examples of the fulfilment of OT prophecies in Christ.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, because the Jews have not literally seen the wolf feed with the lamb,<sup>64</sup> they argue that the time of the Messiah has not yet come – and therefore that Christ cannot be the Messiah.

Origen then rebuts various incorrect readings of scripture made by those he refers to as heretics; in large part this passage refers to the Marcionites, and I will return to it in Chapter 8.<sup>65</sup> What is of interest for our purposes here is Origen’s notion of what ties together both Jewish and Marcionite readings of scripture: that they are ‘according to the letter’.<sup>66</sup> Having thus established the various pitfalls of literalistic scriptural reading, Origen begins to frame the problem of approaching correct exegesis. To do so, he spends some time on the difficulties of scripture.

Origen begins to explain the obscurity of scripture by saying that it is apparent to everyone that there are mysteries contained in scripture.<sup>67</sup> Some instances of this are

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<sup>58</sup>*On First Principles* 4.2.1.

<sup>59</sup>Isaiah 61:1: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, / because the Lord has anointed me; / he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, / to bind up the brokenhearted, / to proclaim liberty to the captives, / and release to the prisoners.”

<sup>60</sup>Psalms 46:64: “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, / the holy habitation of the Most High.” cf. also Ezra 48:15ff: “In the middle of it shall be the city; and these shall be its dimensions...” etc.

<sup>61</sup>Zechariah 9:10: “He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim / and the war-horse from Jerusalem; / and the battle bow shall be cut off, / and he shall command peace to the nations; / his dominion shall be from sea to sea, / and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>62</sup>Isaiah 7:15: “He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.”

<sup>63</sup>e.g. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 49ff.

<sup>64</sup>Isaiah 11:6–7: “The wolf shall live with the lamb, / the leopard shall lie down with the kid, / the calf and the lion and the fatling together, / and a little child shall lead them. / The cow and the bear shall graze, / their young shall lie down together; / and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”

<sup>65</sup>cf. pp. 244–249.

<sup>66</sup>*On First Principles* 4.2.2.

<sup>67</sup>*On First Principles* 4.2.2.

obvious – as noted above, everyone, for example, knows that the tabernacle is an allegory of something.<sup>68</sup> But some examples are extremely problematic; it is not at all easy, for example, to explain the incestuous relationship of Lot with his daughters,<sup>69</sup> the two wives of Abraham,<sup>70</sup> the two sisters married to Jacob,<sup>71</sup> or his two handmaids who bore his children.<sup>72</sup> All of these behaviours are apparently contrary to the Law and the teachings of Christ; their significance is not easy to understand.

Origen then notes that although prophecies often seem to be the most obscure part of scripture, even the Gospels, because they are the ‘mind of Christ’,<sup>73</sup> are not exactly clear. Similarly, Revelation poses its own set of problems, and while the letters of Paul are on the whole clearer, there are still some notable difficulties.

It is at this point, when he has set out these considerable problems, that Origen introduces the metaphor of the tripartite human. By way of introduction, he proposes that we should follow the advice of Solomon in Proverbs 22:20–21<sup>74</sup> and take a ‘threefold’ approach to scripture. In order to explain the metaphor further, he adduces a somewhat complicated example from *The Shepherd of Hermas* which explains that different teachers may and can progressively reveal different senses of a text to their students according to when the student is ready.

The tripartite human metaphor, often quoted in isolation, actually fits therefore into a specific rhetorical sequence in which it directly follows a framing of Solomonic authority – that is, the idea that scripture proposes its own method of exegesis. It is also followed immediately by an example that is centrally focussed on how the tripartite hermeneutic plays a role in the pedagogical process. It is clear from Origen’s very presentation that the metaphor of the tripartite human is meant only to be one illustration among many

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<sup>68</sup>cf. Exodus 25:1ff.

<sup>69</sup>cf. Genesis 19:30. I discuss this case at p. 184.

<sup>70</sup>cf. Genesis 16:1ff.

<sup>71</sup>cf. Genesis 29:21ff.

<sup>72</sup>cf. Genesis 30:1–13.

<sup>73</sup>*On First Principles* 4.2.3.

<sup>74</sup>This is a problematic verse. The Septuagint uncomplicatedly has ‘threefold’ (τρισσῶς) in all three of the major codices: Siniaticus, Alexandrinus, and Vaticanus. The Targum also takes this reading. But in the Masoretic text, the word is uncertain. Other Hebrew recensions do not include this word. The KJV has simply “Have not I written to thee excellent things / In counsels and knowledge,” (defended in John Gill’s *Exposition of the Old Testament* with reference to rabbinic scholarship). The NRSV has “Have I not written for you thirty sayings / of admonition and knowledge,” declaring that Solomon has not written in a threefold way, but has written thirty proverbs; this is inconvenient, given that there are actually 31 proverbs in Proverbs. Other Greek texts, including Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus all have ‘threefold’. Given the unity of the Greek witnesses and the Targum, I am inclined to argue that the problem hardly matters: it is clear that even if Origen was aware of other possible Hebrew readings, he would almost certainly have taken the Septuagint text, and thus the reading ‘threefold’, as authoritative.

for the flexibility and breadth of his tripartite hermeneutic of exegesis.

In the following sections of the chapter, Origen's aim is to clarify the exact differences between the senses, focussing in particular on the features of the pneumatic sense.<sup>75</sup> To do so, he begins with an attempt to demarcate exactly the difference between the psychic and pneumatic readings. He clarifies with examples. The example for psychic reading is 1 Corinthians 9:9–10, an exegesis of Deuteronomy 25:4, in which Paul explains the command “not [to] muzzle the ox that treads out the corn”. Paul explains that it is written for our sake, “because he that ploughs ought to plough in hope, and he that threshes, to thresh in hope of partaking.” Although Origen does not provide further gloss to this, he appears to be setting it forward as a simple moral lesson about exploitation of labour – that is, he is saying that the psychic reading guides us towards right behaviour.

Origen's explanation of the pneumatic reading, on the other hand, uses a patchwork of scriptural citations to try and convey the idea of the ‘shadow’ of things to come. This type of reading, says Origen, is frequently mentioned by Paul: most notably in 1 Corinthians 10:11, when Paul explains some narratives from Exodus and Numbers as having happened “figuratively” (τύποι<sup>76</sup>), and “for our sake”. Origen also explains that Paul is summing up the object of spiritual readings in 1 Corinthians 10:4: “They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ”. This and other texts therefore point, in Origen's view, to the ultimate truth that the object of any spiritual reading of scripture is Christ.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, by citing Paul so regularly, especially passages where Paul is performing his own exegesis of the OT, Origen is building the case that scripture itself gives us the methodological key to right exegesis – that is to say, he is following up his formulation that we should follow Solomon's prescription of taking a ‘threefold’ approach.

In the next sections, Origen moves from the demarcation of the form of the different senses, and instead explains why they are as they are – the motivations and concerns of the Holy Spirit in composing scripture. This motivation is, according to Origen, primarily to enlighten the ‘servants of truth’, the prophets and apostles: the Spirit's aim was ‘pre-eminently concerned with the unspeakable mysteries connected with the affairs

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<sup>75</sup>This focus on the pneumatic sense is sometimes taken to constitute a tacit admission of the unimportance of the psychic sense. Dively Lauro reads this feature quite differently, arguing that the speed and ease with which Origen passes over his examples illustrating the psychic sense is an indication that he felt his audience of teachers would be more comfortable with it and its scope than with the more complex and doctrinally fraught pneumatic sense. Dively Lauro (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>76</sup>Stephanus. SBLGNT has τυπικῶς.

<sup>77</sup>See also Hebrews 8:5 (about Exodus 25:40), Galatians 4:21–24, Colossians 2:16–17.

of... souls... [and] to the doctrines concerning God and his only-begotten Son'.<sup>78</sup>

Thus it is clear that Origen considers the psychic and pneumatic senses to be more important than the somatic. Of the two nonliteral senses, I follow Dively Lauro<sup>79</sup> in reading Origen to consider the pneumatic sense the more important. Indeed, to clarify its importance, in the next section,<sup>80</sup> Origen lists the subjects illuminated by spiritual readings (in addition to Christ). These include: rational creatures (both nearer-divine and fallen); the causes of the fall of some creatures; the differences between souls and how those differences arose; what the world is and why it exists; why evil is so widespread, and if it is elsewhere other than earth?

Clearly this is an enormous sphere – even wider than the psychic sphere, which primarily focusses on the great moral battle of good and evil. For example, while the psychic sense tells us what we must do to combat evil, the pneumatic sense accounts for evil in metaphysical terms by engaging in why and how it exists.

Finally, Origen accounts for the purpose of the somatic sense, which was for the sake of 'those who were unable to endure the burden of investigating matters of such importance':<sup>81</sup>

κρύψαι τὸν περὶ τῶν προειρημένων λόγον ἐν λέξεσιν ἐμφαινούσαις διήγησιν περιέχουσαν ἀπαγγελίαν τὴν περὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν δημιουργημάτων καὶ ἀνθρώπου κτίσεως καὶ τῶν ἐκ τῶν πρώτων κατὰ διαδοχὴν μέχρι πολλῶν γεγενημένων, καὶ ἄλλαις ἱστορίαις ἀπαγγελλούσαις δικαίων πράξεις καὶ τῶν αὐτῶν τούτων ποτὲ γενομένα ἁμαρτήματα ὡς ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἀνόμων καὶ ἀσεβῶν πονηρίας καὶ ἀκολασίας καὶ πλεονεξίας.<sup>82</sup>

To hide the truth of the previously-mentioned matters in words forming a narrative that contained an account of the visible creation, of the making of human beings, and of the successive generations of the first people until that time when they became numerous; and also in other stories, which detail the acts of the righteous and the sins that these same people occasionally committed on account of being only human, and also the evil, perverted and greedy deeds done by criminal and unholy people.

<sup>78</sup> *On First Principles* 4.2.7.

<sup>79</sup> Dively Lauro (2005), *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> *On First Principles* 4.2.7.

<sup>81</sup> τοὺς μὴ δυναμένους τὸν κάματον ἐνεγκεῖν ὑπὲρ τοῦ τὰ τηλικαῦτα εὐρεῖν. *On First Principles* 4.2.8.

<sup>82</sup> *On First Principles* 4.2.8.

Thus, says Origen, by these tales of war and other human events, certain ‘secret’ truths are revealed to those who are capable of discovering them; Origen seems to conceptualise the somatic sense as primarily acting as a vehicle for the deeper senses. This is very much in accord with his statements on the relationships of the three senses in his *Homilies on Numbers*: in particular, he uses the analogy of an almond, in which the somatic sense is the husk of the almond; it plays the role of defending and containing the deeper truth of the psychic and pneumatic senses – as well as, in its obstructiveness, providing a block to those who are not willing to engage in a struggle to receive the nonliteral senses.<sup>83</sup>

From this summary, it may seem as if the scholarly confusion over Origen’s tripartite hermeneutic of exegesis is unwarranted – the three senses seem fairly clearly set out. But this notion, from the metaphor of the almond, of exegesis as an essentially moral task that is blocked by the obstruction of the somatic sense, is developed at one point by Origen in the chapter; sometimes, claims Origen, there is an even greater obstruction than the distraction of the somatic sense. Sometimes, there are occasions when the obvious reading of a passage is so patently impossible that the exegete is forced to concede that there are not three senses, but only two. It is, in essence, from this feature that the scholarly confusion arises.

## i Stumbling Blocks

[Christ]... who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.<sup>84</sup>

Paul’s antithesis between the letter and the spirit is a seminal distinction in much of Christian exegetical understanding. It is a distinction that Origen makes a great deal of in his scriptural hermeneutics – particularly as a rhetorical tool for criticising Jewish or heretical overreliance on literalistic interpretations. The criticism of Jewish reading in this way is, of course, entirely in line with Paul’s use.

But the antithesis, and its presence in Origen’s exegetical writings, has been a source of confusion from his own time to ours. The Pauline antithesis is strictly between two types of reading, literal and nonliteral reading. For some scholars, including Torjesen,<sup>85</sup> this is evidence that Origen only ever conceived of a bipartite exegesis. Others, taking

<sup>83</sup>*Homilies in Numbers* 9, in which Origen discusses the sprouting of almonds on Aaron’s staff in Numbers 17:1–5. See Dively Lauro (2005), op. cit., 109ff for an analysis of Origen’s use of this example. The image originates with Philo (cf. *Life of Moses* 2.34.182).

<sup>84</sup>2 Corinthians 3:6.

<sup>85</sup>Torjesen (1986), op. cit.

a less extreme line, argue that in those cases where Origen does not explicitly provide a tripartite reading of a passage, he is actually really thinking in terms of a simple literal versus nonliteral bipartite exegesis.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, there is a passage in *On First Principles* 4.2 in which Origen does put forward the idea that in some passages there are only two possible readings. But this is categorically not a case of a literal versus nonliteral split – and, I would like to argue, is instead something far more subtle.

In *On First Principles* 4.2.5, Origen discusses what an exegete should do when there is no obvious bodily sense. That this is possible, says Origen, can be proved from scripture itself: in John 2:6, there are six stone water jars set aside for the Jewish ritual purifications, some holding two firkins, and some three.<sup>87</sup> Origen takes these differing capacities of the jars to mean that some passages of scripture have a twofold meaning ('the psychic and the pneumatic meaning'), and some have three ('in addition to those before mentioned, the somatic sense as well').<sup>88</sup>

What does this mean? Clearly every verse has *some* literal meaning – even if not more than as a collection of words on a page. But not every passage has a somatic meaning. Although it is never stated directly, Dively Lauro understands the text to specify that a verse must be morally enlightening in its straightforward meaning in order to have a somatic reading. Any verse that is morally problematic or just plain nonsensical is a verse without a somatic reading.<sup>89</sup> In these cases, Origen argues that we must seek psychic and pneumatic meanings instead.

As he did with the psychic and pneumatic senses as a whole, Origen accounts for the purpose of this feature. We would, Origen claims, be unaware that there was a deeper meaning of scripture if all somatic readings were clear and easily discernible. The reason they are not, he says, is that God was aware of this and arranged for us 'stumbling-blocks' (σκάνδαλα) – that is, passages of scripture that do not make sense in a straightforward somatic sense. This is, says Origen, 'in order that we may not be completely drawn away by the sheer attractiveness of the language' and, in doing so, miss the point of scripture. 'Stumbling blocks' are, to borrow a trope from computing, a feature and not a bug.

Origen's explanation for the purpose and workings of the stumbling-blocks is as follows. Behind every normal tripartite verse the Logos<sup>90</sup> has carried out a decision process:

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<sup>86</sup>e.g. Greer (1986), op. cit.

<sup>87</sup>Approximately 160 pints and 240 pints respectively.

<sup>88</sup>*On First Principles* 4.2.5.

<sup>89</sup>Dively Lauro (2005), op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>90</sup>I return in Chapter 8 to whether Origen means Christ or the Holy Spirit.

χρῆ δὲ καὶ τοῦτο εἰδέναι, ὅτι τοῦ προηγουμένου σκοποῦ τυγχάνοντος τὸν ἐν τοῖς πνευματικοῖς εἰρμὸν ἀπαγγεῖλαι γεγενημένοις καὶ πρακτέοις, ὅπου μὲν εὔρε γένομενα κατὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν ὁ λόγος ἐφαρμόσαι δυνάμενα τοῖς μυστικοῖς τούτοις, ἐχρήσατο ἀποκρύπτων ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν τὸν βαθύτερον νοῦν.<sup>91</sup>

It is necessary to see that because the main aim was to announce the connection between spiritual things, those that have happened and those in the future, whenever the Logos found historical events that could be harmonised with the mystical events, he used them, concealing from the many their deeper sense.

But for those that are stumbling blocks, something more complicated has happened:

ὅπου δὲ ἐν τῇ διηγήσει τῆς περὶ τῶν νοητῶν ἀκολουθίας οὐχ εἶπετο ἢ τῶνδέ τινων πρᾶξις ἢ προαναγεγραμμένη διὰ τὰ μυστικώτερα, συνύφηεν ἢ γραφή τῇ ἱστορίᾳ τὸ μὴ γένομενον, πῆ μὲν μηδὲ δυνατὸν γενέσθαι, πῆ δὲ δυνατὸν μὲν γενέσθαι, οὐ μὴν γεγενημένον. καὶ ἔσθ' ὅτε μὲν ὀλίγαί λέξεις παρεμβλημένα εἰσὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα οὐκ ἀληθεύομενα, ἔσθ' ὅτε δὲ πλείονες.<sup>92</sup>

But wherever in the story the doing of a certain deed, which had been written down before on account of its more mystical sense, did not follow the order of intellectual truths, the scripture wove into the narrative something that did not happen – sometimes something that could not happen, and sometimes something that could happen but actually did not. And sometimes a few words are inserted which in the bodily sense are not true, and sometimes more than just a few.

I take this to mean the following: some historical events recorded in scripture are conducive to both somatic and nonliteral readings (psychic and pneumatic) – and these events are left as they are, truly accounted for. However, sometimes, there are psychic or pneumatic truths that need to be conveyed through scripture at a particular point, and there is no historical event that provides a suitable basis for the allegory. In these cases, the Logos has invented false historical events – sometimes quite implausible ones – and used them as allegories for the truths that he wanted to convey. Morally advanced

<sup>91</sup>*On First Principles* 4.2.9.

<sup>92</sup>*On First Principles* 4.2.9.

human readers should be sufficiently attuned to how somatic, psychic, and pneumatic readings work that they are able to spot these false histories – and understand their purpose as the vehicles of important allegories.

Origen alleges that this happens also in the Law, when some precepts are obviously not useful or morally legitimate; these precepts, he says, are signals that there is something that lies beneath them. I will return, in Chapter 8, to the fundamental anti-Marcionism of this entire formulation – but for now it is worth remarking that the very notion of stumbling-blocks is at once a deep reflection on the epistemology of exegesis, and a riposte to the central Marcionite tenet that the Patriarchs and even the God of the OT commit patently evil acts; under Origen's notion of stumbling-blocks, apparently evil behaviour is a spur to examine deeper meaning, not an excuse to turn away from scripture.

As Dively Lauro convincingly argues, in Origen's exegetical theory it is the action of the person's moral understanding – their active engagement with the psychic sense of scripture – that allows them to begin to access deep pneumatic truths.<sup>93</sup> Origen thus portrays this engagement as a lifelong struggle of the human soul to yoke itself to the divine spirit and resist the temptations of the fleshly or mundane.

There is one text more than any other, in Origen's thought, that constitutes a stumbling-block. This is not merely a verse of scripture, but a whole book – the Song of Songs. Additionally, so far, we have only seen Origen's tripartite hermeneutic as applicable to passages of text – specifically, to scripture. Were the passages in *On First Principles* 4 and the *Homilies* on Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers the only explications of Origen's exegetical hermeneutic, we could not be sure that the object of exegesis could be anything outside the written or spoken text. But there is another text that gives us grounds to believe that Origen thought in terms of this tripartite distinction for objects other than purely textual or scriptural passages.

## ii *Commentary on Song of Songs*

*sed et alia multa in scripturis divinis invenies, quae ordinem hunc, quem in libellis Solomonis contineri diximus, secundum hanc eandem formam designant, sed ea nunc nobis prosequi aliud in manu habentibus longum est.*<sup>94</sup>

You will find that this order, which I have pointed out in the books of

<sup>93</sup>cf. Dively Lauro (2005), op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>94</sup>*Commentary on the Song of Songs* pr.3.

Solomon, appears in the exact same pattern in many other things in the divine scriptures too. But it would take too long for us to follow these examples up, and we have another matter on hand.

The Song of Songs is unique for Origen, argues J. Christopher King, in being a wholly asomatic text.<sup>95</sup> This means that it has no bodily readings, and must be taken as wholly allegorical – which means, King argues, Origen must have been acutely aware of his exegetical practice while commenting on it.

Indeed, Origen's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* contains a lot of material, particularly in the prologue, that makes direct statements about his exegetical practice. While this has been treated in some detail by both Dively Lauro and King, and in a more cursory way by De Lubac, I have a different focus from all three. My focus will be on a passage in the middle of the prologue where Origen makes a number of comparative statements.

In this passage, which comes after a long disquisition on the subject of love, Origen makes a series of analogical substitutions. First, while talking about the grouping of Wisdom Literature, instead of talking about the three senses of scripture in each passage of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs, he compares the three books themselves to the three senses.<sup>96</sup> For Origen, Proverbs equates to psychic or moral readings, Ecclesiastes to somatic or natural readings, and Song of Songs to pneumatic or mystical readings.

Second, to explain the conceptual comparison he has just made, he makes another, even more striking comparison:

*generales disciplinae, quibus ad rerum scientiam pervenitur, tres sunt, quas Graeci ethicam, physicam, enopticen appellarunt; has nos dicere possumus moralem, naturalem, inspectivam.*<sup>97</sup>

There are three branches of learning by which people reach knowledge of things. The Greeks call them Ethics, Physics and Enoptics; these we may call moral, natural, and inspective.

Having introduced these categories, Origen is quick to suggest that the Greek sages took these distinctions from Solomon. While the notion of Greek philosophical knowledge

<sup>95</sup>King (2005), op. cit.

<sup>96</sup>For comments on the order of the senses, see de Lubac (1998), op. cit., 144ff. I have not focussed on this issue here; while it is an interesting consideration, it is not hugely important to my argument.

<sup>97</sup>*Commentary on the Song of Songs* pr.3.

deriving ultimately from Jewish sages is a frequently-expressed one among patristic authors, it is far more common for Moses to be claimed as the source.<sup>98</sup> The use of Solomon in this case is surely meant to be resonant with both the subject matter more widely (the Song of Songs), and also the references to Solomon as dispenser of advice on threefold approaches in *On First Principles* 4 as analysed above. If this is the case, Origen is deliberately building a case in which tripartite hermeneutical taxonomies are associated with Solomon, not just in the case of exegesis, but also with wider branches of knowledge and wisdom:

*Solomon ergo tres istas, quas supra diximus generales esse disciplinas, id est moralem, naturalem, inspectivam, distinguere ab invicem ac secernere volens tribus eas libellis edidit suo quoque ordine singulis consequenter aptatis.*<sup>99</sup>

Solomon, therefore, wanting to distinguish and separate what we previously called the three general disciplines, that is, moral, natural, and contemplative, set them down in three books, each one in its own logical order.

Origen is also careful to emphasise that the ultimate source of this tripartite division is not Solomon's own wisdom, but the wisdom of God, citing 1 Kings 4:29–30,<sup>100</sup> which emphasises particularly Solomon's pre-eminence in wisdom not only over the other Jews, but over sages of other cultures too.

Shortly after this second comparison, Origen makes a final, third comparison, switching the object of a tripartite hermeneutic from the intellectual subject areas to the patriarchs with whom they are most associated:

*Abraham namque moralem declarat philosophiam per oboedientiam;... Isaac quoque naturalem philosophiam tenet, cum puteos fodit et rerum profunda rimatur. sed et Iacob inspectivum obtinet locum, quippe qui et Istrahel ob divinorum contemplationem nominatus sit.*<sup>101</sup>

Now Abraham expounds moral philosophy through obedience;... as well, Isaac holds the place of natural philosophy since he dug wells and explored

<sup>98</sup>Boys-Stones examines this trend in detail, Boys-Stones (2001), op. cit., 76ff. For the role of Moses in Greco-Roman thought more generally see J. G. Gager (1972b). *Moses in Graeco-Roman Paganism*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

<sup>99</sup>*Commentary on the Song of Songs* pr.3.

<sup>100</sup>“God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt.”

<sup>101</sup>*Commentary on the Song of Songs* pr.3.

the depths of things. Moreover, Jacob receives the subject of contemplation, since he was named Israel because of the contemplation of divine things.

Saliently, Origen points out that the patriarchs themselves are a prophetic figuring of the subjects:

*hanc ergo triplicem divinae philosophiae formam etiam in illis sanctis ac beatis viris arbitror praesignatam.*<sup>102</sup>

I think the triple structure of divine philosophy was indicated beforehand in those holy and blessed men.

I believe that this set of substitutions is enormously important for understanding the relationship between prophecy and exegesis in Origen's thought. If the subject divisions are taken from Solomon, and the prophets are a prefiguring of the subjects, then the Solomonic injunction to read in a tripartite sense is itself derived both from the prophets and from the direct gift of God's wisdom. If this is the case, the prophets are themselves an embodiment of an order to be found in God's wisdom – and are themselves the body upon which to practice an allegorical reading, themselves 'signifiers' (σύμβολα)<sup>103</sup> of a tripartite taxonomy. Thus, I see prophecy and exegesis to be inextricably linked in Origen's thought, not just in the case of exegesis of prophecies, but of the bodies, social roles, and activities of prophets, and thus of the entire phenomenon of prophecy itself.

In this text we see there is not just one, but three examples of Origen applying the tripartite hermeneutic to objects other than strictly verses of scripture. First, he applies it to whole books of scripture – an approach that J. Christopher King verifies in the case of the *Song of Songs*.<sup>104</sup> Then he applies it to intellectual subjects more widely. Then, finally, he applies it to three human beings.

## IV Reading Prophecy

As we saw in the Introduction to this thesis,<sup>105</sup> throughout Jewish antiquity, 'prophecy' often simply referred to a fixed collection of scriptural texts said to be written by the

<sup>102</sup>*Commentary on the Song of Songs* pr.3.

<sup>103</sup>On the significance of this term, see Martens (2012), op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>104</sup>King (2005), op. cit.

<sup>105</sup>cf. p. 48.

prophets, and something of this view remained in the various early Christian understandings of the Old Testament. In this sense, quite clearly Origen's exegetical hermeneutic will apply to his understanding of prophecy insofar as it is scripture. But this does not capture the sense of the word wholesale. Can we define the relationship between prophecy and scripture more precisely?

Origen regularly speaks of prophecies and the words of the prophets as fundamentally the same as scripture – indeed, the content, in parts, of scripture. Evidently some prophecy is scripture, and, reciprocally, some scripture is prophecy. As established in Part I, while defining 'prophecies' is a relatively straightforward (if wide-ranging) process, defining 'prophecy' as a phenomenon is much more difficult. I return to the question in Chapter 8.<sup>106</sup>

In Part I, I made the case that prophecy is a multi-layered phenomenon that has different strands: a) the metaphysical and mechanical questions of how prophecy works, how it relates to free will, of what constitutes a prophecy and what constitutes fulfilment; b) the moral strands – what is true and right and legitimate inspiration, and what a prophet has to do to deserve it; and c) questions such as what true prophecy means for the human condition, and what deep truths it can reveal about the world and its workings.

I would like to suggest that, as evidenced by the substitutions in the *Commentary on Song of Songs*, the most natural taxonomical system available to Origen for making sense of these questions is exactly his tripartite hermeneutic. That he would want to seek a unified explanation for apparently disparate prophetic phenomena should, I hope, be evident from the argument of Part I.

With this in mind, I would argue that these considerations about prophecy map well to the somatic, psychic, and pneumatic senses – and, more importantly, that the limitations and complications of the exegetical hermeneutic match some of the limitations and complications when it comes to understanding prophecy. We may take Origen's statement about 'stumbling-blocks' as also applying to prophecy; that is to say, Origen could make sense of the difficulties of multi-layered prophecy in the same way that he made sense of the difficulties of multi-layered scripture – by taking them as a pedagogical prod from the Spirit to seek deeper truth through Christ. In what remains of this chapter I discuss examples of scriptural prophecies and how they work under the tripartite hermeneutic.

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<sup>106</sup>cf. p. 257ff.

## Scriptural prophecies

ὁ προστάσσεται ὁ προφήτης λέγειν ὑπὸ θεοῦ, ὀφείλει ἄξιον εἶναι τοῦ θεοῦ, φαίνεται δὲ ὅτι οὐκ ἄξιον ἐστὶ τοῦ θεοῦ μενόντων ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ γράμματος, ὥστε εἰπεῖν ἄλλον τινὰ ἀκούσαντα τοῦ γράμματος· μωρία ἐστὶ ταῦτα τὰ γράμματα.<sup>107</sup>

What the prophet is appointed to say for God should to be worthy of God. But it appears that it is unworthy of God when we stick to the letter, as, just hearing the letter, somebody might say ‘these texts are stupid’.

First, let us deal with the notion that prophecies are particularly conducive to analysis under the tripartite hermeneutic. I seek to demonstrate two things here: first, that some passages of scripture – those that have all three senses present – can be read as many-layered prophecies, with different prophetic aims and timescales in the different senses. Second, I seek to demonstrate that some passages that are not at first glance prophecies can become so under a psychic or pneumatic allegorical reading.

Let us take three sample passages of Origen’s exegesis: the first, a prophecy that is clearly and unambiguously signalled as a prophecy in the scriptures, and has a relatively unproblematic somatic sense; the second, a prophecy which Origen recognises as a prophecy in the somatic sense but takes as something of a stumbling block; and the third, a prophecy that is, upon first glance, simply a piece of historical narrative, yet under a psychic and pneumatic analysis becomes a profound prophecy for the final triumph of good over evil and the ascendancy of the Christian Church.

### Isaiah 4:1ff

Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying,  
 “We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes;  
 just let us be called by your name;  
 take away our disgrace.”<sup>108</sup>

This is an excerpt of a longer minatory prophecy delivered by the prophet Isaiah about the forthcoming judgement by the Lord against Judah and Jerusalem, which Origen discusses in *Homilies on Isaiah* 4.1. While he does not signpost them as such explicitly, Origen provides readings in all three senses:

<sup>107</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 12.1.

<sup>108</sup>Isaiah 4:1.

The somatic reading: in the chaos of the destruction of Jerusalem, seven wealthy women seek a protector and somebody who will take away their disgrace – all seven of them seek the same man.

The psychic reading: the seven women represent the seven virtues of the Spirit of the Lord. The virtues and the removal of their disgrace provides us with a moral lesson in endurance in virtue. Wisdom is disgraced by false wisdom, understanding is disgraced by false understanding, counsel is disgraced by bad counsel, virtue is disgraced by false virtue, knowledge is disgraced by false knowledge, piety is disgraced by impiety, and fear is disgraced by worldly (as opposed to divine) fear.

The pneumatic reading: the women are the spirit of God, and the disgrace they suffer is the disgrace of the rulers of this age, who seek to find fault with Christ. The man who takes away this disgrace is Christ.

While Origen makes no particular comment on the somatic reading of this passage, I have inferred from his uncomplicated and easy approach to the passage that he does not consider this an unlikely or difficult passage to construe in the somatic sense. The previous verses concern the ways in which women – especially those who indulge in vanities – will suffer adverse effects during the destruction of Jerusalem. It is therefore not particularly difficult to read the passage somatically as about widows or unmarried women seeking protection in a time of crisis.

The psychic and pneumatic readings shift the timescale and scope of the prophecy. Under the psychic reading, the exegete is reminded of the need to pay constant attention to the exercise of the virtues in order to safeguard them from imposters. In this sense, it is not a prophecy about the future, but a present-tense insight into the moral workings of the world.<sup>109</sup> The pneumatic sense, on the other hand, has a definite eschatological focus, explaining the place of the rulers of this age in opposing Christ.

### **Jeremiah 15:10**

Woe is me, my mother, that you ever bore me, a man of strife and contention  
to the whole land!

While this may not classically look like a prophecy, in a long passage in the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, Origen considers it to be so, and reads it in several prophetic layers. He is

<sup>109</sup>For a similar reading of the tripartite hermeneutic, see Ludlow (2011), op. cit.

initially troubled by what he considers a hyperbolic somatic reading.<sup>110</sup> While Origen deals with the ways in which Jeremiah was rejected and punished by his community for his morality and his prophetic truth-telling,<sup>111</sup> he also notes that it is not strictly the case that Jeremiah was rejected in the whole land or over the whole earth. Nevertheless, these are his readings:

The somatic reading: Jeremiah is rejected in the whole land.

The psychic reading: the passage deals with the state of human souls and the judgement of the angels. Slightly oddly, Origen's argumentative tack here is that since the angels are lesser than Christ, if we are also pneumatically to read Christ saying 'woe is me' – as I shall deal with below – we must understand this passage to imply that the angels say 'woe is me' when they see human wrongdoing ('they see our faults'). Thus, says Origen, blessed is the person on account of whose behaviour the angels do not say 'woe is me.'<sup>112</sup>

The pneumatic reading: Christ is rejected in the whole land.

While Origen's psychic reading is not perhaps totally intuitive, it is abundantly clear that Origen is reading this prophecy psychically as a moral invocation to human beings to improve their behaviour. In making his pneumatic reading of this passage, Origen gives an explicit statement of how the tripartite hermeneutic parallels different layers of prophetic importance:

κυριώτερόν γε τοῦτο δύναται [τὸ] προφητικὸν εἶναι ἀναφερόμενον ἐπὶ τὸν σωτήρα.

This text can be prophetic in a more authoritative sense when it is applied to the saviour.<sup>113</sup>

Here we have an explicit statement by Origen that there are exegetical layers of prophetic reading – that is to say, not only is the text explicable as normal under the tripartite hermeneutic, but that a pneumatic reading of the text makes it 'prophetic in a more authoritative sense', that the pneumatic reading is *more* prophetic than the somatic or psychic.

<sup>110</sup>*Homilies in Jeremiah* 15.2.

<sup>111</sup>cf. Chapter 7, pp. 222–230.

<sup>112</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 15.4.

<sup>113</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 15.3.

**Joshua 8:10-29**

So Joshua burned Ai and made it a permanent heap of ruins, a desolate place to this day. He hung the king of Ai on a tree and left him there until evening. At sunset, Joshua ordered them to take his body from the tree and throw it down at the entrance of the city gate. And they raised a large pile of rocks over it, which remains to this day.<sup>114</sup>

In several of the *Homilies on Joshua*, Origen deals with the scriptural narrative of the incidents of violence and killing at Ai under the leadership of Joshua. In line with a stated commitment to nonviolence that he makes in *On Martyrdom*, Origen is clearly disturbed by the violence.<sup>115</sup> While Origen does not directly identify this passage as a stumbling-block, he does make quite clear that some elements of this story are not somatically plausible:

*vides quia haec, quae consequuntur, magis ad mysterii quam ad historiae pertinent veritatem.*<sup>116</sup>

You see that the following things pertain more to the truth of a mystery than to that of history.

Instead, Origen presents two separate readings:

The psychic reading: the opposing forces are armies of demons, and the king of Ai, which means chaos, is the king of the demons. The Israelites, who are an allegory for the Christians, must therefore do moral battle against the men of Ai.

The pneumatic reading: the opposing forces are the powers of this world, and Joshua is Jesus fighting for the souls of men. When the king of Ai is crucified, this is an allegory of the twofold final crucifixion – of Christ and the Devil – and the triumph of the cross over evil.

Under Origen's bipartite nonliteral reading of this passage, a piece of violent – and, to him, implausible – narrative becomes, in the psychic sense, a reflection on the moral state of the battle between good and evil, and in the pneumatic sense, an eschatological prophecy of the final triumph of Christ.

<sup>114</sup>Joshua 8:28–29.

<sup>115</sup>For some reflections on Origen's understanding of gratuitous violence and torture, see P. R. Kolbet (2008). "Torture and Origen's Hermeneutics of Nonviolence". In: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76.3, pp. 545–572.

<sup>116</sup>*Homilies on Joshua* 8.5.

## V Conclusions

We have seen several cases in the literature of links drawn between Origen's exegetical practice and his pedagogy. Martens and others contextualise Origen's exegetical hermeneutic not as a set of rhetorical-logical principles developed in a vacuum, but as an iterated and lived process of his own work and his pedagogy. Allegory, on this reading, is not just a tool in the exegetical toolbox, but necessarily the way of reading anything from scripture to the natural world.<sup>117</sup> This insight has all sorts of resonances for our understanding of prophecy as a phenomenon – from Origen's consideration of the exegesis of the stars, to his understanding of how to 'read' the social and cultural roles of prophets themselves.

In Part I, I established several themes within prophecy:

1. How God can have true and certain foreknowledge without it contradicting human free will.
2. The nature of prophetic morality.
3. The role of prophecy in establishing the relationship between the OT and NT.

In Part III of this thesis, the three chapters will treat these questions in turn. Chapter 6 concerns the somatic-historic facets of prophecy, focussing on how prophecy relates to free will and foreknowledge. Chapter 7 concerns the psychic-moral facets of prophecy: in short, this chapter will explore what Origen believed the moral reformatory character of the prophets to be, what their prophecies did to enlighten the ethical souls of their hearers, and the relationship between prophecy and personal virtue. Chapter 8 concerns the pneumatic-Christological facets of prophecy. I put forward the theory that for Origen, Christ, by being the literal subject of all future-telling and the exemplar of all ethical instruction, pulls together all three strands into a final prophetic unity.

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<sup>117</sup>For the application of this insight to cosmological readings, see C. Chin (2015). "Cosmos". In: *Late Antique Knowing*. Ed. by C. Chin and M. Vidas. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

## Part III



## Chapter 6

# Free Will and Foreknowledge

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.”<sup>1</sup>

The notion that Judas’s betrayal of Jesus was prophesied was widely accepted in Christian thought from the earliest times. Yet despite his position as one of the most complex figures in New Testament theology, Judas is also one of the characters least examined by early patristic writers.<sup>2</sup> Samuel Laeuchli argued in 1953 that Origen was the first person to treat Judas systematically as an important theological figure in his own right rather than simply as a paradigm of evil or apostasy.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the passage above, Origen claims several other passages as prophecies of Judas, including Habakkuk 3:8<sup>4</sup> and Psalms 40:14.<sup>5</sup>

As Laeuchli argues, much of the earliest patristic discussion of Judas considered him only as a possible paradigm of evil. Was Judas truly evil? Was he fully an apostate? Or was he somehow redeemed? Less frequently considered were the consequent questions about his free will: if Judas was always evil, was he so by nature or choice? If Judas was originally a good disciple but turned bad, did he do so by choice or simply as an instrument of the devil? Origen mixes these frameworks of Judas as cautionary tale and Judas as crux of philosophical questions; he considers both Judas’ moral status and also the philosophical notion of foreknowledge as it pertains to him.

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<sup>1</sup>John 13:21.

<sup>2</sup>For a brief summary of patristic views of Judas cf. R. Harvey (2018). *Judas Iscariot: Betrayal, Blasphemy, and Idolatry in the Gospels and Acts*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, pp. 2–5.

<sup>3</sup>S. Laeuchli (1953). “Origen’s Interpretation of Judas Iscariot”. In: *Church History* 22.4, pp. 253–268.

<sup>4</sup>*Homilies on Exodus* 6.2.

<sup>5</sup>*Commentary on John* 32.157-158.

The prophecies predicting Judas's actions are unusual in two ways that help to raise the question of free will particularly acutely: first, they occupy a much shorter time-span than most biblical prophecies, which are either Old Testament prophecies concerning the long messianic future, or Old or New Testament prophecies of the eschaton. The only two categories of prophecy that significantly focus around short-term event prediction are the prophecies of the actions of Judas, and prophecies about Christ made shortly before his appearance by his contemporary John the Baptist.<sup>6</sup>

Second, some of these prophecies are made by Christ himself, removing any question of human error, human intervention, false inspiration, or any other discounting factor that may remain a possibility in the case of other prophets. Christ's prophecies are necessarily accurate, true, and morally perfect. The relationship between free will and foreknowledge is thus acting without its usual veil of human ignorance and partiality; there is no parochial interface, only pure metaphysics. As I argued in Chapter 4, it is Alexander of Aphrodisias' formulation of the problem which means Origen is able to see it in these terms.

Origen deals with these various questions at some length in Book 32 of the *Commentary on John*, coming to the conclusion that a) Judas was a disciple like the others, b) Judas chose to turn away from Christ, c) Christ foreknew that Judas would turn away but had hopes for him anyway, and d) Judas had some sense of guilt after his betrayal.<sup>7</sup> Origen thus makes a sustained case that Judas had use of his own free will throughout the entire betrayal pericope, and that this was not compromised by Jesus' foreknowledge.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter will argue that although Origen's most famous discussion of free will occurs in *On First Principles* 3, it is instead in another text, *Philocalia* 23, that we can find his clearest and most fruitful engagement with the free will and foreknowledge (FWFK) problem. On the surface, *Philocalia* 23 is an arcane text, a discussion of astrology that revolves around the exegesis of Genesis 1:14. However, I will argue that this discussion,

<sup>6</sup>I return to John the Baptist in Chapter 8, pp. 249–255.

<sup>7</sup>Famously, there is a contradiction in the NT accounts of Judas's death. Matthew records that he hanged himself: "When Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. He said, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself." (Matthew 27:3–5). However, in Acts, Judas is said to have had a more unusual death: "Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out"(Acts 1:18). This discrepancy is discussed at length in W. Pratscher (2010). "Judas Iskariot im Neuen Testament und im Judasevangelium". In: *Novum Testamentum* 52.1, pp. 1–23.

<sup>8</sup>Origen states this twice, once in *Philocalia* 23.9, a passage to which I return at pp. 192–194, and once in *Commentary on John* 32.159, written towards the end of Origen's life (cf. p.26).

which centres on prophecy and divination, is equally as important as *On First Principles* 3.1 for understanding Origen's view of free will. If we take the two texts side by side, we can come to a fuller understanding both of Origen's engagement with the FWFK problem, and of his philosophy of prophecy as a whole.

I begin with a discussion of what 'free will' means to Origen, using *On First Principles* 3.1: in this way I pin down one of the terms of the FWFK problem. Next, I consider the problem itself. To do so, I set out a close reading of *Philocalia* 23. I discuss his motivation for considering the problem, the formal and generic features of the text, and his solution to it. My purpose in structuring the chapter like this is to demonstrate as explicitly as possible the following argument: Origen had an unusually sophisticated view of free will as a narrative process as well as an event-level human faculty. This means that while he believed that human beings have free will, he was happy with the notion that a concatenated set of human choices can close down enough future paths and courses of actions to make outcomes superficially inevitable. In essence, this model means that agents can effectively paint themselves into corners. When this happens, it can appear that God is *ad hoc* intervening, when in fact all of God's interventions with humans are carefully premeditated and depend on chains of human choices.

With this understanding of free will in mind, I would also like to suggest that Origen's solution to the FWFK problem is explicitly motivated by the epistemological considerations surrounding prophecy. Origen's innovative narrative understanding of free will allows him to understand the FWFK problem, which he frames the same way as Alexander, neither as about judgement or the problem of evil, nor as an abstract metaphysical snapshot, but as the intersection of divine and human narratives. Prophecy, in this picture, is the access-point for human beings to this intersection. Since, for Origen, God's foreknowledge is primarily expressed among human beings through scripture and prophecy, it is scripture and prophecy that become inextricably linked to free will in Origen's thought. This is the first instance in Christian thought of this particular framing of the problem.

## I Literature

Often in Origen scholarship, it is claimed without much discussion that Origen had an absolute view of free will. Those discussions in the scholarship that actually focus on Origen's view of free will are fewer – a notable example of the text being put to

excellent use is in Lisa Holliday's article on the salvation of the Devil as a test-case for Origen's apparent notion of universal salvation, although she limits her attention only to *On First Principles*.<sup>9</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 4, another scholar who attempts a comprehensive analysis of Origen's view of free will is Michael Frede.<sup>10</sup> However, for Frede, the central concern is how anti-Stoic Origen's view is, not specifically how it relates to the foreknowledge problem, nor how this pertains to the question of prophecy.

Christian Hengstermann's recent work on free will in Origen is an important contribution to the subject.<sup>11</sup> Hengstermann argues that Origen had a 'freedom metaphysics', in which freedom was an essential component of his understanding of the world, of God, and of Christ:

Redemption, in Origen's 'freedom metaphysics', is the individual soul's participation in the universal process of the world's restitution in which man, by virtue of his own freedom and the triune God's goodness and grace, comes to share in the Son, the 'middle' and centre of the Father's providential work.<sup>12</sup>

I think Hengstermann is correct – I return to the wider significance of Origen's view of free will in Chapter 8.<sup>13</sup> In this chapter, in contrast to the claim that Origen's view of free will was absolute, I will argue that Origen had an unusual view of free will, which he develops over the course of *On First Principles* 3.1. I believe that Origen delimits two operational sites of free will: free will on the level of the individual event or action, and free will that operates on a long scale over the course of a person's entire life. In this latter case, a person may exercise their free will to make a concatenated series of decisions in order to attain a standard behaviour, either virtuous or vicious. This means that there are cases where human beings make a series of decisions such that they close off future choices. When this happens, it can occasionally appear that God is overriding somebody's free will by making an intervention, when in fact, under circumstances where the agent had made different choices, the selfsame intervention would not appear so problematic.

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<sup>9</sup>Holliday (2009), op. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Frede (2011), op. cit. cf. p. 122.

<sup>11</sup>Hengstermann (2017a), op. cit.

<sup>12</sup>C. Hengstermann (2017b). "Pre-existence and universal salvation – the Origenian renaissance in early modern Cambridge". In: *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25.5, pp. 971–989.

<sup>13</sup>cf. pp. 257–260.

## II Origen on Free Will

Origen's discussion of free will in *On First Principles* is one of his most famous philosophical texts.<sup>14</sup> His discussion of free will is divided into three parts: a short theoretical introduction, a longer discussion of a number of scriptural passages that support the notion of human free will, and, longest of all, a discussion of various scriptural passages that appear to contradict or problematise it.

*On First Principles* 3.1 begins with an Aristotelian taxonomy of inanimate and animate things. This taxonomy further subdivides the category of animate things into non-rational and rational creatures. Origen distinguishes between non-rational and rational creatures on the grounds that while both receive impulses that are themselves involuntary, a non-rational creature acts instantly on impulse, whereas a rational creature has the ability to choose whether to act on impulse, take some other line of action, or refrain from action. He gives examples of some trained animals that blur this dichotomy (hunting dogs and war horses) on the grounds that they can be trained to choose against their instincts, although he is uncertain about whether to class them as truly rational animals.<sup>15</sup> He then illustrates this theory with reference to human beings. If, Origen says, a woman attempts to persuade a man to have sex with her, and the man has an impulse to do so, this impulse is not voluntary. However, the man may choose whether to follow the impulse and have sex with the woman, or whether to ignore the impulse and refrain.<sup>16</sup>

Origen thus provides a model of free will in which an agent can choose between one or more actions, regardless of impulse. It is clear that Origen acknowledges the power of impulse as an internal influence on a person's choices. He must, therefore, account for differences among human beings in how they relate to and manage their impulses. He does so by arguing that a person has a power of the rational will to reject impulse. Through education and training, a person can increase this willpower, and thus have clearer control over their own decisions; in this way, education can radically alter the character of a person.<sup>17</sup>

That people can change their willpower (in both directions) is evidenced by the fact

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<sup>14</sup>As noted at p.29, we are fortunate to have this text in both Greek and Latin; the work as a whole was translated into Latin by Rufinus, but this chapter was excerpted in the original Greek to Book 21 of *Philocalia*.

<sup>15</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.1-3.

<sup>16</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.4.

<sup>17</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.4-5.

that morally wicked people sometimes reform and end up becoming more virtuous than anybody else around them; conversely, some formerly virtuous people fail to maintain the training and education of their wills, and thus lapse into vice.<sup>18</sup> Thus Origen sees free will as a mixed phenomenon, acting both on the scale of the individual event (the choice to do something or not to do it) and as a process over the course of a human life (the continuing moral training of the person).

Origen refutes explicitly a few conceptions of free will – listing them here will give us a more precise idea of his own definition. The first model he rejects is as follows:

τὸ δὲ τούτων οὕτως ἡμῖν γινομένων τὰ ἕξωθεν αἰτιᾶσθαι καὶ ἑαυτοὺς ἀπο-  
λῦσαι ἐγκλήματος, ὁμοίους ἑαυτοὺς ἀποφηνάμενους ξύλοις καὶ λίθοις, ἐλ-  
κυσθεῖσιν ὑπὸ τῶν ἕξωθεν αὐτὰ κινήσαντων, οὐκ ἀληθὲς οὐδὲ εὐγνωμον,  
βουλομένου τε λόγος ἐστὶν ὁ τοιοῦτος τὴν ἔννοιαν τοῦ αὐτεξοσίου παρα-  
χαράττειν. εἰ γὰρ πυθοίμεθα αὐτοῦ, τί ἦν τὸ αὐτεξούσιον, λέγοι ἂν ὅτι εἰ  
μηδὲν τῶν ἕξωθεν ἀπήντα, ἐμοῦ τότε τι προθεμένου, τὸ ἐπὶ τὸ ἐναντίον προ-  
καλούμενον.<sup>19</sup>

To put the blame for what happens to us on external things and to release ourselves from blame, declaring that we are like logs and stones, which are dragged along by outside forces, is neither true nor reasonable, but is the argument of somebody who wants to contradict the idea of free will. If we were to ask such a person what free will was, he would say this: that no external cause, when I wanted to do a certain thing, forced me to do the opposite.

We may call this an ‘externalist’ determinism – that is to say, Origen rejects the notion that human beings are always subject to external causes and therefore cannot make any decisions of their own. The next model he rejects is its counterpart, ‘internalist’ determinism, which claims that a person’s constitution and nature leads them inevitably to act in a certain way under certain circumstances:

πάλιν τε αὖ ψιλὴν τὴν κατασκευὴν αἰτιᾶσθαι παρὰ τὸ ἐναργές ἐστι, λό-  
γου παιδευτικοῦ τοὺς ἀκρατεστάτους καὶ τοὺς ἀγριωτάτους παραλαμβάνοντος, εἰ τῇ προτροπῇ παρακολουθήσαιεν, καὶ μεταβάλλοντες ὥστε παρὰ  
πολὺ γεγονέναι τὴν προτροπὴν καὶ τὴν ἐπὶ τὸ κρεῖττον μεταβολὴν.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.5.

<sup>19</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.5.

<sup>20</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.5.

To put the blame simply on our nature is ridiculous, for education can take hold of even the most stubborn and wild people and, if they will follow its encouragement, can change them so that the alteration and change for the better is huge.

Origen instead gives a positive definition of free will, linking it with moral responsibility:

ὅτι δὲ ἡμέτερον ἔργον τὸ βιώσαι καλῶς ἐστὶ, καὶ αἰτεῖ ἡμᾶς τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς ὡς οὐκ αὐτοῦ ὄν οὐδὲ ἐξ ἑτέρου τινὸς παραγινόμενον ἢ, ὡς οἴονταί τινες, ἀπὸ εἰμαρμένης, ἀλλ' ὡς ἡμέτερον ἔργον.<sup>21</sup>

It is our job to live a worthy life. God asks this of us not as his work nor as something that comes to us from somebody else, nor, as some people think, from necessity, but as our own job.

Here we have a definition of free will that fits very closely with the Greek term ἐφ' ἡμῖν, that which is 'up to us'. I will return to the nuances of this terminology.

Next, Origen cites a number of scriptural verses that imply that human beings have the ability to make choices and may thus be judged morally for their choices. They are, in order: Micah 6:8,<sup>22</sup> Deuteronomy 30:15ff,<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 1:19–20,<sup>24</sup> Psalms 81:13–14,<sup>25</sup> Matthew 5:39,<sup>26</sup> Matthew 5:22,<sup>27</sup> Matthew 5:28,<sup>28</sup> Matthew 7:24,<sup>29</sup> Matthew 7:26,<sup>30</sup> Matthew 25:34–35,<sup>31</sup> Matthew 25:41,<sup>32</sup> and Romans 2:4–10.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>21</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.6.

<sup>22</sup>“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

<sup>23</sup>“I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity... choose life so that you and your descendents may live.”

<sup>24</sup>“If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword.”

<sup>25</sup>“O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! Then I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn my hand against their foes.”

<sup>26</sup>“But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer.”

<sup>27</sup>“If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement.”

<sup>28</sup>“Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

<sup>29</sup>“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”

<sup>30</sup>“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.”

<sup>31</sup>“Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

<sup>32</sup>“You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire.”

<sup>33</sup>“Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realise that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing

These passages all aim at the same notion: that the Lord has instructed us through the Laws and prophets what is right and good, and that the choice whether to follow this instruction is ours. Origen glosses a few of the passages. In Psalms 81:13, he notes that, despite the counterfactual ('that my people would...'), the passage implies that it was in the power of the Israelites both to 'hearken' to God, and to 'walk in [his] ways'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, he notes that Christ makes an explicit point of showing that when he gives us commandments, it lies in our power to obey or disobey them and thus they qualify as meaningful moral instruction. By citing both Old and New Testament examples here, Origen is also gently building his anti-Marcionite polemic against cherry-picking scriptural verses: as he seeks to demonstrate, the Testaments are in unity on the issue of free will.<sup>35</sup>

Having established the scriptural basis for free will, Origen cites a number of passages that appear to go against the doctrine, and refutes them one by one. They are, in order: Exodus 4:21;7:3,<sup>36</sup> Ezekiel 11:19–20,<sup>37</sup> Mark 4:12,<sup>38</sup> Philippians 2:13,<sup>39</sup> Romans 9:18–19,<sup>40</sup> Galatians 5:8,<sup>41</sup> and Romans 9:20–21.<sup>42</sup>

The passages that take up most of Origen's attention in this discussion are Exodus 4:21 and 7:3 on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, Ezekiel 11:19–20 on the stony hearts of the Israelites, and Mark 4:12 on the crowd that might hear Christ's words and be converted. Unpicking these arguments in detail will allow us to better understand Origen's conception and use of free will.

Pharaoh's hardened heart has its own rather complex exegetical history. Its earliest

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up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgement will be revealed. For he will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honour and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek."

<sup>34</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.6.

<sup>35</sup>cf. Chapter 2. I will return to Origen's anti-Marcionite arguments in greater detail in Chapter 8, pp. 244–249.

<sup>36</sup>"I will harden [Pharaoh's] heart."

<sup>37</sup>"I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh."

<sup>38</sup>"In order that they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven."

<sup>39</sup>"For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

<sup>40</sup>"So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses."

<sup>41</sup>"Such persuasion does not come from the one who calls you."

<sup>42</sup>"But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is moulded say to the one who moulds it, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use?"

mention in Christian literature is in the NT, in Romans 9:17–24, as Paul considers the implications of God’s intervention, and dismisses questioning with the charge of impudence (‘who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?’). Irenaeus refers to it in a passage of refutation of the Marcionite notion that God is the author of sin.<sup>43</sup> Augustine mentions it a number of times in his various discussions of free will and providence.<sup>44</sup> It poses particular concern to Origen because it appears to be a direct example of God removing the free will of a human agent.<sup>45</sup> He begins by positing a ‘standard’ syllogistic view of the problem that he does not agree with:

εἰ γὰρ ὑπὸ θεοῦ σκληρύνεται καὶ διὰ τὸ σκληρύνεσθαι ἁμαρτάνει, οὐκ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ τῆς ἁμαρτίας αἴτιος· εἰ δὲ τοῦτο, οὐδὲ ἀντεξούσιος ὁ Φαραώ.<sup>46</sup>

If he is hardened by God and he sins because he has been hardened, he is not himself responsible for the sin; and if this is the case, Pharaoh has no free will.

This is a classic model of free will that considers causation as the benchmark for moral responsibility, a concept that we will examine in some detail in the next section of this chapter. This, then, is the problem as Origen believes others conceive of it, and which he spends the next portion of the text refuting. I will argue that, to do so, he uses quite a different conception of moral responsibility – one that depends on Pharaoh’s ability to do other than what he does (both in the past, or at the time at which his heart is hardened), not whether Pharaoh is the *cause* of the sin of detaining the Israelites.

Origen begins his discussion by noting, with a hint of admonitory panache, that heretics take the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart to be indicative that some human beings have a lost, earthly nature and are thus beyond the remit of salvation. By implication, they argue that human beings do not have free will.<sup>47</sup> He mocks this notion straight away by stating that there is no need to harden the heart of a truly disobedient man, as he would have disobeyed anyway. Instead, says Origen, the fact that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart is indicative ‘that it was possible for him to obey’.<sup>48</sup> He then gets to

<sup>43</sup> *Against Heresies* 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Homilies on the Psalms* 76.7, *On Grace and Free Will* 43, 45, *On the Predestination of the Saints* 13, *On Faith Hope and Love* 99.

<sup>45</sup> cf. M. Scott (2012). *Journey Back to God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 80–83 for a discussion of this passage with an eye to the problem of evil.

<sup>46</sup> *On First Principles* 3.1.7.

<sup>47</sup> *On First Principles* 3.1.8.

<sup>48</sup> *On First Principles* 3.1.8.

God's motive for apparently interfering with Pharaoh's free will: it is necessary 'for the salvation of many.'<sup>49</sup> This is similar to the case of the seer Balaam, an episode in which God appeared to intervene with the free will of a non-Israelite for the sake of all of Israel, and, as Origen argues, for all Gentile Christians who came later. I explore this case in detail in Chapter 7.<sup>50</sup>

Origen proposes two initial justifications for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart: first, that God's hardening of one person's heart may constitute an act of mercy for another person, and thus is justified as God is still overall just and good. Second, that the cause of God hardening somebody's heart is the evil already present in that person – so when we think about the chain of causes, God is only 'harden[ing] him who is already hardened'. There is, too, the fact that Pharaoh's heart also softened when the Israelites were leaving.<sup>51</sup> Origen makes the claim that this could not have happened if God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was meant in the sense in which those who deny free will take it.

He considers also the idiomatic sense of the phrase, noting that it is not uncommon for parents to say to their children or masters to their slaves 'you are making me do this' – when what they really mean is that they are responding appropriately to fault on the part of the child or slave. Thus in Isaiah 63:17, "Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?" is, according to Origen, really expressing the following concept:

ἵνα τί ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἐφείσω ἡμῶν, οὐκ ἐπισκεπτόμενος ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ ταῖς ἀμαρ-  
τίαις, ἀλλὰ καταλιπὼν ἕως εἰς μέγεθος ἔλθη πταισμάτων τὰ ἡμέτερα;<sup>52</sup>

Why did you spare us for so long, not correcting us for our sins, but abandoning us until our errors had grown to a great size?

Given the potential for idiomatic interpretations of this type, Origen argues that the most appropriate way of understanding the hardening of Pharaoh's heart is by analogy with the thorns and thistles brought forth from the earth in Hebrews 6:7–8.<sup>53</sup> God, in this analogy, is the rain: it is ludicrous to blame the rain for making the thorns flourish when it is the selfsame rain that brings life to the fruit and herbs that grow. Thus, the

<sup>49</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.8.

<sup>50</sup>pp. 210–219.

<sup>51</sup>cf. Exodus 8:27–28 when God told the departing Israelites not to proceed far.

<sup>52</sup>*On First Principles* 3.1.12.

<sup>53</sup>"Ground that drinks up the rain falling on it repeatedly, and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it produces thorns and thistles, it is worthless and on the verge of being cursed; its end is to be burned over."

‘neglected and untilled land’<sup>54</sup> of a morally vicious person’s soul receives a different effect from the fertile land of a good person’s soul, even if what is being imparted to both from God is identical. Another appropriate analogy is that the sun’s heat may have different effects on different substances: for example, wax melts with heat, whereas mud dries. This, argues Origen, is what happened during the Exodus:

οὕτως ἡ μία ἐνέργεια, ἡ διὰ Μωσέως γινομένη, σκληρυμμὸν μὲν ἤλεγχε τὸν τοῦ Φαραῶ διὰ τὴν κακίαν αὐτοῦ, πειθῶ δὲ τὴν τῶν ἐπιμίκτων Αἰγυπτίων, συνεξορησάντων τοῖς Ἑβραίοις.<sup>55</sup>

So the one single operation that happened through Moses revealed on the one hand the hardness of Pharaoh through his wickedness, and on the other hand that the mixed multitude of Egyptians could be persuaded – as they joined the Hebrews when they departed.

I would like to propose that we call this the Jaffa Cake effect: a legal trial involving Jaffa Cakes turned on whether they hardened when they got old (and were therefore cakes), or whether they went soft (and were therefore biscuits).<sup>56</sup> Just so, with the will of God, the same operation can make some soften and others harden. Through the Jaffa Cake effect, a person can, through the exercise of free will, restrict their own choices and circumstances so much that an action that God takes will have a major restrictive effect on their future choices – an effect which it would *not* have on another person who had made different choices. This does not necessarily compromise their free will so much as make it starkly obvious that they cannot alter their past choices; it makes visible their true character. Origen moves on to apply the Jaffa Cake effect, with some tweaks, to his next example, Mark 4:12.

Mark 4:12 is, on the surface, rather perturbing. The scenario is as follows: Christ is preaching, and wants to speak more privately in case a large crowd nearby accidentally hears him and is converted to Christianity. Naturally, Origen is concerned that it appears that Jesus himself, the Way, is standing in the way of mass conversion. Yet Origen

<sup>54</sup> *On First Principles* 3.1.10.

<sup>55</sup> *On First Principles* 3.1.11.

<sup>56</sup> In 1991 in the UK, the biscuit manufacturer McVities went through a lengthy VAT tribunal over whether Jaffa Cakes should be subject to the luxury goods tax (which applies to chocolate biscuits but not to cakes). McVities’ lawyers argued that they should not, on the grounds that they are cakes, not biscuits. A key piece of evidence in the trial was a specially-made giant Jaffa Cake which was left to go stale; cakes harden as they go stale and biscuits soften. The giant Jaffa Cake hardened, and was judged to be a cake and therefore exempt from the luxury goods tax. cf. VAT Tribunal case LON/91/0160 (United Biscuits)).

can answer this concern with the Jaffa Cake effect. He argues that Jesus' intent here is to prevent people attempting too speedy a conversion. Similar, says Origen, to the rock in the parable of the sower, the untrained crowd is simply not ready to receive the seeds of Jesus's wisdom – and to let them do so would be not only a waste, but actively detrimental. Those listeners who are equivalent to the tilled soil, those who already have some understanding of Christianity, will take Jesus' words and flourish. Those who are not ready will completely fail to understand – or worse, completely misunderstand – Jesus' words, and will be nominally converted, although with no real understanding of Christianity.

Thus Jesus is not denying absolutely that the crowd should hear his words and be converted: he is claiming merely that they are not yet ready.<sup>57</sup> In a model of narrative free will, it becomes clear that the crowd have to prepare themselves through choosing virtuous acts in order to train themselves for readiness for Christ. Thus, once again, an apparently shocking intervention turns out to be an instance of the Jaffa Cake effect.

Free will is not the absolute that many claim it to be in Origen's thought – not, certainly, in the sense that every human person has a completely uninhibited choice between actions at every decision-making juncture. Rather, Origen has a narrative vision of free will that takes into account the fact that human beings may train themselves, slowly, over time, to act a certain way against their impulses or natural character. Free will, for Origen, thus not only confers moral responsibility on persons for making the correct moral choice in a given situation, but also confers a deeper and lengthier responsibility for each individual to train themselves continually throughout their life. Thus there is a sense, I believe, in which Origen views free will as a *privilege* which comes with accompanying duties rather than as an absolute right.

This understanding of free will makes sense of Origen's understanding of the incident of Lot's incest with his daughters, which he discusses in his *Homilies on Genesis*. Origen summarises the story: Lot, drunk to the point of unawareness of what he is doing, is seduced by his two daughters. As noted in Chapter 5,<sup>58</sup> this narrative caused problems for many exegetes for the exculpatory terms in which the story is told ("he did not know", claims Genesis 19:35). Origen's view is that Lot is free from the charge of incest and concupiscence, having been too drunk either to wish to have sex or to consent to it. However, Origen argues that Lot's earlier (and much lesser) sin of getting drunk made the situation possible:

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<sup>57</sup>Anybody who has ever done any teaching will be sympathetic to Jesus in this scenario.

<sup>58</sup>p. 155.

*subiacet vero culpa, quod decepti potuit, quod vino nimis indulset et hoc non semel, sed iterum fecit.*<sup>59</sup>

But he is at fault because he could be trapped, because he indulged in wine too much, and this not once, but he did it a second time.

Sexual ethics aside,<sup>60</sup> Origen is here presenting a view of free will in which a previous choice conditions the possibilities available for a following situation; therefore, a bad choice can lead to a situation in which choices are curtailed.

This model of free will also makes sense of prayer. In *On Prayer*, Origen makes a lengthy rebuttal of the notion that God's foreknowledge renders prayer superfluous because God has prearranged all things.<sup>61</sup> His rebuttal follows very closely the contours of *On First Principles* 3.1, with the addition of the notion that we should prize our intuitions about moral responsibility – and thus also about free will – as they are driven by truth.<sup>62</sup> He argues that God's foreknowledge takes into account our free wills through his impeccable knowledge of each person's character:

προδιατάσσεται κατ' ἀξίαν ἐκάστῳ κινήματι τῶν ἐφ' ἡμῖν τὸ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς προνοίας αὐτῷ ἀπαντησόμενον ἔτι δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὸν εἰρμὸν τῶν ἐσομένων συμβησόμενον, οὐχὶ τῆς προγνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ αἰτίας γινομένης τοῖς ἐσομένοις πᾶσι καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἐφ' ἡμῖν κατὰ τὴν ὁρμὴν ἡμῶν ἐνεργηθησομένοις.<sup>63</sup>

He has prearranged, with due respect to each movement of our free will, what is also to happen according to providence and will occur along with the the sequence of future events. God's foreknowledge is not the cause of all future events, including those which have as their efficient cause our free will working with impulse.

On this interpretation of Origen's view of free will, in answering a prayer, God makes interventions and listens for the sake of a particularly virtuous individual – an individual

<sup>59</sup>*Homilies on Genesis* 5.3.

<sup>60</sup>Clearly by modern standards, this is victim-blaming of a kind; nevertheless, Origen's discussion of consent and its workings is rather sophisticated.

<sup>61</sup>Origen raises these objections to the efficacy of prayer in *On Prayer* 3, and rebuts them in *On Prayer* 4.

<sup>62</sup>*On Prayer* 4: 'Truth forces and compels us, in spite of innumerable refinements, to impulsive praise and blame, on the basis of our retention of free will with the responsibility in which it involves us.'

<sup>63</sup>*On Prayer* 6.3.

who has exercised their free will in order to train their moral character to a sufficient degree that he may intercede – all of which is foreknown by God:

ἐὰν δέ τις ταραττήται διὰ τὸ μὴ οὐ ψεύσασθαι τὸν θεὸν τὰ μέλλοντα προεγνωκότα, ὡς τῶν πραγμάτων κατηναγκασμένων, λεκτέον πρὸς τὸν τοιοῦτον ὅτι αὐτὸ τοῦτο τῷ θεῷ ἔγνωσται ἀραρότως, τὸ μὴ ἀραρότως τόνδε τινὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ βεβαίως βούλεσθαι τὰ κρείττονα ἢ ὅτιω θελήσειν τὰ χείρονα, ὥστε ἀνεπίδεκτον αὐτὸν ἔσεσθαι μεταβολῆς τῆς ἐπὶ τὰ συμφέροντα.<sup>64</sup>

Should God’s foreknowledge of the future, which cannot be false, disturb anyone because it implies that all matters have been necessarily determined, I must add that it is a fixed part of God’s foreknowledge, that it is not fixed that any particular person will choose the better or desire the worse so much that they become incapable of changing for the better.

This approach to free will, which resembles the Aristotelian discussion of future contingents in some ways,<sup>65</sup> resolves a number of the more problematic aspects of prayer and salvation, and provides a channel for escaping the FWFK problem, which I explore in the second half of this chapter.

### III The Problem of Free Will and Foreknowledge

*Philocalia* 23, the discussion of the FWFK problem in Origen’s work, is actually originally from two separate texts – the *Commentary on Genesis*, and *Against Celsus*. This will matter for my interpretation, as Origen clearly did not conceive nor write these two texts as a unity. However, while the passages from the *Against Celsus* are pertinent to my argument, the vast majority of the material in *Philocalia* 23 is from the lost *Commentary on Genesis*, and nearly everything I quote is from that work.<sup>66</sup>

Origen’s discussion of the FWFK problem in *Philocalia* 23 provides a key to understanding his position on many contemporary Alexandrian debates: the metaphysical set-up of the created world, the distinction between divination and prophecy, and the reception of astrology. This section of the chapter will argue that Origen provides the

<sup>64</sup>*On Prayer* 6.4.

<sup>65</sup>cf. pp. 126–128.

<sup>66</sup>Where relevant, the source text is marked; otherwise, references are to the passage’s position within *Philocalia* 23.

first distinctly Christian treatment of the FWFK problem by embedding Greco-Roman philosophical discussion of the problem into the framework of scriptural exegesis about the stars and prophecy. In doing so, he discusses the FWFK problem as a fundamentally aporetic or epistemological problem which recasts scriptural instances of reading the stars not as pagan astrology, but as part of the conversation about prophecy and prophets.

Through a lengthy discussion of free will and God's foreknowledge, Origen concludes, in his explanation of Genesis 1:14, that the stars are a form of 'writing in the sky', an outpouring of the mind of God for 'astral powers' to read and enact. In special cases, Origen suggests, extraordinary human beings can read the stars too — human beings including the Magi in Matthew 2:1–2 and Jacob in the apocryphal Prayer of Joseph. Thus divination and prophecy lie at the heart of how human beings can understand and access God's foreknowledge while preserving free will.

Astrology in patristic thought has not received a great deal of attention.<sup>67</sup> The subject of astrology in Origen's work has often been overlooked in favour of his more general discussion of astral ontology, particularly the question of the stars' rationality or ensoulment.<sup>68</sup> However, I would like to make the case that, far from being a footnote or a side issue, Origen's discussion of astrology in *Philocalia* 23 is actually central to understanding his view of the FWFK problem.<sup>69</sup> I will therefore argue that Origen creates a new, distinctly Christian treatment of the subject of astrology – the first, and perhaps only one, of its kind. In doing so, he provides the second ever discussion of the FWFK problem as we understand it, and the first Christian compatibilist solution.

First, Origen's discussion of the FWFK problem embeds traditional concerns of the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition into a framework of scriptural exegesis. The entire discussion, even at its most classically Platonic or Stoic, follows from the apparent astrological undertones of Genesis 1:14 ("let [the lights in the dome of heaven] be for signs"). The sometimes-drawn dichotomy between Christian mysticism and Platonic

<sup>67</sup>The only thorough comparative examination of patristic attitudes to astrology is T. Hegedus (2007). *Ancient Astrology and Early Christianity*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.

<sup>68</sup>Alan Scott treats this issue, situating Origen's beliefs within their Greco-Roman and patristic contexts (A. Scott (1991). *Origen and the life of the Stars*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.). Yet Scott has very little to say on the discussion of astrology in *Philocalia* 23, a discussion which surely must shape any consideration of the stars in Origen's thought.

<sup>69</sup>*Philocalia* 23 consists of a long passage from book 3 of the lost *Commentary on Genesis*, and a shorter excerpt of a section, section 20, from Book 2 of the *Against Celsus*. The context of this chapter within the *Against Celsus* is Origen's response to Celsus's criticism that, had Jesus really known Judas would betray him, he would have prevented it happening. Thus the compiler of the *Philocalia* appropriately placed this section along with argumentation from the *Commentary on Genesis* which also revolves around Judas.

philosophy in Origen's thought<sup>70</sup> cannot be sustained in *Philocalia* 23, which interleaves the formal commentary-style presentation of scriptural exegesis quite naturally with traditional Greco-Roman philosophical discussion. Indeed, unlike many patristic discussions of astrology, which tend to rehearse well-established Stoic or Cynic anti-astrological arguments,<sup>71</sup> Origen reworks such arguments, furnishing them with scriptural examples; occasionally his arguments are innovative, and much less negative about astrology. Indeed, his knowledge of astrology is quite extensive.<sup>72</sup> Over the course of the discussion, Origen generalises the traditional anti-astrological arguments into a wider discussion of free will and foreknowledge – again, furnishing his arguments with scriptural examples. As such, Origen is using the epistemological questions surrounding astrology not just as a cursory engagement with Greek traditions, but as a vehicle for building a solution to the FWFK problem as a whole, and thus to answer the question of how we may relate to God's foreknowledge through prophecy.

Second, Origen considers divination by the stars as practised by human beings, in the rare cases that it occurs in scripture, to be an arcane form of prophecy. This is never explicitly stated, but can be argued quite clearly from his discussion. Origen rules out astrology as Greco-Roman τέχνη, yet accounts for Scriptural references to “read[ing] in the tablet of heaven”,<sup>73</sup> “observ[ing Christ's] star”,<sup>74</sup> the heavens “roll[ing] up like a scroll”<sup>75</sup> and “Balaam's oracle”<sup>76</sup> by considering these as instances not of divination in the Greco-Roman sense, but of inspired prophecy. Thus, in Origen's view, the ‘book’<sup>77</sup> of God's foreknowledge is recast: it is not a book legible to anybody with the correct skill, as in the traditional astrological view, but a piece of scripture, legible only to those who receive specific divine inspiration – that is to say, legible to the heavenly powers, and to a handful of select, exceptional human beings, just as with the gift of prophecy. Thus a solution to the FWFK problem, must, in Origen's thought, centre around the human experience of prophecy.

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<sup>70</sup>cf. p. 34ff.

<sup>71</sup>Hegedus categorises the arguments made against astrology by the Church Fathers into five groups, all attested in pagan writers. cf. Hegedus (2007), op. cit.

<sup>72</sup>For example, Origen considers the precession of the equinoxes to be a widespread and well-proved theorem, which is by no means the case. See P. Duhem (1914). *Le système du monde*. Vol. 2. Paris, pp. 191–204.

<sup>73</sup>See Fragment B of the Prayer of Joseph, quoted in Eusebius, *Commentary on Genesis* 5. We know that Origen considered the Prayer of Joseph to be canonical, as he says so in *Commentary on John* 2.31.

<sup>74</sup>Matthew 2:1–2.

<sup>75</sup>Isaiah 34:4.

<sup>76</sup>Numbers 23:7 and elsewhere.

<sup>77</sup>*Philocalia* 23.15

Origen begins from Genesis 1:14 to explore a familiar set of arguments against Greco-Roman astral determinism. He uses the question of what it means for the stars to be ‘signs’ (σημεῖα)<sup>78</sup> rather than causes as the natural jumping-off point for this discussion.<sup>79</sup> He explains that many who have embraced the faith are led astray by the idea that human affairs are governed by the stars; therefore he must provide an exegetical reading of Genesis 1:14 that corrects this view while still accounting for the scriptural use of the term “signs”.

There are, Origen argues, major theological problems with astral determinism, including the *reductio ad absurdum* that true astral determinism would mean that a person’s belief in God, or even in astrology itself, was determined by the stars.<sup>80</sup>

ἔπεται δὲ τοῖς ταῦτα δογματατίζουσιν ἐξ ὄλων τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἀναιρεῖν... ἡ πίστις ἔσται μάταιος... οἷς ἀθείοις καὶ ἀσεβέσι τυγχάνουσι λόγοις ἀκολουθεῖ καὶ τὸ τοὺς πιστεύοντας ὑπὸ τῶν ἀστέρων ἀγομένους πιστεύειν εἰς θεὸν λέγεσθαι.<sup>81</sup>

From these opinions follows utter destruction of our free will... even faith would be in vain... These godless and unholy arguments demand that believers are said to be compelled by the stars to believe in God.

He lists several other additional problems: Christ too would be subject to the influence of stars, likewise the prophets and apostles; prayer would be useless and moral responsibility meaningless were astral determinism to hold. The pagan notion of fate in its fullest force is clearly, in Origen’s view, fundamentally at odds with Christian theology. This is, as we saw earlier, fully compatible with his view of free will in *On First Principles* 3.1. Having established such an incompatibility between true Christian beliefs and astral determinism, Origen begins to discuss what a reading of the stars as ‘signs’ that preserves free will might look like. To do so, he structures his argument around three implicit questions:

1. What is the content of the stars as ‘signs’?
2. Who made the signs?

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<sup>78</sup>LXX.

<sup>79</sup>Plotinus’s (slightly) later discussion of the same problem in *Enneads* 2.3 turns on a different kind of exegesis – that of Plato – but takes the same basic signs/causes distinction as the central term of the argument.

<sup>80</sup>This argument is, as far as I can tell, novel.

<sup>81</sup>*Philocalia* 23.1.

### 3. To whom are the signs legible?

In answer to the first question Origen makes an assumption: that the stars signify the future; that is to say, that the content of the heavens is the stuff of foreknowledge. In doing so, he can shift from a purely astrological focus to generalise more widely about foreknowledge; by establishing the signs/causes distinction through use of conventional Stoic arguments, Origen maps the distinction onto foreknowledge (signs) and free will (that is, the absence of external causes). Thus astrology, in the rest of *Philocalia* 23, acts as a case study for prophecy and foreknowledge as a whole.

To begin his discussion of free will and foreknowledge, Origen reminds us again of Genesis 1:14, emphasising the continuity of present concerns with the scriptural context of the astrological discussion that has preceded. He then begins with foreknowledge, starting with a generalised version of the signs/causes question: does an entity's foreknowing an event necessarily imply that that entity causes the event?

Origen invites consideration of the following scenario: an event takes place with a witness. Let us, for the sake of ease, use a specific example (which Origen does not): let us say that Augustine and Jerome have a fist-fight, and present, watching, is Polycarp. Polycarp then writes a letter to Ignatius to explain what happened. In this scenario, neither Polycarp nor his letter can be reasonably held to be responsible for the fight – they simply have disseminated knowledge of the event. Similarly, Ignatius, who wasn't even present, cannot have caused the fight.

Apply this principle, Origen says, to the future. Take the same scenario, but in this case, Polycarp writes his letter before the fight, saying that it is going to happen. If it does in fact then happen, Ignatius cannot reasonably believe that Polycarp or his letter caused the fight – the fight was caused by none other than the participants, Augustine and Jerome. Thus, just because an entity has foreknowledge of an event, the entity does not necessarily cause that event, even if the entity puts its foreknowledge down in writing.

So, explains Origen, with scripture. He cites the specific case of Judas: if somebody were to read a prophecy in scripture that Judas would betray Christ, it would not be reasonable to say that scripture itself caused Judas to betray Christ. Thus it would also not be reasonable to say that the author of scripture caused Judas to betray Christ. Well, says Origen, this same principle applies even when the author is God – there is no necessary reason to believe, just because God authored the prophecy through the Spirit, that he caused Judas to do anything (other than in the most general sense of being the first

cause of all things).

God's foreknowledge, for Origen, is beyond question:

ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἕκαστον τῶν ἐσομένων πρὸ πολλοῦ οἶδεν ὁ θεὸς γενησόμενον, καὶ χωρὶς μὲν γραφῆς αὐτόθεν ἐκ τῆς ἐννοίας τῆς περὶ θεοῦ δῆλον τῷ συνιέντι ἀξίωμα δυνάμεως νοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>82</sup>

That God knows far in advance each thing about the future, is, besides scripture, from the very concept of God, clear to the person who understands the power of the divine mind.

Nevertheless, Origen spends sections 4-5 of *Philocalia* 23 on scriptural examples of God's foreknowledge. They are, in order, Susanna 42-3,<sup>83</sup> 1 Kings 12:32,<sup>84</sup> 1 Kings 13:1ff,<sup>85</sup> 1 Kings 13:5,<sup>86</sup> Isaiah 45:1ff,<sup>87</sup> Daniel 8:5ff,<sup>88</sup> and Luke 21:20.<sup>89</sup> None of these examples is particularly controversial.

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<sup>82</sup>*Philocalia* 23.4.

<sup>83</sup>"Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, "O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; you know that these men have given false evidence against me."

<sup>84</sup>"Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar; so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made."

<sup>85</sup>"While Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer incense, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of the Lord to Bethel and proclaimed against the altar by the word of the Lord, and said "O altar, altar, thus says the Lord: 'A son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who offer incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'" He gave a sign the same day, saying "This is the sign that the Lord has spoken: 'The altar shall be torn down and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out.'"

<sup>86</sup>"The altar was also torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of the Lord."

<sup>87</sup>"Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him – and the gates shall not be closed: I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me."

<sup>88</sup>"As I was watching, a male goat appeared from the west, coming across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground. The goat had a horn between its eyes. It came toward the ram with the two horns that I had seen standing beside the river, and it ran at it with savage force. I saw it approaching the ram. It was enraged against it and struck the ram, breaking its two horns. The ram did not have power to withstand it; it threw the ram down to the ground and trampled upon it, and there was no one who could rescue the ram from its power. Then the male goat grew exceedingly great; but at the height of its power, the great horn was broken, and in its place there came up four prominent horns toward the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came another horn, a little one, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the beautiful land."

<sup>89</sup>"When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near."

It worth noting at this point that Origen's notion of foreknowledge has tightened from a scenario of a vague or hypothetical event to the prophecies of scripture – that is, he is not talking about foreknowledge in general (as in pagan astrology), but a particular type of foreknowledge which is necessarily true and certain as it is the result of divine inspiration.

Origen now considers the issue of free will. He structures his argument around the following problems:

1. πῶς, προγνώστου ὄντος ἕξ αἰῶνος τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ τῶν ὑφ' ἐχάστου πράττεσθαι νομιζομένων, τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν σώζεται  
How, given that God foreknows from eternity everything about each person, we can save free will.
2. καὶ τίνα τρόπον οἱ ἀστέρες οὐκ εἰσὶ ποιητικοὶ τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις, σημαντικοὶ δὲ μόνον;  
In what way the stars are not the causes of events among humans, but only signify them.
3. καὶ ὅτι ἄνθρωποι τὴν περὶ τούτων γνῶσιν ἀκριβῶς ἔχειν οὐ δύνανται, ἀλλὰ δυνάμεσιν ἀνθρώπων κρείττοσι τὰ σημεῖα ἔκκειται.  
How human beings cannot understand these things accurately, but that the signs lie open to powers greater than us.
4. τίς γὰρ ἡ αἰτία τοῦ τὰ σημεῖα τὸν θεὸν πεποιηκέναι εἰς γνῶσιν τῶν δυνάμενων.<sup>90</sup>  
For what reason these signs were made by God for the powers to know.

We may note that Origen's discussion to this point, as in *On First Principles* 3.1, has carefully separated the issues of free will and foreknowledge – sections 1-5 of *Philocalia* 23 only mention foreknowledge and causes of events, whereas at this point Origen's focus shifts to the human element: free will.

As an answer to the first problem, Origen posits an interesting solution. God, he argues, foresaw at once the entire universe and all things in it, the chains of cause and effect running from the beginning of time to the end of days. Thinking about God's foreknowledge in this way makes it even clearer, says Origen, that things do not happen because God foreknows them – he foreknows them because they happen. To unpick that statement a little, Origen explains with the case of Judas:

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<sup>90</sup>*Philocalia* 23.6.

εἰ ἐνδέξεται Ἰούδαν προδότην γενέσθαι, ἐνδέξεται τὸν θεὸν φρονῆσαι περὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι προδότης ἔσται.

If it is possible for Judas to become a traitor, it is possible for God to comprehend that he will become a traitor.

but also

εἰ ἐνδέξεται Ἰούδαν εἶναι ἀπόστολον ὁμοίως Πέτρῳ, ἐνδέξεται τὸν θεὸν νοῆσαι περὶ τοῦ Ἰούδα ὅτι μενεῖ ἀπόστολος ὁμοίως Πέτρῳ.

If it is possible for Judas to be an apostle like Peter [that is, not to be a traitor] it is possible for God to know that he will be an apostle like Peter.

Therefore, God says to himself something along these lines:

ἐνδέξεται μὲν τόνδε τόδε ποιῆσαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον; ἐνδεξομένων δὲ ἀμφοτέρων, οἶδα ὅτι τόδε ποιήσει.<sup>91</sup>

It is possible for him to do this [that is, become a traitor] and also the opposite is possible; with both still being possible, I know that he will do this [that is, become a traitor].

This is a little clearer in cases where one option is trivially predictable:

1. οὐκ ἐνδέξεται τόνδε τινὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον πτῆναι.

It is not possible for this man to fly.

2. οὐκ ἐνδέξεται τόνδε σωφρονῆσαι.<sup>92</sup>

It is not possible for this man to behave with moderation.

In the first case, God knows that the only possible option is that the man cannot fly; men cannot fly, whoever they are, regardless of free will – it is an absolute sense of ἐνδέξομαι which denotes logical possibility. But in the second case, ἐνδέξεται does refer to something within the sphere of free will – a sort of possibility that does depend on us.<sup>93</sup> God knows that it is possible for the man either to behave with moderation or

<sup>91</sup>*Philocalia* 23.9. Translators usually take ἐνδεξομένων as a partitive genitive (e.g. George Lewis's translation of 1911) – i.e. 'of the two, I know that he will do this'. I translate it as a present tense genitive absolute to capture the sense of the continuing possibility of both courses of action despite God's foreknowledge. I feel this translation emphasises much more clearly what work this piece of reasoning is doing in Origen's argument.

<sup>92</sup>*Philocalia* 23.9.

<sup>93</sup>cf. Chapter 4 p. 122.

not to do so; as God foreknows all things, He knows which of the two will be the case without compromising the man's free will to do either.<sup>94</sup> This kind of argument from character – that God can perfectly predict a person's choices as he has perfect knowledge of their character – brings us full circle to Origen's view of free will in *On First Principles* 3.1, as examined earlier in this chapter.

We see quite clearly here, from the very structure of Origen's argument, that we are working with Bobzien's second type of moral responsibility – a question of freedom to do otherwise. Origen is not concerned with whether human beings are the causes of their actions, but with the problem of how, if a person can do otherwise (up until the very moment of their doing it – that is the force of ἐνδεξιόμενων δὲ ἀμφοτέρων), God may reasonably be said to have certain foreknowledge. This, Origen is arguing, is a question about the nature of God: our interest in it should be circumscribed by how it relates to us parochially, that is, by how it relates to prophecy.

Therefore, Origen turns next to scriptural examples of prophets urging repentance as evidence against the compromising of free will.<sup>95</sup> Both rhetorically and philosophically, we are still quite clearly in the realm of prophecy and scripture; astrology is still acting as a test case for broader questions around prophecy.

At this point Origen moves back to the stars, in order to specify how how the stars actually relate to God's mind, and uses a syllogism to argue against astral determinism. If the stars are, as Origen argues, an outpouring of the mind of God, then they are essentially an externalisation of God's foreknowledge. If God's foreknowledge of events is not the cause of events (as previously established), and if the stars are an externalisation of God's foreknowledge, then the stars are not the cause of events.

Origen uses some examples from contemporary astrology to explain this further. For example, in horoscopic astrology it was common practice to provide information not just about the newborn, but about their parents, any brothers or sisters, and other members of the family.<sup>96</sup> Even if, says Origen, we grant that the astrologers could have accurate charts of the constellations at the time of birth, they cannot possibly make the claim that the natal stars of the child are the cause of the father's status, or the number of brothers and sisters. If they grant that this is true, then they end up having to maintain that some of the natal stars are not causes but simply signifiers (those pertaining

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<sup>94</sup>This is essentially an argument that God can foreknow the actions of free agents by having perfect models of their characters.

<sup>95</sup>The main examples he uses are Jeremiah and Isaiah. For further discussion of the role of Jeremiah and Isaiah in Origen's thought, cf. Chapter 7, pp. 222–230.

<sup>96</sup>For example, see Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* 2.14.

to the family and events preceding the child's birth), and some of them are causes (those pertaining to the child's future). This begs the question which, and how can you tell them apart? And, indeed, what of the combinations of stars?

Origen therefore rejects individual horoscopic astrology for at least two different reasons. However, having set up the notion of the stars as an outpouring of the mind of God and made allusion to higher powers, he must answer the third of his questions, and explain to whom the stars are legible and why – in short, he must account for the fact that he is declaring astrology (of a kind) theoretically possible.

His primary answer to this question is that the stars are legible for the 'astral powers', as in the scriptural references to 'powers, dominions' and so on. These powers are interpreted variously by patristic authors; in this text, Origen appears to see them as operating like some kind of celestial civil service, instructed in their managerial affairs by a system of memos written in the stars:

στοχάζομαι [δὲ] ταῖς τὰ ἀνθρώπινα οἰκονομούσαις δυνάμεσιν ἐκκεῖσθαι τὰ σημεῖα, ἵνα τινὰ μὲν γινώσκωσι μόνον, τινὰ δὲ ἐνεργῶσι, καθάπερ ἐν ταῖς παρ' ἡμῖν βίβλοις ἃ μὲν γέγραπται ἵνα γινώσκωμεν [...], ἃ δὲ ἵνα γινώσκοντες ποιῶμεν.<sup>97</sup>

I conjecture that the signs are shown to the powers which manage human affairs, so that they might know some things only, but do others, as how among human beings, in the Bible there are things written which we are to interpret only [...] and those things which we are, having understood them, to do.

Origen makes it clear that the powers cannot carry out hermeneutics of the heavens without their special link with the divine, their inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Thus, he claims, it was similarly possible for Biblical figures such as the magi at the nativity and Jacob to have been sufficiently divinely inspired to have been able to carry out the same reading of the heavens. Origen is reading this kind of astrology in parallel with prophecy as a more arcane form of revelation, a revelation by which the prophet is not inspired verbally, but through the medium of the stars. Thus the scriptural references to astrology are rehabilitated, and astrology is theoretically possible, but the practices of contemporary pagan astrologers are wholeheartedly and thoroughly rejected. This refiguring of astrology as prophecy is explicitly stated:

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<sup>97</sup>*Philocalia* 23.20.

ἀλλὰ παραπλησίως βιβλίῳ περιέχοντι τὰ μέλλοντα προφητικῶς ὁ πᾶς οὐρανὸς δύναται, οἷον εἰ βίβλος ὧν θεοῦ, περιέχειν τὰ μέλλοντα.<sup>98</sup>

But similar to a prophetic book which contains the future, the whole heavens can, like a book of God, contain the future.

This analogy links back to the step of the foreknowledge argument that focussed on whether scripture itself could be a cause, or merely a sign – by comparing the stars to scripture, Origen is implying that they, like scripture, cannot be held to be the cause of events, even when their author is God. I conclude that the logic of Origen’s argument flows this way:

1. astral determinism can be rejected on many grounds, therefore
2. the stars, as a book authored by God, cannot be held to be the cause of events, therefore
3. scripture cannot be held to be the cause of events, even when the foreknowledge contained in it is necessarily true, therefore
4. just because God’s foreknowledge is necessarily true, that doesn’t imply he is the cause of events, therefore
5. God is not necessarily the cause of events, and human free will is saved

Thus, the force of Origen’s argument is that it is only by examining prophecy (which includes prophecy based on reading the stars) that we can come to a compatibilist aporetic understanding of the FWFK problem and balance free will and foreknowledge.

## IV Conclusions

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that Origen’s view of free will is not to be dismissed glibly as absolute or unthinkingly libertarian, but in fact relies on a complex narrative view over the course of a human lifetime. This view allows him to account for apparent scriptural instances of God overriding free will, and also allows him to account for prayer and salvation: in short, it renders Christian theology workable.

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<sup>98</sup>*Philocalia* 23.15.

This view of free will, far from being in the philosophical mainstream at the time, works on quite a novel and specific view of ‘freedom of the will’ as the freedom to choose otherwise. As I argued in Chapter 4, this way of framing the problem only entered the Greek philosophical mainstream during Origen’s lifetime, in the mixing of Aristotelian and Stoic views of free will by Alexander of Aphrodisias. In doing so, Alexander drew attention for the first time to the real metaphysical problem of divine foreknowledge and free will. While Alexander’s answer was to reject the possibility of divine foreknowledge, Origen upholds it.

Origen’s solution – to consider the problem aporetically and epistemologically, rather than attempting an ethically-motivated solution or a straight metaphysical solution – allows him to work with flexible notions of what foreknowledge might mean to God. He can therefore come up with a number of solutions that are usually attributed to later writers, such as the Eternality of the Present for God (usually attributed to Augustine or Boethius), by tapping into a deep philosophical consideration of the signs / causes debate (via astrology). Origen’s focus, in his solution to the FWFK problem, is exegetically rooted in his understanding of prophecy, and as such, it is Origen’s view of prophecy that acts as the testing ground for this very earliest Christian metaphysics of free will.



## Chapter 7

# Prophets

There arose among us suddenly a woman, who in a state of ecstasy announced that she was a prophetess, and acted as if she was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she was so moved by the impetus of the principal demons that for a long time she worried and deceived the brotherhood, accomplishing certain wonderful and portentous deeds, and promised that she would make the earth shake.<sup>1</sup>

The above words were written by the bishop of Caesarea, Firmilian, in a letter to Cyprian. He was, many years after the fact, describing the arrival of a self-proclaimed prophetess in Caesarea in 235 shortly after a devastating earthquake, and, according to conventional dating, at not much later than Origen's own arrival. Kurt Aland characterises the description of this woman as '[resembling] the earliest Montanist prophetesses',<sup>2</sup> a characterisation with which Susanna Elm agrees, stating that the woman was 'evidently' part of the Phrygian movement.<sup>3</sup>

In Chapter 2, I claimed that the Phrygian movement was not important to Origen's understanding of prophecy. Here we have a clear example of a conflict over prophecy in Origen's own life – a conflict which was evidently a matter of great concern for his colleague and friend Firmilian.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as I claimed in Chapter 2,<sup>5</sup> Origen does not make

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<sup>1</sup>Firmilian, in Cyprian's *Epistles* 75.10. Translation my own based on text from W. von Hartel, ed. (1866). *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*. Vol. 3.1. Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky.

<sup>2</sup>Thus Aland (1960), op. cit., p. 117. Translation by Susanna Elm, cf Elm (1994), op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>Tantalisingly, Firmilian also gives us a hint about how the Church in Caesarea received her, saying that she managed to deceive a deacon and a presbyter into having sex with her, but that she was faced down by an exorcist – 'a man approved and always of good conversation in respect of religious discipline.' Firmilian, in Cyprian's *Epistles* 74.10. We do not know the identity of the exorcist.

<sup>5</sup>p.66.

a single direct mention of the Phrygian heresy or this conflict in his extant works.<sup>6</sup> I will return in Chapter 8 to the subject of prophecy after Christ, a question raised by the Phrygian movement.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, I will deal – among other things – with the question of ecstasy.

Origen's mentions of prophetic ecstasy are few and do not carry much polemical force, instead taking ecstasy as a possible indication of illegitimate prophecy but not in itself significant. One such instance comes from the *Commentary on John* in discussion of the difficult figure of Caiaphas, to whom I return later in this chapter:<sup>8</sup>

τινὰ μὲν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἄφ' ἑαυτῶν λέγομεν, μηδεμιᾶς ἡμᾶς ἐνεργούσης εἰς τὸ λέγειν δυνάμεως, ἕτερα δὲ ὡσπερὶ ὑπηχούσης καὶ ὑποβαλλούσης δυνάμεώς τινος ἡμῖν τὰ λεγόμενα, κἂν μὴ τέλεον ἐξιστώμεθα καὶ ἀπαρακολουθήτως ἔχωμεν ἑαυτοῖς, ἀλλὰ δοκῶμεν παρακολουθεῖν οἷς λέγομεν.<sup>9</sup>

Some things people say from themselves, without there being any power which inspires us to speak; whereas there are [some] things we say when some power prompts us, as it were, and dictates what we say, even if we do not fall completely into a trance and lose full possession of our own faculties, but seem to understand what we say.

Without context, this appears to posit two options: either a) a prophecy is non-ecstatic and the prophet understands what they are saying, or b) the prophet is in an ecstatic trance and does not understand what they are saying. Since Origen goes on to argue that Caiaphas did not understand his own prophecy, we might take the logical implication to be that Caiaphas prophesied ecstatically. However, this statement comes as part of a passage in which Origen is discussing the nature of the prompt that Caiaphas received. He explains that while Caiaphas did not speak 'from himself', he was nevertheless in his senses when he prophesied. Given this context, I believe the force of the above distinction is actually something like this: sometimes we speak when a power prompts us, and although we don't fall into a trance and we *seem* to understand what we say [in fact, we do not understand].

<sup>6</sup>There are occasional indirect references, e.g.: In regard to those who teach another doctrine of Christ, ... the opposing powers... have introuced, through the agency of vessels that suited their purpose, and, if i may so call them, through their own prophets, different kinds of error contrary to the rule of Christian truth.' *On First Principles* 3.3.4.

<sup>7</sup>cf. pp.255–264.

<sup>8</sup>cf. pp.219–222.

<sup>9</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.171.

Otherwise, the closest Origen comes to suggesting the possibility of prophetic ecstasy is the following, from the *Homilies on Luke*:

*sensus noster Spiritus sancti sensibus compleatur, id est, ut sermo et mens illius compleatur adventu et nec loquamur aliquid nec intellegamus, nisi quod ille suggesserit...*<sup>10</sup>

Our senses would be filled with the Holy Spirit – that is, our speech and our mind filled by his arrival, and we would neither speak nor understand anything except what he supplies.

While this passage suggests a certain immersive sapiential experience, I do not see that it necessarily indicates anything in either direction concerning ecstasy of the frenzied, manic sort. Instead it is similar to the passage from Philo's *On the Heir* discussed in Chapter 2;<sup>11</sup> that is to say, the participation of the prophet's mind and senses is paramount.

Indeed, due to this lack of interest on Origen's part in prophetic ecstasy, Hällström claims that neither ἔκστασις nor μανία belongs to Origen's terminology or notion of biblical prophecy at all.<sup>12</sup> Hällström goes on to argue that Origen's 'puzzling terminology' of prophetic inspiration should be seen as part of his general anti-Phrygian stance. That is to say, while Origen does not mention the Phrygians directly, he is reluctant to use any terms with Phrygian connotations at all.<sup>13</sup> I do not think this follows. The much more likely explanation for his terminological vagueness is – as is often the case where vague terminology is present – that the issue of ecstasy was not central to Origen's thinking about prophecy. On those issues with which he is centrally concerned, such as free will, Origen usually has a detailed and consistent vocabulary which is often quite technical.<sup>14</sup> Where an issue is more peripheral – such as in this case – he tends to be vague or use a mixture of conventional or neutral terms. Thus while Hällström claims that 'ecstasy [is] a dividing line between Christianity and paganism,'<sup>15</sup> this chapter will argue that ecstasy is neither central to Origen's taxonomies of true and false prophecy, nor even to his interest in pagan prophecy.

<sup>10</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 27.6.

<sup>11</sup>cf. p.86.

<sup>12</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., p. 14. This is not strictly true: Origen does use the word ἔκστασις of prophecy (see below, p.204; see also, Introduction, pp. 41–45). However, the point, that ecstasy is not a major feature of Origen's taxonomy of prophecy, still stands.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>As above, in his terminology of free will and foreknowledge. cf. Chapter 6.

<sup>15</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., p. 15.

Instead, for Origen – as for Philo – the dividing line between true and false prophets was primarily a question of morality. However, Origen goes beyond his predecessor in the scope of his moral considerations. While Philo’s account is primarily aretalogical – that is to say, the personal virtues of the prophet as an individual are the most important feature – Origen’s understanding takes into account two additional aspects of morality. I propose these are understood as comprising the following threefold set of moral criteria: a) the personal *virtue* of a prophet (the virtue criterion), b) the morality of their *inspiration*, through God rather than through demons (the inspiration criterion) and c) the *benefit* of their prophecies for other people, both contemporaries and in the future (the benefit criterion).

To make this argument I will examine several important examples of prophets in Origen’s work. I begin with the claims of the Greek oracles to prophetic status, which Origen deals with in *Against Celsus* 7. By closely analysing this text, I show the axes along which Origen considers the oracles to be flawed. By an explicit comparison with the Israelite prophets of the Old Testament – who pass all three criteria – Origen demonstrates that the Greek oracles fail all three criteria for true prophecy, and are thus clearly illegitimate.

Next I will examine a case study from the OT: Balaam, the pagan seer in the book of Numbers, to whom Origen devotes much attention. I will show that while Origen believes that Balaam delivers true prophecies (including some extremely important messianic prophecies), he is not himself a true prophet since he is personally morally suspect. In short, while he fulfills the inspiration criterion and the benefit criterion, he fails to meet the virtue criterion on account of his personal immorality. I will also show that there is a parallel New Testament prophet whom Origen considers in the same way: Caiaphas. In this case, which is in some ways even more problematic, Origen is not even sure that Caiaphas passes the inspiration criterion; yet his prophecy has such a clear moral benefit to others that Origen deems it legitimate.

I will then take a quite different case, that of the supremely moral reforming prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah. I will argue that, unlike in the case of Balaam and Caiaphas, here Origen focusses primarily on Jeremiah and Isaiah’s own personal virtue separate from the importance of their prophecies. It is in the examples of Isaiah and Jeremiah, in their crusades against their immoral environments and in their ascetic practices, that Origen sees the model of the prophet as a moral leader embroiled in a virtuous struggle.

The final case study of the chapter is a figure who unites both trends, of personal moral leadership and struggle, but also of intensely significant prophetic activity: Moses.

The most important Israelite prophet in Origen's thought, Moses functions for Origen – as he did for Philo – as the archetypal OT prophet, uniting the disparate roles of lawgiver, leader, statesman, sage, priest and prophet. This chapter will therefore conclude on the argument that Moses as a prophet is, in Origen's thought, not just a *predictor* of Christ but a *forerunner* of Christ in his deep theological understanding and his impeccable moral conduct.

## I Literature

Some work has been done on the presentation of individual prophets in Origen's work: foremost is Judith Baskin's careful study of Origen's presentation of Balaam, which I have used in this chapter.<sup>16</sup> While I agree with Baskin on most features of her analysis, her focus is primarily on Balaam and comparative analysis of his presentation in other writers; mine is on how Balaam fits into a wider picture in Origen's understanding of prophets. On these grounds, she naturally does not cover everything that I think is salient for this chapter – particularly Balaam's similarity to other prophets such as Caiaphas, which I treat in detail. Her work is backed up by an excellent piece by Johan Leemans on prophetic interpretations of the Balaam pericope, although again, since his focus is on Balaam, this does not involve comparative analysis.

Gunnar af Hällström's work on Origen's view of prophecy has a chapter which deals with Origen's view of the OT prophets.<sup>17</sup> It is, on the whole, both accurate and helpful, and relies on a wide range of sources across Origen's work. However, given that Hällström's overall thesis is to argue for a dichotomy of first- and second-class prophets, his treatment of the prophets is led by this flattening assumption – the only prophet mentioned by name in his analysis is Moses, and, while he mentions Caiaphas, he doesn't deal with Balaam at all. In contrast, Robert Hauck's work on Origen's understanding of pagan prophecy does deal neatly with the question of virtue and morality,<sup>18</sup> although since Hauck focusses exclusively on *Against Celsus* he also does not examine individual prophets.

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<sup>16</sup>J. Baskin (1983a). "Origen on Balaam: The Dilemma of the Unworthy Prophet". In: *Vigilae Christianae* 37, pp. 22–35.

<sup>17</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit.

<sup>18</sup>Hauck (1989), op. cit.

## II The Oracle at Delphi

διόπερ ἐν οὐδενὶ μὲν τιθέμεθα λόγῳ τὰ ὑπὸ τῆς Πυθίας ἢ Δωδωνίδων ἢ Κλαρίου ἢ ἐν Βραγχίδαις ἢ ἐν Ἄμμωνος ἢ ὑπὸ μυρίων ἄλλων λεγομένων θεοπρόπων προειρημένα· τὰ δ' ὑπὸ τῶν ἐν Ἰουδαίᾳ προφητευσάντων τεθήπαμεν, ὁρῶντες ὅτι ἄξιός ἦν αὐτῶν ὁ ἐρρωμένος καὶ εὐτονος καὶ σεμνὸς βίος πνεύματος θεοῦ, τρόπῳ προφητεύοντος καινῶ καὶ οὐδὲν ἔχοντι παραπλήσιον ταῖς ἀπὸ δαιμόνων μαντείας.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore I think absolutely nothing of the oracles of the Pythia, or those delivered at Dodona, or Clarus, or Branchidae, or Ammon, or by a thousand other so-called seers. But I pay reverence to the Jewish prophets, seeing that their lives were noble, honest, and devout, and worthy of the inspiration of the spirit of God, whose effects have nothing in common with the divination of demons.

In Book 7 of *Against Celsus* Origen sets out the above demarcation between the Greek oracles and the OT Jewish prophets. This dichotomy structures the first few chapters of the book; the chapters alternate between the Greek and OT prophets, drawing out their salient characteristics and arguing that while both sources were capable of making correct predictions of the future, the Greek oracles – and particularly the oracle at Delphi – had a number of features that made them very clearly immoral and illegitimate.

Origen was fully aware that there were Greek philosophical traditions that rejected the concept of oracles as a whole: some of the Peripatetics, the Epicureans, and some passages of Aristotle cast doubt on the notion that prophetic foreknowledge is possible.<sup>20</sup> Yet Origen does not take this position.<sup>21</sup> His claim instead is that the prophets of the oracle sites are inspired by demons, and that the content of their prophecies, while accurate about the future, is calculated to morally mislead human beings. Thus, instead of a model in which we compare prophecy and not-prophecy, Origen is showing us the

<sup>19</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.7.

<sup>20</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.3.

<sup>21</sup>While this stance may seem rhetorically odd to modern eyes – why not just reject the efficacy of the oracles outright? – it is part of a standard ancient polemical trope. In antiquity, there were two common approaches to rejecting a scientific, divinatory, or religious practice. Either a polemicist could outright reject the notion that the practice achieved the desired effect; or the polemicist could claim that while the practice was efficacious, it was morally suspicious. Although modern writers tend to intuitively lean to the former strategy, we find that the latter is much more common in antiquity. For a discussion of this sort of rhetorical rejection, see Chin (2015), op. cit.

difference, as he sees it, between legitimate prophecy and illegitimate prophecy.<sup>22</sup>

In Chapter 3 I discussed the status of the Pythia at Delphi as the best-known ecstatic prophet of the Greco-Roman world. We might expect that Origen's criticism would revolve around the presence of prophetic ecstasy, as that of his contemporaries did, concerning the claims of both pagan and early Christian prophets, such as the Phrygians. Indeed, Origen does criticise the presence of prophetic ecstasy in the workings of the oracle at Delphi:

ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εἰς ἔκστασιν καὶ μανικὴν ἄγειν κατάστασιν τὴν δῆθεν προφητεύουσαν, ὡς μηδαμῶς αὐτὴν ἑαυτῇ παρακολουθεῖν, οὐ θείου πνεύματος ἔργον ἐστίν.<sup>23</sup>

It is not the work of a divine spirit to lead the one who is apparently prophesying into ecstasy and mania so that she in no way has possession of herself.

However, this is the only reference to ecstasy in the whole passage; Origen certainly does not use this as an opportunity for a wider discussion of ecstasy or mania. Instead, the accusation is made as part of a wider set of claims about how Greco-Roman prophecy differs morally from OT prophecy. I categorised these claims above as the virtue criterion, the inspiration criterion, and the benefit criterion; I will expand upon these criteria in the specific context of Origen's discussion of the Delphic oracle. This section will argue that the following three claims structure Origen's comparison between the Greek oracles and the OT prophets:

- a) Virtue: The OT prophets were virtuous and holy and thus worthy of prophetic inspiration from God, whereas the Greek oracles are not.
- b) Inspiration: The OT prophets were inspired by God, whereas the Greek oracles are inspired by demons.

<sup>22</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.3 – ἀλλὰ γὰρ δεδόσθω μὴ εἶναι πλάσματα μηδὲ προσποιήσεις ἀνθρώπων περὶ θεοφορίας τὰ περὶ τὴν Πυθίαν καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ χρηστήρια... καὶ τῷ παραδεχομένῳ εἶναι ταῦτα τὰ μαντεῖα οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον προσέσθαι ὅτι θεοὶ τινες εἰσὶ παρ' αὐτοῖς. ('Let us suppose that the prophecies of the Pythian priestess and the other oracles are not inventions of people who pretend to possess divine inspiration... even for the person who accepts the stance that these oracles are genuine, there is no necessity to believe that they are caused by certain gods.'). See also *Against Celsus* 4.95: 'It is necessary to realise that foreknowledge of the future is not necessarily divine; for in itself it is morally neutral and happens to bad and good.'

<sup>23</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.3.

c) Benefit: The moral benefit of the prophecies in the case of the OT prophets was very great, whereas pagan prophecy is at best morally neutral and futile, and at worst actively immoral.

The claim concerning the Pythia's ecstatic state concerns the inspiration criterion. But instead of reading the question of ecstasy as constituting the whole of this criterion, as Hällström does, I propose that prophetic ecstasy functions, for Origen, as just one of a number of symptoms of demonic possession. Thus in *Against Celsus*, after Origen has mentioned the Pythia's ecstatic state, he goes on to look for more symptoms that the Pythia's inspiration is demonic rather than divine. It is not in the *type* of inspiration (ecstatic or frenzied) that he finds the clearest symptom, but in the *method* of her inspiration – that is to say, how the spirit actually enters the prophet. Origen makes the claim that in the case of the Pythia, the demonic spirit enters her body through her vagina:

ὄρα δὴ διὰ τούτων εἰ μὴ τὸ τοῦ πνεύματος ἐκείνου ἀκάθαρτον καὶ βέβηλον ἐμφαίνεται, μὴ διὰ μανῶν καὶ ἀφανῶν πόρων καὶ πολλῶ γυναικείων κόλπων καθαρωτέρων ἐπεισιὸν τῇ ψυχῇ τῆς θεσπιζούσης ἀλλὰ διὰ τούτων, ἃ οὐδὲ θέμις ἦν τῷ σώφρονι καὶ ἀνθρώπῳ βλέπειν, οὐπω λέγεσθαι ἢ καὶ ἄπτεισθαι.<sup>24</sup>

Consider whether this does not imply the impure and disgusting nature of the spirit – that it does not enter the soul of the seer by the open and invisible pores, which are far purer than the womb, but by that part, which a modest and sensible man should not look at, let alone speak of or touch.

It is unclear where this tendentious claim originates; Chadwick certainly does not think it is Origen's own invention, although it is not mentioned in classical sources on the oracle.<sup>25</sup> Yet for Origen it seems to be an important symptom of the obvious immorality of the Pythia's inspiration; for him, the idea that God might enter a prophet through the genitals is beyond the remit of serious consideration. I believe that for Origen this particular symptom of demonic inspiration is much more conclusive than the presence of prophetic ecstasy *per se*. In either case, it is clear from the passages cited that in Origen's view the Pythia fails to meet the standards of a legitimate prophet on the inspiration criterion.

<sup>24</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.3.

<sup>25</sup>Chadwick in Origen (1953). *Origen: Contra Celsum*. Trans. by H. Chadwick. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 396n6. cf. Chapter 3, pp. 107–109 for the historical Delphic oracle.

In order to argue for the illegitimacy of the Pythia on the other criteria, Origen follows on with a discussion of the Pythia's gender and status, and how this is related to her own personal moral virtue. He objects that Apollo should have chosen a man, preferably an educated man, as his prophet rather than a woman. He then makes the further point — not without humour — that Apollo (whom he considers to be a demon) makes a choice that is indicative of both his weakness and immorality:

εἰ δὲ καὶ τὸ θῆλυ ἔθληεν, ὡς τάχα μὴ δυνάμενος ἢ μὴ τερπόμενος ἄλλω τινὶ ἢ τοῖς κόλποις τῶν γυναικῶν, πῶς οὐχὶ παρθένον μᾶλλον ἐχρῆν αὐτὸν ἐπιλέξασθαι ἢπερ γυναικᾶ τὴν τὸ βούλημα αὐτοῦ θεσπίζουσαν;<sup>26</sup>

Even if he preferred a female, maybe because he wasn't able to do otherwise, or because he delighted in nothing else but the genitals of women, should he not have preferred a virgin rather than a non-virgin to prophesy his will?

While this passage is sometimes taken to indicate that Origen believes that women cannot be prophets, or can only be prophets in a very restricted sense,<sup>27</sup> it makes no such statement — and indeed, Origen later in his own life would argue the somewhat controversial case that Rahab the prostitute in the Book of Joshua was a prophet.<sup>28</sup> Instead, what is salient in this passage is the underlying intent of Origen's use of a hierarchy of gender and status; his belief here is not that women are inherently unable to prophesy, but that women (particularly uneducated, non-virgins) are not the kind of morally virtuous and ascetic characters that Origen believes prophets should be.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, these selection criteria seem to point along two axes: that a prophet must be intellectually capable, and that a prophet must be a morally virtuous person. Given that Origen believes the Pythia to be neither, she also fails on the virtue criterion. Thus the Pythia is not an ideal prophet in terms of her personal status and qualities, nor in terms of her method and type of inspiration — in short, she fails on both the virtue criterion and the inspiration criterion.

Origen's rejection of the Pythia in *Against Celsus* 7 is also partially based on the designation of the content of the prophecies. He describes the prophecies as 'the will of

<sup>26</sup> *Against Celsus* 7.5.

<sup>27</sup> This is often alleged in the literature with little evidence. For example, see J. Hopkins (2003). "The Epiphany of the Dove: Healing and Prophecy in Mark's Gospel (New Approaches in Women's Studies)". In: *Biblical Interpretation*. Ed. by J. M. Court. London: T.&T. Clark International, p. 305.

<sup>28</sup> *Homilies on Joshua* 3.4: 'The prostitute who receives them becomes, instead of a prostitute, a prophet.'

<sup>29</sup> Apollo's failure to recognise this fact is, in Origen's eyes, further confirmation that he is not even a particularly successful or powerful demon, unlike, say, the Devil.

Apollo' (τὸ βούλημα αὐτοῦ);<sup>30</sup> I think the implication here is that the Pythia's prophecies, as the morally unstable and changeable whims of a demon, are fundamentally immoral proclamations, and cannot therefore be of any serious moral benefit. Origen focuses on the idea that the prophecies themselves are not morally worthwhile, as they do not bring benefits to humankind:

εἴπερ θεὸς ἦν, τῇ προγνώσει αὐτὸν χρήσασθαι δελέατι, ἵν' οὕτως ὀνομάσω, πρὸς τὴν ἐπιστροφὴν καὶ θεραπείαν καὶ ἠθικὴν κατόρθωσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων· νυνὶ δὲ οὐδὲν ἢ ἱστορία τοιοῦτον παραδίδωσι περὶ αὐτοῦ.<sup>31</sup>

If he was a God, he should have used his foreknowledge as an incentive, if we shall call it that, for the conversion and healing and ethical improvement of men. But history says nothing of this sort about him.

Interestingly, it is not just the wider moral benefit of prophecy for which Origen advocates in this section. A point he spends some time on is the fact that the Pythia's prophecies seem to effect no moral reformation in her own character, and are of no benefit to her as a moral entity:

ἐχρῆν γὰρ τὸν κάτοχον τῷ θείῳ πνεύματι πολλῶ πρότερον παντὸς οὐτινοσοῦν τοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν χρησμῶν διδασκομένου τὸ συμβαλλόμενον εἰς τὸν μέσον καὶ κατὰ φύσιν βίον... καὶ διορατικώτερον παρ' ἐκεῖνο μάλιστα καιροῦ τυγχάνειν, ὅτε σύνεστιν αὐτῷ τὸ θεῖον.<sup>32</sup>

The person inspired by the divine spirit ought to have derived from it far more benefit than anyone who might be instructed by the oracles to do that which helps towards living a life that is moderate and according to nature... For that reason he ought to possess the clearest vision at the very time when the deity is in communion with him.

Although this seems on the surface to be simply another objection to prophetic ecstasy, I believe it is also a clear statement that prophetic ecstasy is, once again, part of a wider set of symptoms that a prophecy is morally problematic. Where before ecstasy indicated a weak and immoral prophet and the presence of a demon, here ecstasy is taken in a more utilitarian sense – Origen's objection is something of the form: the prophecy must be

<sup>30</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.5.

<sup>31</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.6.

<sup>32</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.3.

extremely unimportant in moral terms if the prophet herself doesn't even need to hear it.

We see, therefore, that for Origen it is not merely the *presence* of ecstasy that demarcates legitimate from illegitimate prophecies as Hällström claims. Instead, ecstasy is only one symptom among many that a prophet is inspired by demons. What is of primary importance for Origen in distinguishing true prophets from false prophets is neither the presence nor the absence of ecstasy, nor the accuracy of the prophecies made, but the morality and virtue of the prophet, the morality of the inspiration (from God rather than from demons), and the moral benefit of the prophecies made.

In Origen's view the ancient Israelite prophets met all of these criteria: they were truly inspired by the spirit of God, their prophecies were efficacious and beneficial, and their virtuous lives rendered them capable of taking the role of prophets:

αἰρεθέντες ὑπὸ τῆς προνοίας εἰς τὸ πιστευθῆναι τὸ θεῖον πνεῦμα καὶ τοὺς ἀπὸ τούτου λόγους διὰ τὸ τοῦ βίου δυσμίμητον καὶ σφόδρα εὖτονον καὶ ἐλευθέριον... τοιούτους γὰρ καὶ ὁ λόγος αἰρεῖ δεῖν εἶναι τοὺς τοῦ ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεοῦ προφήτας.<sup>33</sup>

They were chosen by providence to be entrusted with the divine spirit and with the words from him on account of the quality of their lives, which was of very great courage and freedom... for reason demands that the prophets of the supreme God be like this.

In contrast, the Greek oracles – who may occasionally make correct predictions – are run by unworthy and impure priests and priestesses, inspired by demons, and do not bring benefit to humankind as a whole. Thus on all three criteria – virtue, inspiration, and benefit – the oracle at Delphi fails to live up to the standards that Origen sets out. While the Pythia's prophecies may be correct in terms of their raw truth value (that is, what they say will happen does actually happen), they are not, therefore, valid and legitimate prophecy, nor is she a valid and legitimate prophet. This forms a parallel to those 'stumbling blocks' discussed in Chapter 5 in which there was a literal sense but no morally acceptable somatic sense.<sup>34</sup>

We see how Origen comprehensively treats the Greek oracles, examples of pagan prophecy firmly outside the Christian tradition. In the next section, however, I examine how he deals with a pagan prophet who is nonetheless firmly within the Bible.

<sup>33</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.7.

<sup>34</sup>cf. pp. 158–161.

### III Balaam

Balaam, variously characterised as astrologer, sorcerer, prophet, villain, and founder of the dynasty of Magi, appears only in a handful of verses in the Book of Numbers, and in a few glancing references elsewhere in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>35</sup> We are given very little information about him: only the name of his father, the fact that he was a hired magician, and an indication that he incited the Israelites to idolatry and fornication at Baal Peor.<sup>36</sup> However, despite this unpromising background, Balaam's prophecies have been, from patristic authors onwards, considered to be some of the most important in the OT.

Naturally, such an ambiguous figure poses significant exegetical problems. If, as many did, we find in Balaam the archetypal immoral (pagan) sorcerer, what business does he have delivering prophecies of Christ and being included in the scriptures, when Origen so clearly considers other pagan prophets to be illegitimate on moral grounds? If, however, we see him as a legitimate and important prophet in his own right, what are we to make of the information that he, a non-Israelite, was hired by Balak, king of the Moabites, to curse Israel – and agreed to payment for such services? Given, in short, that Balaam fails on the virtue criterion in terms of his prophetic legitimacy, how can he be rehabilitated?

Origen addressed these questions at length in a series of homilies on the book of Numbers, and in a few scattered references in other texts.<sup>37</sup> There are twenty-eight of Origen's homilies on Numbers, of which seven are on the topic of Balaam.<sup>38</sup> Of these seven, five deal with the content of the prophecies, and two deal specifically with the problems that Balaam poses. Judging, therefore, by the length of this discussion, Balaam is in Origen's estimation the second most important figure in the book of Numbers (after Moses);<sup>39</sup> indeed, these homilies constitute by far the lengthiest treatment of Balaam by any writer of the period.

But if we look to Balaam's role in scripture, he is not seen as particularly controversial. He appears in Numbers in an extended narrative, elsewhere in the OT on four

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<sup>35</sup>Deuteronomy 23:3–5; Joshua 24:9–10; Nehemiah 13:1–2; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15–16; Jude 1:11 and Revelation 2:14.

<sup>36</sup>Numbers 31:16.

<sup>37</sup>In particular, in *Commentary on John* 28 and in several catena fragments from the same work.

<sup>38</sup>As discussed in the Introduction at p. 24, the *Homilies on Numbers* are preserved for us by the Latin translation of Rufinus.

<sup>39</sup>I will return to Moses, the most important figure in the pentateuch (and indeed the whole OT) at pp. 230–234.

occasions and on three occasions in the NT. The OT citations are all reiterations of the story with little extra information.<sup>40</sup> Each time Balaam is cited in the NT, he is used as a paradigm of evil behaviour.

First, in 2 Peter 2:15–16,<sup>41</sup> there is a reference to ‘gain from wrongdoing’ which seems to refer specifically to Balaam’s agreement with Balak to curse the Israelites in return for money. In Jude 1:11,<sup>42</sup> we get only a reference to the error (τῆ πλάνῃ)<sup>43</sup> of Balaam; it is not explained exactly what this error is. Finally, at Revelation 2:14,<sup>44</sup> Balaam’s activity at Baal Peor is specifically indicated as the content of his teaching.

We see then that the ambiguous Balaam of the OT becomes in the NT strangely dissociated from his prophecy. Instead he stands a figure representative of two specific types of impious behaviour: the corruption of others, and the sale of magical services for a fee. The story in patristic and later authors becomes, once again, somewhat more complicated. Balaam does indeed pose several problems to both Jewish and Christian exegetes: his impious behaviour in accepting money for magical deeds takes place before his prophecies, yet his role in convincing the Israelites to commit fornication at Baal Peor occurs afterwards;<sup>45</sup> the act of prophesying, therefore, cannot simply be explained as a moral reformation or conversion in him, as his wickedness bookends his experience of inspiration.

There are four main features of patristic responses to Balaam: i) Balaam’s prophecies are read as messianic prophecies of Christ, ii) Balaam is read as a precursor to the Magi, iii) Balaam is read as a warning against astrology, and iv) Balaam’s bad character and the honour from prophesying conferred on him stand in tension to one another.<sup>46</sup>

Many early Christian writers – intentionally or otherwise – sidestepped the signifi-

<sup>40</sup>They are Deuteronomy 23:3–5, Joshua 24:9–10, Nehemiah 13:1–2, and Micah 6:5 (in which the Lord is rebuking Israel and gives his intervention in the Balaam case as an example of his generosity towards his people).

<sup>41</sup>“They have left the straight road and have gone astray, following the road of Balaam son of [Beor] who loved the wages of doing wrong, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.”

<sup>42</sup>“Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam’s error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah’s rebellion.”

<sup>43</sup>SBLGNT.

<sup>44</sup>“But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication.”

<sup>45</sup>Numbers 25:1ff.

<sup>46</sup>J. Leemans (2008). “‘To Bless With A Mouth Bent On Cursing’: Patristic Interpretations of Balaam (Num 24:17)”. In: *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam*. Ed. by G. H. van Kooten and J. Ruiten. Leiden: Brill, pp. 287–299.

cant exegetical problems associated with Balaam by conflating his prophecies with those of others, or simply neglecting to mention him by name. Thus Justin Martyr, while affirming that the Numbers prophecies are messianic and refer to Christ, simply attributes Balaam's prophecy to Isaiah, conflating Numbers 24:17 with Isaiah 11:1 to create an amalgam prophecy.<sup>47</sup> In *Dialogue with Trypho* 126, Justin refers to the same prophecy again, this time noting that it is contemporary with Moses; once again, he does not mention Balaam.

Similarly, post-Origin, Athanasius attributes the prophecy to Moses, conflating two passages of Balaam's prophecy (Numbers 24:17 and Numbers 25:5) to form one longer prophecy both about the 'star' from Israel, and about the tents of Jacob.<sup>48</sup> These confluations may constitute an attempt by patristic writers to sanitise the Numbers episode by attributing the prophecies instead to a 'safe' prophet like Moses,<sup>49</sup> or it may simply represent a tradition that states that Moses, in writing the Pentateuch, was the recipient of all the prophecies uttered in those books separately – and thus they might not wholly dishonestly be called the words of Moses.<sup>50</sup>

One writer who did mention Balaam by name and at length was Philo. In his *Life of Moses*, Philo examines the episode in Numbers, taking a mostly narrative approach with the occasional authorial judgement.<sup>51</sup> In this account, Philo takes Balaam to be an astrologer and considers his speech to be prophetic, but does not accord him the status of prophet. Indeed, it is from Philo that we get the notion that Balaam was an astrologer<sup>52</sup> – a feature of the Balaam narrative that becomes important for Origen's purposes. Although Philo makes various references to Balaam's speech as prophetic (προφητικός),<sup>53</sup> the only use of the noun προφήτης is in a passage explaining that Balaam was *posing* as a prophet (and therefore that he himself was not a prophet).<sup>54</sup> This analysis – that

<sup>47</sup>Justin Martyr, *Apology* 1.32: 'And Isaiah, another prophet, foretelling the same things in other words, spoke thus: A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a flower shall spring from the root of Jesse; and His arm shall the nations trust. Isaiah 11:1 And a star of light has arisen, and a flower has sprung from the root of Jesse – this Christ.'

<sup>48</sup>Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 33.

<sup>49</sup>Baskin (1983a), op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>50</sup>Origen deals with this concern in his discussion in *Homilies on Numbers* 13.7.4.

<sup>51</sup>See p. 89 for more on the *Life of Moses* as a text.

<sup>52</sup>Philo gives us some background for Balaam's divinatory activity, listing various predictions of meteorological and natural events. These predictions all fall very conventionally under the remit of general astrology (cf. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 1.2), so perhaps unsurprisingly, Philo refers to Balaam straightforwardly as a μάντις; this is in itself interesting, given that Balaam is not explicitly associated with astrology in the OT. See Philo, *Life of Moses* 1.264-5.

<sup>53</sup>Philo, *Life of Moses* 1.274, 1.283.

<sup>54</sup>*Life of Moses* 1.266: 'But he did not treat the messengers with any noble or consistent disposition, but

Balaam was not a prophet but a particularly skilled astrologer, who on this occasion was able to make accurate predictions through specific inspiration – provided a template for Origen’s more in-depth reading of the same text.<sup>55</sup>

In what follows, I will sift through the text of the *Homilies on Numbers*, in which events are discussed in order (with long asides into related topics), and structure my presentation of them through a set of related questions. By doing this, I hope to bring out the argument that Origen is making in his homilies – not just that Balaam was not a prophet, but exactly why he was not, in much the same way that he builds up a sustained argument against the legitimacy of the Delphic oracle in *Against Celsus* 7, as discussed above.

I shall therefore construct my analysis around the various questions that Origen must answer about Balaam, using the criteria for prophetic morality established above: a) virtue: whether Balaam is himself morally legitimate enough to be called a prophet b) inspiration: whether Balaam’s method of inspiration is moral – is he a magician (and if so, does it matter?), and by what method does Balaam become inspired? c) benefit: is the content of Balaam’s prophecies morally beneficial and therefore legitimate? I will begin with the inspiration criterion as it is most involved, before moving on the benefit criterion; I will finish with the virtue criterion, considering whether Balaam’s immorality matters to Origen.

Origen begins Homily 13 on Numbers with an involved discussion of the miracles of Moses and Pharaoh’s attempt to replicate them by summoning magicians. He draws a distinction, which will later be important for discussion of Balaam, between the magical powers of soothsayers and enchanters, and the miracles of God.<sup>56</sup> Although he accepts that enchanters can perform magic acts (in this case, turning Pharaoh’s staff into a snake), he argues that they cannot reverse them and restore the natural order of things. Magic is thus portrayed by Origen as permanent and unnatural, rather than a temporary sign of God. Hence magic is an end unto itself, whereas miracles are instead a means to convince the unfaithful that God has a hand in events, and do not interfere with the created order or compromise the free will of creatures.

Having in this way established a firm line between magic and miracles, Origen can

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with great courtesy and civility evaded their request, as if he were one of the most celebrated prophets, and as such was accustomed to do nothing whatever without first consulting the oracle, and so he declined, saying that the Deity would not permit him to go with them.’

<sup>55</sup>For Origen’s views on astrology, see above, Chapter 6. Although Origen does not make this argument about Balaam, he makes a somewhat similar argument concerning Caiaphas. See below, p. 219.

<sup>56</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 13.4.4.

discuss Balaam's magical powers. He is said to be extremely powerful; indeed, Origen reasons that Balak would not have turned to him otherwise.<sup>57</sup> In order to define the limits of Balaam's powers, Origen must consider the scope of magic as a whole, particularly as regards scripture. He acknowledges, as most Church Fathers did, that magic is effective, but prohibited;<sup>58</sup> since, Origen argues, one can only invoke demons by magic and cannot invoke angels, *a fortiori* one cannot invoke Christ through magic. Therefore, anybody who is able to invoke Christ cannot be doing so by magic, but must instead be doing so through his own holiness. Anybody holy enough to invoke Christ, reasons Origen, is by definition too holy to resort to magic – that is, Balaam, as a magician, cannot be a truly holy man. This is the first clear way in which Balaam fails on the virtue criterion.

Having now fully separated magic from miracles (and placed Balaam firmly on the side of magic), Origen turns to the separate but related question of the difference between divination and prophecy:

*aliud tamen apud Scripturas divina prophetia, aliud divinatio habetur. ait enim: 'non erit auguratio in Jacob, neque divinatio in Israel. in tempore dicetur ad Jacob et Israel, quid factururus sit Deus.' abdicatur ergo penitus divinatio.*<sup>59</sup>

But in the divine scriptures, prophecy is one thing, and divination is another. For it says 'There shall not be augury in Jacob, nor divination in Israel. In time it will be told to Jacob and Israel what God will do'. Therefore divination is absolutely rejected.

Origen treats the difference between divination and prophecy as analogous to the difference between magic and miracles. Divination in its pagan form is an end in itself, a way of attempting to ascertain the future. Prophecy, on the other hand, is a means of moral edification, to convince the unfaithful back to God. By making this distinction, Origen paves the way for an examination of the mechanism by which Balaam becomes inspired – by which God transforms Balaam's divination, a prohibited and earthly practice, into true prophecy. By allowing himself to elevate the importance of the benefit criterion, Origen simultaneously allows the virtue criterion to recede from sight a little.

<sup>57</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 13.4.6.

<sup>58</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 13.5.2. For a survey of patristic views of magic, Lynn Thorndike remains the best source. cf. L. Thorndike (1923). *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*. Vol. 1. New York, NY: Macmillan, pp. 337–523.

<sup>59</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 13.6.2, quoting Numbers 23:23.

Therefore, in order to continue investigating whether Balaam is a legitimate prophet, Origen must turn to the inspiration criterion in order to judge the mechanism by which Balaam makes his prophecies. To establish this, he begins from the question of why God is said to have gone to Balaam.<sup>60</sup> He cites Matthew 8:29 and argues from it that God will not remove free will from even demons before the end of days.<sup>61</sup> By analogy, in order to preserve Balaam's free will, God's best course of action is to go to Balaam and remonstrate with him. Similarly, when Balaam insists on going to Balak, God does not prevent him, but puts into place other measures to protect Israel (that is, by putting his word into Balaam's mouth).<sup>62</sup> We have then, from the start, an assertion that Balaam's free will is an important part of the discussion.<sup>63</sup>

What does it mean for God to place words in somebody's mouth? For Origen, the distinction between words spoken from the heart and spoken from the mouth is an important one.<sup>64</sup> Through this distinction, he uses the notion of vessels of honour and shame from 2 Timothy 2:20–21<sup>65</sup> to come to the conclusion that Balaam is a 'vessel' for God's word.<sup>66</sup> Thus, despite the fact that Balaam is a non-Israelite, he can function as a vessel for God's word in the sense that he contains the prophecies rather than producing them; they come from his mouth and not from his heart.

In order to establish exactly how God put his words into Balaam's mouth, Origen spends some time on the phrase 'the spirit of God came on him' (ἐγένετο πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ<sup>67</sup>), which appears just before Balaam's third oracle.<sup>68</sup> He notes that this phrase may seem commonplace, but is in fact rather unusual. In fact, as Origen identifies, there are much more common formulae denoting the onset of a prophecy, including 'the word

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<sup>60</sup>Numbers 22:9.

<sup>61</sup>"Suddenly [the demons] shouted, "What have you to do with us, Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

<sup>62</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 13.7.2.

<sup>63</sup>To a surprising extent – *Homilies on Numbers* 14.8.1: *molestus est Balaam Deo et extorquet propemodum permitti sibi ut eat maledicere filiis Israel, et ut invocet daemones, ad quem iam venerat Deus.* 'Balaam is annoying to God, and extorts him to permit him to do evil against the sons of Israel, and so that he might call down demons upon those who venerate God.' The use of the verb *extorquere* is particularly striking.

<sup>64</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 14.3.2.

<sup>65</sup>"In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work"

<sup>66</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 14.3.1.

<sup>67</sup>LXX.

<sup>68</sup>Numbers 24:2.

of the Lord came to him'<sup>69</sup> and 'this is the vision/oracle of [such-and-such]'<sup>70</sup>. However, there is an instance of prophecy linked with the Holy Spirit's presence in the case of Saul, which, like the Numbers text, functions as part of a narrative rather than occurring at the beginning of a book.<sup>71</sup> This verse suggests (through the words 'you will be changed into a different person') that the prophet loses himself in the prophetic state.

While it appears that this question – whether the prophet remains in control of himself – is the central question of the Balaam narrative, it is not being used as a diagnostic test for whether the prophet is inspired by God or by demons as it was in the case of the Delphic oracle. In Balaam's case there is no ambiguity as regards the source of the inspiration: scripture tells us the prophecy is from God. Instead, the question here is over Balaam's free will, which, as Origen established at the beginning of his discussion, underlies the whole narrative.

It is, therefore, clear why Origen spends so long initially establishing the question of God's going to Balaam. For it is in this point that he sees the solution to the free will problem: that is to say, Balaam had a chance to act correctly, and chose not to. Thus, God's intervention only comes as a reaction to human stubbornness. This is another example of Origen's narrative understanding of free will as examined in Chapter 6.<sup>72</sup> Origen also emphasises the (rather difficult) notion that while Balaam's *mouth* was full of the prophecies of God, the free will of his *heart* was not compromised, as his heart did not receive God.<sup>73</sup> Although there is prophetic ecstasy of a kind present, Origen is clear that Balaam does in fact pass the inspiration criterion, in that his prophecies are inspired by God. Ultimately, when Balaam's free will is carefully considered his prophecies are the product of a morally acceptable form of inspiration. This is the clearest demonstration that Hällström's claim – that ecstasy is a dividing line for Origen between legitimate (Israelite) and illegitimate (pagan) prophecy – does not hold up in complex cases. Now all that remains is for Origen to consider the moral implications of the content of Balaam's prophecy, which he does at some length.

Balaam makes five prophecies. Of these, the first, second, and fourth are most important for our purposes.<sup>74</sup> The first, after centring Israel as the subject of blessing,

<sup>69</sup>1 Samuel 3:1; 1 Samuel 15:10; Jeremiah 1:2; Ezekiel 1:3; Hosea 1:1; Joel 1:1; Jonah 1:1; Micah 1:1; Zephaniah 1:1; Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 1:1.

<sup>70</sup>Isaiah 1:1; Isaiah 13:1; Obadiah 1:1; Nahum 1:1; Habakkuk 1:1; Zechariah 9:1 and Malachi 1:1.

<sup>71</sup>1 Samuel 10:5–6.

<sup>72</sup>See pp. 180–183.

<sup>73</sup>cf. also Psalms 10:7–8.

<sup>74</sup>The third exalts the kings of Israel and the fifth concerns the destruction of Amalek.

primarily concerns Balaam's own future and that of his descendants. The second treats the question of God's relationships to prophets. The fourth is a messianic oracle, and is uncomplicatedly read as a prophecy of Christ by all patristic interpreters.

Let us begin with the first prophecy (Numbers 23:7–10). It notes the presence of Israel and the Israelites' status as a holy people, explains that Balaam cannot curse them, and expresses his wish for a righteous end like theirs. Origen spends some time on Balaam's wish for a righteous end. He points out that, according to Numbers 31:8, Balaam does not die among the just, so we must, in this case, take the prophecy allegorically. Origen makes the case that the Magi of Matthew 2:1–2 are descended from Balaam, whether by physical descent or as his intellectual followers. This is on the basis that they must have recognised the 'star' rising in Israel from Balaam's prophecy, that is, they were the first to recognise this as a symbol of the Messiah and thus the first to reach him. Although this interpretation becomes a patristic commonplace, it is quite remarkable in its delineation of a separate, pagan, astrological lineage of messianic foreknowledge, separate from Israel and its tribulations. Indeed it is from this separate tradition that Origen can argue that Balaam earns his redemption and is transformed into an example for the gentiles.<sup>75</sup>

The second prophecy (Numbers 23:18–24) treats, among other things, the question of whether God may change his mind, and the subject of divination. Origen takes this prophecy to consider how prophetic interpolation works, using examples that include Jonah, Gad, Moses and Paul to explain occasions on which individual human beings mediated the messages that they received from God. In the case of Jonah, this concerns an unfulfilled threat against Nineveh,<sup>76</sup> which, Origen argues, was implicitly made by God but made (incorrectly) explicit only by Jonah himself.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Gad interpolates a threat in a prophecy in 2 Samuel 24:11–16. In the case of Moses and Paul, Origen makes a strikingly explicit statement that the words spoken by a prophet are not always to be received as statements of God.<sup>78</sup>

These examples open up the possibility for Origen, through interpretation of Balaam's oracles themselves, that Balaam himself may not be a prophet. In this account, he does not appear to have the intellectual capacity to interact with his prophecies, which

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<sup>75</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 15.4.2.

<sup>76</sup>Jonah 3:1–5,10.

<sup>77</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 16.4.2.

<sup>78</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 16.4.4. cf also 16.4.5: 'The Lord, and not the prophets, has spoken some things, to be sure, but other things the prophets are speaking and not the Lord.' We return to this question later in the chapter in the case of Moses: cf. p.233.

Origen has already portrayed as external to him, words put in his mouth.<sup>79</sup>

The fourth prophecy (Numbers 24:15–19) is the most famous of the Balaam prophecies. Its evidently messianic phraseology – ‘a star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel’ – has meant that it has been unambiguously and uniformly interpreted as a prophecy of Christ in all patristic writers who comment on the passage.<sup>80</sup> Origen is no exception to this, and reads the prophecy as straightforwardly christological.<sup>81</sup>

Having established, therefore, the importance of Balaam’s prophecies and their evident moral importance as messianic predictions of Christ, Origen is free to conclude that Balaam passes the benefit criterion. Overall, however, he comes to the conclusion that while Balaam’s prophecies are legitimate, since Balaam fails so spectacularly on the virtue criterion, he is not a prophet even though he makes significant prophecies.

While this is not stated directly in the *Homilies on Numbers*, there is an explicit comment in Origen’s *Commentary on John* to exactly this effect:

εἰ δὲ καὶ Βαλαάμ προφήτευσεν τὰ ἐν τοῖς Ἀριθμοῖς ἀναγεγραμμένα... σαφὲς ὅτι προφήτης οὐκ ἦν· μάντις γὰρ εἶναι ἀναγέγραπται. εἴ τις μὲν οὖν προφήτης ἐστὶ, πάντως προφητεύει· εἰ δὲ τις προφητεύει, οὐ πάντως ἐστὶ προφήτης.<sup>82</sup>

Although Balaam prophesied the things recorded in Numbers... it is clear that he was not a prophet, for it is recorded that he was a seer. If, therefore, someone is a prophet, he no doubt prophesies, but if someone prophesies he is not necessarily a prophet.

This conclusion is, in essence, identical to the conclusion of the homilies. Having marshalled the evidence carefully through the course of these homilies, Origen arrives at the decision that Balaam is not a prophet for the following reasons: Balaam is a magician, and magic is incompatible with prophecy. Balaam also explicitly rejects God’s first approach, through which he proves himself unworthy of being a prophet in a moral sense, thus failing the virtue criterion. His own moral failing means that God’s method of inspiration is not as usual, although it is, in Origen’s estimation, ultimately legitimate,

<sup>79</sup>As we saw earlier at p. 215.

<sup>80</sup>Leemans (2008), op. cit.

<sup>81</sup>cf. *Homilies on Numbers* 18.2.1: ‘He adds in what follows, which is about Christ...’

<sup>82</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.99-100. The catena fragment (no. 85 according to Preuschen’s ordering) has Βαλαάμ γὰρ μάντις ὢν προφητεύει which makes the contradiction of prophet and diviner even more explicit. However, it is unlikely that the fragment is genuine, as it bears very little resemblance to Origen’s usual style. For discussion of the authenticity of catena fragments of Origen more generally, see R. E. Heine (1986). “Can the Catena Fragments Be Trusted?” In: *Vigilae Christianae* 40, pp. 118–134.

and he thus passes the inspiration criterion. However, it is the benefit criterion that is of most importance in the Balaam episode; it is because of the moral benefit of the prophecies both to Balaam himself and to other people that God uses him justifiably as an ecstatic, non-Israelite vehicle for true prophecy; God is aware that Balaam's prophecies will be recorded both by Moses for the Israelites, but also in an extra-scriptural gentile tradition, ensuring that they will receive a wide audience and play an important role in the announcement of Christ by the Magi.

There is another ambiguous prophetic figure – this time from the New Testament – whom I would like to compare with Balaam: Caiaphas, high priest at the time of Jesus' death.

## IV Caiaphas

Caiaphas features prominently in the narrative of Jesus' betrayal in the synoptic Gospels. It is very clear that he fails what I have designated as the virtue criterion: Origen spends some time in the *Commentary on John* in his initial considerations listing passages from the Gospels that prove Caiaphas has a 'wicked soul' (μοχθηρὰ ψυχή).<sup>83</sup> However he is clear that 'although Caiaphas contended against Jesus, none the less he prophesied.'<sup>84</sup> Thus Origen frames the tension between Caiaphas's evil behaviour and the fact that he delivers a true and important prophecy in much the same way as he constructed the same problem with reference to Balaam.

Origen's discussion also progresses in the same way as it did with Balaam, moving on from initial statements concerning how Caiaphas fails the virtue criterion to consideration of the question of inspiration. While in the case of Balaam, Origen's main focus was the significance of God's intervention and its consequences for free will, in the case of Caiaphas, his focus is slightly different. His concern here is establishing whether Caiaphas prophesied 'by the Holy Spirit' or not.<sup>85</sup> His answer – somewhat surprisingly – is that he, Origen, does not have a view.<sup>86</sup> To explain why Caiaphas might *not* be divinely inspired, Origen uses examples in scripture of cases in which true prophecies are made by inspiration that is stated clearly to be derived from sources other than the

<sup>83</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.106. The passages include Matthew 26:14–15 and Luke 23:3–4, in which Caiaphas pays Judas thirty pieces of silver for the betrayal of Jesus, and Matthew 26:59–66 and Luke 22:3–4, in which Caiaphas accuses Jesus before the Sanhedrin, and co-operates with Pontius Pilate.

<sup>84</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.120.

<sup>85</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.121.

<sup>86</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.191.

Holy Spirit. His primary example is the Python who inspires the girl who prophesies in Acts 16:16–17.<sup>87</sup> Origen – somewhat cautiously – comes to the conclusion that the girl, despite being inspired by the Python, nevertheless clearly delivers a true prophecy:

φήσει οὖν ὁ τούτοις συγχρώμενος ὅτι οὐδὲν ἀποδεῖ προφητείας ὁ τοῦ πύθωνος λόγος, μαρτυρῶν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις καὶ προτρέπων ὡς ἐπὶ ὁδὸν σωτηρίας καταγγελλομένην πιστεύειν τοὺς ἀκούσαντας.<sup>88</sup>

He therefore who makes use of these words will say that the word of the Python falls short of prophecy in no way, since it bears witness to the apostles, and urges that those who hear them believe in the way of salvation that is being preached.

Origen is careful to use not only NT examples but also makes reference to examples from the OT. He briefly considers the possibility that Balaam was inspired by an angel rather than by the Holy Spirit;<sup>89</sup> however, his more powerful examples are the messengers of Saul, and Samuel and the witch of Endor.<sup>90</sup> Having built up this tapestry of scriptural parallels, Origen is happy to speculate that some sort of ‘inferior spirit’ influenced Caiaphas:<sup>91</sup>

ἀναγκαίως δὲ νομίζω καὶ ταῦτα παρατεθεῖσθαι ὑπὲρ τοῦ φανῆναι πῶς ἀμαρτωλοὶ προφητεύουσιν, καὶ πότερον ἐξ ἁγίου πνεύματος ἢ ἀπὸ ἄλλης δυνάμεως, ὅσον γε ἐπὶ τῷ μαρτυρεῖν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ μὴ ψευδομένης.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>87</sup>“One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave-girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.”

<sup>88</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.131.

<sup>89</sup>His discussion on this point is inconclusive, and covers much of the same territory as the *Homilies on Numbers*. As in that text, one of the main points of consideration is the unusual formula ‘the spirit of God came on him.’ cf. pp. 215–216.

<sup>90</sup>The messengers of Saul pericope at 1 Kings 19:19–24 involves a group of messengers, sent to capture David, who prophesy suddenly in front of Samuel; the same thing happens to Saul himself when he attempts to accomplish the task after the messengers have failed. The case of the witch of Endor, somewhat differently, involves a magician who can nonetheless effectively summon the spirit of the prophet Samuel from the underworld (1 Kings 28:1ff). Many exegetes took this spirit to be a demon pretending to be Samuel, but Origen argued at length in his one extant homily on 1 Kings 28 that it was in fact the true spirit of the prophet, regardless of the moral inadequacy of the summoning technique. For more on the witch of Endor in patristic thought, see R. Greer and M. Mitchell (2007). *The ‘Belly-Myther’ of Endor: Interpretations of 1 Kingdoms 28 in the Early Church*. Vol. 16. SBL - Writings from the Greco-Roman World. Leiden: Brill.

<sup>91</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.146.

<sup>92</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.146.

I think that it is necessary to cite these [parallels] to reveal how sinners prophesy, and whether they prophesy by the Holy Spirit, or from some other power that is not false insofar, at least, as it bears witness to the truth.

Nevertheless, Origen notes, when we take into account the benefit criterion and perform proper exegesis on the prophecy itself – “it is better for you to have one man die for the people”<sup>93</sup> – it is clear that the prophecy is wholly true. He points out that this is the case even if in the literal sense the death of Christ was not personally expedient for Caiaphas, whose soul was – in Origen’s view – not saved. Thus it is clear that this prophecy passes the benefit criterion. However, after an outright failure on the virtue criterion, and a deeply ambiguous result on the inspiration criterion, it is very clear that for Origen Caiaphas is not a prophet. Indeed, he ends on a generalising note – as in the discussion of Balaam – that emphasises that sometimes prophesying is merely about being in the right place at the right time:

καὶ περίστασις αἰτία ποτὲ γίνεται τοῦ προφητεύειν, ὡσπερ καὶ νῦν τῷ Καϊ-  
 άφρα τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἀρχιερέα τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ἐκείνου, ᾧ ἔμελλεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς  
 ἀποθνήσκειν... ὄντων γάρ καὶ ἄλλων ἀρχιερέων, ὡς δῆλον ἐξ ὧν προπα-  
 ρεθέμεθα, οὐδεὶς προφητεύει ἢ ὁ τοῦ ἐνιαυτοῦ ᾧ ἔμελλεν πάσχειν ὁ Ἰησοῦς  
 ἀρχιερεύς.<sup>94</sup>

Fortuitous circumstance also is sometimes the cause of prophesying, as is true in the present case of Caiaphas. He was high priest of that year [in which] Jesus was to die... For although others were high priests... no one prophesies except the high priest of the year in which Jesus was to suffer.

We have seen in the case of Caiaphas that a person can make a true prophecy despite failing the virtue criterion and possibly the inspiration criterion too. Additionally, a person can prophesy through their office rather than because of who they are as a person. This is an even more extreme case than that of Balaam, and highlights how flexible Origen’s notion of prophecy really is. Additionally, while Hällström’s distinction draws a line between pagan and Judaeo-Christian prophets, it is clear from the similarities between the pagan Balaam and the Jewish Caiaphas that this distinction cannot hold in any serious sense.

<sup>93</sup>John 11:50.

<sup>94</sup>*Commentary on John* 28.175. Other examples Origen mentions include the messengers of Saul (as above, 1 Kings 19:20–24).

We have also seen the way in which Origen – in both texts, the *Homilies on Numbers* and the *Commentary on John* – builds up an argument about prophetic morality and the different ways in which it can be measured. It is clear that even in the case of Caiaphas, a deeply morally problematic figure, that prophecy is important and legitimate not just through its somatic truth-value but through its psychic import to others and moral-reformatory possibilities.

## V Isaiah and Jeremiah

καὶ διὰ τῆς πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν, ἴν' οὕτως ὀνομάσω, ἀφῆς τοῦ καλουμένου ἁγίου πνεύματος διορατικώτεροί τε τὸν νοῦν ἐγίνοντο καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν λαμπρότεροι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα.

Through the touch, as it were, of what is called the Holy Spirit upon their souls, they possessed clear mental vision and became more illuminated in their souls, and even in their bodies.<sup>95</sup>

In Origen's discussion of the Greek oracles, we saw that his objection to the pagan oracles was not only their suspect forms of inspiration, but more broadly their lack of moral legitimacy as prophetic figures. In his discussion of Balaam, Origen grappled with a scriptural prophet who was also morally illegitimate, and was forced to conclude that while Balaam's prophecies were legitimate, he himself was not a true prophet. In the case of Caiaphas in the NT, the problem was confounded by the possibility that his prophecy was not even divinely inspired, but was the result of lesser or even demonic inspiration. The feature that unites these three difficult cases is their failure in each instance on the virtue criterion.

In this section I will examine what it might look like for a prophet to succeed on that criterion, and why the prophet's personal virtue might be a particular area of focus in Origen's examination. I will use the examples of two of the prophets that Origen mentions above as being among the most important in the whole Bible, Isaiah and Jeremiah.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Origen presents Jeremiah as a natural opposite to Balaam:

*quomodo ergo possumus his, quae absolute per Hieremiam dicta sunt, praeferre illa, quae suspense per Balaam dicuntur?*<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.4.

<sup>96</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.8: Origen lists Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah as the most important prophets. I return to Moses at pp.230–234.

<sup>97</sup>*Homilies on Numbers* 16.4.

How can we prefer the things that are said by Balaam in an undecided way to these things that were spoken absolutely by Jeremiah?

In his discussions of Jeremiah and Isaiah in his homilies on each, Origen notes distinctions that set both of them apart from other prophets. Jeremiah, according to Origen, received a distinction that no other prophet received in that he was ‘appointed [as] a prophet to the nations’ by God while still in the womb.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Isaiah is considered to be such a paradigmatic prophet that often when Origen refers simply to ‘the prophet’, he means Isaiah.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, Origen emphasises that Isaiah’s inspiration is almost uniquely visual – he has more than one significant vision of God himself, and describes these visions in detailed visual language, which is not the case for any other prophet.<sup>100</sup>

This section will argue the following: Isaiah and Jeremiah serve as paradigms in Origen’s thought for an important strand of the prophetic role. For Origen, Isaiah and Jeremiah are supremely morally virtuous leaders. While he accepted that the Pythia, Caiaphas, and Balaam could make accurate prophecies, they all failed to qualify as true prophets on the virtue criterion.

I discussed in Chapter 2 Philo’s aretological analysis of Moses – for him, the ultimate example of prophetic virtue.<sup>101</sup> Philo gave a list of prophetic virtues, which I have grouped as follows:

- i) Restraint and purity: self-restraint, continence, temperance, contempt of pleasures.
- ii) Wisdom: shrewdness, good sense, knowledge.
- iii) Steadfastness: endurance of toil and hardships, justice, advocacy of excellence, chastisement of wrongdoing, praise for well-doers.

<sup>98</sup>Jeremiah 1:5. We will see in Chapter 8 that it is not strictly true that Jeremiah was the only such prophet: Origen also discusses how John the Baptist was born into prophecy, making his first prophecy while still a foetus. The sense of this, however, seems to be somewhat different: that Jeremiah was *destined* to prophesy.

<sup>99</sup>For example, *Homilies on Numbers* 15.4 and *Homilies on Joshua* 4.1 both contain references to ‘the prophet’ which clearly mean Isaiah. However, sometimes ‘the prophet’ can also refer to others, including Jeremiah, cf. *Homilies on Isaiah* 8.2.

<sup>100</sup>cf. Isaiah 6:1: “I saw the Lord sitting on a high and exalted throne.” Origen points out how unusual it is to have so explicitly visual an experience in *Homilies on Isaiah* 1.1. The possible exception is Daniel, who also has very explicitly visual experiences of God in dreams.

<sup>101</sup>cf. p. 90.

In this section I argue that Origen's praise of the moral prophets of the OT, exemplified first and foremost by Jeremiah and Isaiah, fits extremely neatly into these same groupings. While Origen nowhere writes a text specifically on moral virtues, in his wide-ranging discussions of different prophets in the course of his homilies and commentaries, these virtues – classified into roughly these groups – stand out as recurring themes. Additionally, while there are some other more minor prophets on whom Origen focusses, including Ezekiel and Daniel, the two prophets who consistently are described in terms of moral praise are Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Second, I argue that the reason that these particular virtues are so important for Origen is that they are the virtues of Christ. Thus Origen's argument about virtuous prophets is not just – as with Philo – that they are virtuous prophet-sages in their own right, but that their morality fundamentally makes them prophetic forerunners of Christ's morality. This is most clear in the case of suffering and steadfastness.

### **i Moral Purity**

For Origen, it is important that he shows that while Isaiah and Jeremiah are fully human and thus not perfect, they are morally pure. In the case of Isaiah – who was not marked out for prophecy in the way Jeremiah was but selected as an adult – this involves moral purification before he can prophesy. Thus Origen acknowledges that Isaiah may not have originally been morally pure:

*“cum sim homo et immunda labia habeam”.*<sup>102</sup> *non possum sentire quia humiliaverit se ipsum Isaias, verum dicit.*<sup>103</sup>

“Since I am a man, I also have unclean lips.” I do not think Isaiah is humbling himself here; he is speaking the truth.

However, argues Origen, it is precisely because Isaiah has been impure in his speech that his lips were purified in his first vision by the seraphim with flaming coals:

*Isaias sanctus erat et ideo tantum labia eius purgata sunt, quia labiis tantum, id est sermone, deliquerat.*

Isaiah was holy. The reason why only his lips were purged is because he had sinned only with his lips, that is, in speech.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>102</sup>Isaiah 6:5.

<sup>103</sup>*Homilies on Isaiah* 1.4.

<sup>104</sup>*Homilies on Isaiah* 5.2.

Once Isaiah has become a prophet, Origen notes the purity of Isaiah's behaviour as evident from his ascetic practice:

ὁ βίος ἀναγέγραπται... Ἡσαΐου, ὃς ἐπορεύθη ὑπερτείνων πᾶσαν ἄσκησιν γυμνὸς καὶ ἀνυπόδετος ἔτεσι τρισίν.<sup>105</sup>

The life has been written of Isaiah, who went beyond every ascetic practice when he went naked and barefoot for three years.

Jeremiah, on the other hand, is presented as pure from the start, in part due to his youth:

ἔστι δὲ ποτε κατὰ τὸν ἔξω ἄνθρωπον εἶναι παιδίον, κατὰ δὲ τὸν ἔξω ἄνδρα. τοιοῦτος ἦν ὁ Ἰερεμίας, ἥδη ἔχων τὴν χάριν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἔτι ὢν ἐν τῇ τοῦ παιδίου ἡλικίᾳ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα.<sup>106</sup>

Sometimes one might be a child with respect to the outer man, but an adult with respect to the inner. Such a one was Jeremiah, who already had grace from God while still a child in body.

Origen is clear also that Jeremiah continues this purity through his life, remarking, for example, that Jeremiah 'lived in chastity' (ἐν ἀγνεΐᾳ ἔζησεν).<sup>107</sup> In contrast to Isaiah, Jeremiah's lips do not need purification, such that when he becomes a prophet, God touches him directly on the lips.<sup>108</sup>

It is clear from these two examples that there is not, then, a uniform model by which prophets can pass the virtue criterion with respect to purity: some prophets, like Isaiah, are already adults who may have committed previous indiscretions and so require purification to enter upon their new life. Others, like Jeremiah, are still very young and have been morally pure from the beginning. There also does not seem to be a uniform model of how a prophet should be purified: in Isaiah's case, it involves burning away impurities with fire in a vision. However, Origen refers to the ascetic lives of both Isaiah and Jeremiah as a component of their virtue. We saw in the case of Apollonius in Chapter 3 that purity rituals could involve diet.<sup>109</sup> In the case of Jeremiah, this appears also to be a component: Origen notes that Jeremiah drinks only water and eats only bread.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>105</sup> *Against Celsus* 7.8.

<sup>106</sup> *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1.13.

<sup>107</sup> *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.7.

<sup>108</sup> cf. *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1.14: τήρει διαφορὰς Ἰερεμίου καὶ Ἡσαΐου... ἐπεὶ δὲ οὗτος ἡγιασθη ἐκ μήτρας... οὐκ εἶχεν οὐδὲν ἄξιον τοῦ πυρός ('Observe the differences between Jeremiah and Isaiah... since Jeremiah was sanctified from the womb of his mother... he had nothing worthy of the fire.')

<sup>109</sup> cf. pp. 112–113.

<sup>110</sup> *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1.13. We will see an additional example of the relationship between diet and virtue in the case of John the Baptist in the following chapter. cf. pp. 249–255.

## ii Wisdom

In the case of wisdom, Origen notes that there is some diversity among the prophets:

τῶν δ' ἐν Ἰουδαίοις προφητῶν οἱ μὲν πρὸ τῆς προφητείας καὶ τῆς θείας κατακωχῆς ἦσαν σοφοὶ, οἱ δ' ἀπ' αὐτῆς τῆς προφητείας φωτισθέντες τὸν νοῦν τοιοῦτοι γεγόνασιν.

Of the Jewish prophets, some were wise before they received prophecy and divine inspiration, while others became wise after they had been enlightened in mind by prophecy itself.<sup>111</sup>

For Origen, Isaiah is a paradigm of what happens when human beings begin to undergo conversion to wisdom. He reads Isaiah's declaration 'I am pricked' (κατανένυγμα)<sup>112</sup> as a declaration of his beginning on the path to wisdom:

*si quis sine sensu est iuxta interiorem hominem, cum peccator sit, non compungitur; sed quasi in exteriora membra licet adhibeas stimulum, non sentit mortuum corpus.*<sup>113</sup>

If someone is without understanding in the inner man, though he may not be a sinner, he is not "pricked"; but although you may apply a goad, as it were, to the outer members, a dead body does not feel it.

Isaiah's subsequent journey to wisdom – as with his ascetic practice – is evidence of his increasing moral status. In the case of Jeremiah, once again there does not seem to be any kind of conversion required. Indeed, Origen demonstrates that Jeremiah is morally advanced enough to caution explicitly against boasting even about wisdom, which is otherwise a virtue – and clearly a virtue that Jeremiah himself possesses.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>111</sup>*Against Celsus* 7.7. Nevertheless, Origen notes that all of the prophets are somewhat wise anyway: 'Know, however, that no one untrained and inexperienced receives the prophetic word, but he who knows how to draw water from the depth of the well and who knows how to draw in such quantity that it may be sufficient also for those who appear irrational and perverse.' (*Homilies on Genesis* 10.2.)

<sup>112</sup>LXX. The NRSV translates just as 'I am lost', the KJV as 'I am undone', but Origen is right that the force of the Greek is that there is a jolt to Isaiah like a prod or a prick. Phlegon of Tralles, whom Origen had read (and cites at *Against Celsus* 2.14), uses the same word of eyes being gouged, cf. 36.4 (LSJ p.903).

<sup>113</sup>*Homilies on Isaiah* 4.3.

<sup>114</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 11.4.

### iii Steadfastness

In Chapter 3 I discussed the case of the prophet Cassandra, whose prophecies were always true but who was destined to be ignored and disbelieved by all who heard her.<sup>115</sup> A key feature of the proof of prophetic morality, for Origen, is the moral endurance of prophets who are ignored or dishonoured among their people. In the case of Cassandra, the refusal of her audience to listen to her was a punishment from Apollo because she did not submit to his will, and the question is framed by those writers who treat it less as an explicitly moral question and more as a reflection on the cruelty of the human condition. In the case of the Biblical prophets, however, the fault is presented as lying with the immoral audience; in this explicitly moral framing, the endurance of the prophet becomes a key testing ground for his continued elevated status and worthiness in the eyes of God.

According to Origen, Isaiah is aware of his prophetic struggle, and the unenviable nature of his prophetic task of reforming the immoral:

*audivi autem ego quendam Hebraeum exponentem hunc locum atque dicentem quia libenter quidem prophetae et paratus prophetiam suscepit ad populum, ignorans, quae ei essent dicenda, porro audiens tristitia, quae essent populo nuntianda, pigrior fit.*<sup>116</sup>

I have heard before a Hebrew man explaining this passage, and saying that the prophet was willing and prepared to receive the prophecy to the people and willing, although he was ignorant of what things were to be said to him. But, apparently, that when he heard the grave things that had to be announced to the people, he became more reluctant.

Origen endorses this reading, noting that Isaiah's eagerness means that he can underestimate the difficulty of his task. Similarly, Origen presents Jeremiah as having a clear moral purpose as a prophet. Early on in the *Homilies on Jeremiah*, Origen states what he believes to be God's intent in sending Jeremiah, explaining that Jeremiah was sent as a last resort before Jerusalem was to be 'delivered into captivity', having been 'sentenced' for its sins. Jeremiah's role was 'so that those who wish to consider it may repent by

<sup>115</sup>See p.99.

<sup>116</sup>*Homilies on Isaiah* 9.1. Note the reference to Origen's conversations with a Jewish exegete. cf. Chapter 2, p. 72.

means of the words of the Prophet' – that is to say, his function was primarily a minatory one.<sup>117</sup>

The notion of the prophetic struggle, a prophet's battle for acceptance by his own people, has a longstanding history in Jewish and Christian thought.<sup>118</sup> One of the frameworks in which Origen understands the moral role of prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah is their explicit acknowledgement in the NT as worthy moral exempla. For example, Origen states quite clearly that Paul had learnt his 'patient endurance' from the prophets,<sup>119</sup> with the implication that Origen and his own contemporaries should therefore follow the example not just of Paul, but of the prophets from whom Paul learnt.

Origen's underlying scriptural foundation, however, in his examination of the 'prophetic struggle' is the saying of Jesus, reported at Luke 4:24 and Matthew 13:57, that no prophet is accepted in his own land. The implications of this statement from the mouth of Jesus are very obvious: Jesus is explaining his own rejection at the hands of the Jews, supposedly his own people. But Jesus is also drawing on historical examples of the OT prophets, including Isaiah and Jeremiah.

In a passage in the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen discusses this saying directly. He notes to begin with that it is not historically correct to say that every prophet is despised in his own country.<sup>120</sup> However, those prophets who did suffer dishonour include Jeremiah,<sup>121</sup> Isaiah, Moses, and Daniel. But, argues Origen, this statement applies *figuratively* to all the prophets, as they all suffered dishonour among Israel as a whole. In a parallel passage in the *Commentary on John*, Origen goes into detail on the sorts of ill-treatment the prophets were subjected to, adopting the commonly-held notion that Isaiah was killed by being sawn in half.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>117</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 1.3. See also, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.2, in which Origen compares Jeremiah's prophetic ministry to Isaiah's, noting that both of them had unenviable tasks in taking threats to the people.

<sup>118</sup>cf. e.g. D. L. Petersen (2000). "Defining Prophecy and Prophetic Literature". In: *Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context*. Ed. by M. Nissinen. Society of Biblical Literature, pp. 33–44; for the specifically political aspects, see M. Nissinen (2017). *Ancient Prophecy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 257–296.

<sup>119</sup>*Commentary on Romans* 1.14.1.

<sup>120</sup>There is, he notes, no record that Elijah suffered dishonour in Gilead, nor Elisha in Abelmeholah, nor Samuel in Ramathaim. (*Commentary On Matthew* 10.18.)

<sup>121</sup>Although Jeremiah is not mentioned as suffering dishonour in the passage at *Commentary On Matthew* 10.18 (and indeed, Origen speculates that he was without dishonour), in another passage at *Homilies on Luke* 33.3, he says the following: *licet et Hieremias in Anathoth patria sua non fuerit acceptus et Isaias, quaecunq[ue] fuit patria illius, et reliqui prophetae*. 'It is true that Jeremiah was not accepted in Anathoth, his native land; nor was Isaiah, whatever his native land was, nor the rest of the prophets.' Similarly, in *Homilies on Jeremiah* 1.13, Origen makes reference to Jeremiah being thrown into a cistern of mud.

<sup>122</sup>πατρις δὴ τῶν προφητῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἦν, καὶ φανερόν ἐστιν τιμῆν αὐτοῦ παρὰ Ἰουδαίους μὴ

What is crucial about these virtues – which were the virtues of Philo’s Moses, and, as we shall see in the following section, Origen’s Moses too<sup>123</sup> – is that Origen conceives of these virtues as the virtues of Christ. Thus in the case of steadfastness, the prophets in their suffering are foreshadowing the suffering and rejection of Christ:

καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν τοῦτο πεποίηκε καὶ κρείττονως γε ἢ οὗτοι, ἅτε κύριος προφητῶν ὢν.<sup>124</sup>

Above all our Saviour has [endured suffering] better even than they, seeing that he is Lord of the prophets.

Indeed, as Origen notes, it is sometimes not possible to establish whether the scripture is speaking about Jeremiah or Christ, and argues that in some cases, the prophets are such clear ‘prefigures’<sup>125</sup> of Christ that it makes no sense to attempt to separate them:

ὁ μέντοι εὐγνώμων πάνυ θλιβήσεται ἐν τῷ τόπῳ, ὁρῶν ὅτι τὸ διακόψαι ἐν εἰρμῷ λόγων λόγους εἰρημένους εἴτε πρὸς τὸν Ἰερεμίαν εἴτε πρὸς τὸν σωτῆρα, καὶ λέγειν ταῦτα ἐπεὶ ἐλάττονα ἐστὶ Χριστοῦ, οὐ τῷ Χριστῷ ἀλλὰ τῷ Ἰερεμῖα ἀρμόζειν, καὶ ταῦτα, ἐπεὶ μείζονα ἐστὶν Ἰερεμίου, οὐ τῷ Ἰερεμῖα ἀλλὰ τῷ Χριστῷ ἀρμόζειν, ἀγνωμόνων ἐστίν.<sup>126</sup>

The sensible person, however, will find it very problematic in the context, when he/she realizes that it is senseless to separate in a series of statements words said either to Jeremiah or to the Saviour, and state that some do not belong to Christ but to Jeremiah since they are not appropriate for Christ, and that others, being greater than Jeremiah, do not belong to Jeremiah but to Christ.

In this more figurative reading, Origen also reads the prophets as soldiers in a psychic battle in which Christ is their leader. In an extraordinary passage in the *Homilies on Joshua* in which he describes this psychic conflict, Jeremiah and Isaiah are listed as the first two combatants, the fiercest troops:

ἐσχηκέναι, λιθασθέντας, πρισθέντας, πειρασθέντας, ἐν φόνῳ μαχαίρας ἀποθανόντας, διὰ τὸ ἀτιμάζεσθαι περιελθόντας ἐν μηλωταῖς, ἐν αἰγείοις δέρμασιν, ὑστερουμένους, θλιβομένους, κακουχομένους. (‘The country of the prophets, of course, was in Judaea, and it is clear that they had no home among the Jews, since they were stoned, sawn in two, tried, and put to death by the sword. Because they were dishonoured, they went about in sheepskins and goat skins, being in need, afflicted, and ill-treated.’)

<sup>123</sup>cf. pp. 230–234.

<sup>124</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 15.2.

<sup>125</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 1.6.

<sup>126</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 1.6.

*vide, quomodo Esaias mihi praestat auxilium, cum me sermonibus suae lectionis illuminat. vide accinctum et expeditum venientem Hieremiam ad auxilium nostrum et voluminis sui iaculis hostes acerrimos, cordis mei tenebras, effugantem.*<sup>127</sup>

See how Isaiah brings me help, when he illuminates me with the words of his text. See Jeremiah coming to our aid, well-girded and ready, and putting to flight with the javelins of his book the fiercest enemies, the shadows in my heart.

Overall, we see that Origen takes Isaiah and Jeremiah to be instances of exemplary prophetic virtue:

προέκειτο γὰρ τῷ προφήτῃ καὶ τούτῳ καὶ τῷ Ἡσαΐα καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς τὸ προφητικόν, διδάσκειν, ἐλέγχειν καὶ ἐπιστρέφειν... δικάζειν.

For the prophetic office was set forth for the prophet, both for [Jeremiah] and for Isaiah and for the rest: to teach, to reprove and to convert... to judge.<sup>128</sup>

While prophets like Balaam and Caiaphas uttered true prophecies which were beneficial to their hearers, they themselves did not have the moral authority to teach and to judge like Isaiah and Jeremiah, who, because of their conduct, fully qualify as prophets. The other prophet who is, of course, in Origen's view an outstanding moral exemplar is Moses, to whom I now turn.

## VI Moses

*ego audacter facio comparans duos sanctos et beatos viros et decernens et dicens verecundius Moysen fecisse quam Isaiam.*

I shall be brash enough to compare two holy and blessed men and distinguish them by saying that Moses acted more modestly than Isaiah.<sup>129</sup>

In the previous section, we saw that, while Isaiah became pure and virtuous as a prophet, he required cleansing from his previous life as a normal man; although Jeremiah and Isaiah are for Origen both exemplary moral prophets, their differences in background and

<sup>127</sup> *Homilies on Joshua* 3.1.

<sup>128</sup> *Homilies on Jeremiah* 15.2.

<sup>129</sup> *Homilies on Isaiah* 6.1.

life experience prior to becoming prophets show that Origen clearly sees the potential for a diversity of paths to prophecy. One of the ways in which Origen highlights the ordinariness of Isaiah before he becomes a prophet is in his eagerness to take up the prophetic office. Moses, who is more reluctant to do so because he is more aware of what is involved, is – to Origen’s mind – even more pre-existingly virtuous. Indeed it is clear that for Origen, as for many thinkers, Moses is among ‘the greatest and the best of the prophets’.<sup>130</sup> In the next chapter, I discuss John the Baptist, who Origen on other occasions also labels as the ‘greatest’ prophet: it is clear from his discussions of John that he considers Moses and John to be on an equal footing, perhaps to the exclusion of all others.<sup>131</sup>

In this section, I will argue that Origen’s presentation of Moses is highly influenced by Philo’s *Life of Moses*.<sup>132</sup> Moses in Origen’s thought not only passes all criteria for being a true prophet, but is the ultimate OT example of each. However, while Philo took Moses to be a supremely virtuous prophet-sage, for Origen his ultimate significance is as a forerunner of Christ. We saw above that Origen read Isaiah and Jeremiah – among others – as forerunners for Christ; to an even greater degree he considers Moses to be Christ-like.

Moses appears the most frequently of any of the prophets in Origen’s writings. He plays a major role in the *Homilies on Genesis*, *Homilies on Exodus*, *Homilies on Numbers*, and *Homilies on Joshua*, and also features more incidentally in the *Commentary on John*, and the *Against Celsus*. He is characterised a number of times in Origen’s writing as ‘the greatest of the prophets’.<sup>133</sup> Origen often implies that Moses is exceptionally virtuous, even beyond the other prophets.<sup>134</sup> First, let us examine the ways in which Moses fulfils and surpasses the criteria that Origen uses to judge the morality of other prophets as discussed above.

In contrast to Isaiah and Jeremiah, who are primarily judged to be virtuous through their steadfastness and purity, Moses’ personal wisdom is the quality Origen focusses on most. Indeed, he picks up explicitly on Celsus’s refusal to include Moses in the canon of sages even when many other pagans do:

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<sup>130</sup> *Homilies on Numbers* 6.3.

<sup>131</sup> cf. pp. 249–255. Arguably, Origen may also include Elijah in this designation, on account of his appearance at Jesus’ transfiguration. cf. e.g. *Commentary on Romans* 1.10.3.

<sup>132</sup> as discussed at p. 91.

<sup>133</sup> e.g. *Homilies on Exodus* 3.1.

<sup>134</sup> e.g. *Homilies on Genesis* 3.3: ‘Moses is a star in us, which shines and enlightens us by his acts.’

πάλιν τε αὖ κατάλογον ποιούμενος ἀνδρῶν ἀρχαίων καὶ σοφῶν, ὠφελήσαντων τοὺς κατ' αὐτοὺς καὶ διὰ συγγραμμάτων τοὺς μετ' αὐτούς, Μωϋσέα ἐξέβαλε τοῦ καταλόγου τῶν σοφῶν. καὶ Λίνου μὲν, ὃν προέταξεν ὧν ὠνόμασεν ὁ Κέλσος, οὔτε νόμοι οὔτε λόγοι φέρονται ἐπιστρέψαντες καὶ θεραπεύσαντες ἔθνη· Μωϋσέως δὲ τοὺς νόμους ὅλον ἔθνος φέρει ἐπεσπαρμένον τῇ πάσῃ οἰκουμένῃ.<sup>135</sup>

Again, when making a catalogue of ancient wise men who have benefitted their peers by and, by their writings, have also benefitted those who came after them, he excluded Moses from the catalogue of the wise. But from Linus, whom Celsus names in the top ranks, there are neither laws nor dialogues which turned any peoples to the better or healed them; whereas a whole people, dispersed throughout the whole world, obeys the laws of Moses.

As Origen alleges in the same section, many pagan writers did in fact include Moses in their canons of wise men. Strabo, for example, lists Moses alongside Teiresias, Amphiarus, Trophonius, Orpheus, Museaus and others as standard examples of wise men or sages.<sup>136</sup> As well as advocating for Moses's inclusion in lists of those traditionally considered wise, Origen focusses on a number of scriptural examples of his wisdom in action. For example, he notes that Moses possesses levels of knowledge that others do not: when asked to pick presbyters in Genesis, Moses chooses those whom he knows 'already' to be presbyters.<sup>137</sup>

Sometimes Moses's wisdom exhibits itself in displays of particularly shrewd leadership. Moses is, first of all, a classically powerful orator, meaning that many among the Israelites are persuaded by his words.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, Origen often points out the strategic prowess of Moses's decision-making. A particularly clear example for Origen is the way in which Moses promoted sacrifice; Origen argues that since Moses was 'learned in

<sup>135</sup>*Against Celsus* 1.16.

<sup>136</sup>Strabo, *Geography* 16.2.39: 'The [Jewish] prophets too were held in so much honour that they were deemed worthy to be kings, on the ground that they promulgated to us ordinances and amendments from the gods, not only when they were alive, but also when they were dead, as, for example, Teiresias'. This trend goes back extremely far: see, for example, the 4<sup>th</sup> century geographer Hecateus, who described Moses as 'a man not only great of soul but also in his life the most public-spirited of all lawgivers whose names are recorded' (Hecateus, fragment preserved in Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca* 1). See also Gager (1972b), *op. cit.*

<sup>137</sup>*Homilies on Genesis* 3.3.

<sup>138</sup>*cf. Homilies on Exodus* 3.1: '[Moses's] speech was sonorous and his eloquence incomparable.'

all the wisdom of the Egyptians' and wanted to prohibit secret rites,<sup>139</sup> he decided the best way to turn the Israelites away from idolatry was to focus on sacrifice as a culturally acceptable alternative. Thus Origen also argues that the commands about sacrifice came from Moses and not from God; Moses knew to make the Israelites sacrifice to God in order to wean them off sacrificing to demons, even though the ultimate form, in Origen's eyes, was no sacrifice at all.<sup>140</sup>

It is clear that for Origen, Moses is also restrained and steadfast. For example, Origen refers to him as having 'great purity',<sup>141</sup> citing Exodus 24:2 in support, which sets Moses apart even from other prophets. Similarly, his perseverance in the face of incidents such as the golden calf, discussed in *Homilies on Exodus* 7, shows how steadfast he is as a leader. But Moses is most morally important in Origen's estimation as a forerunner of Christ:

*nisi enim intellexerimus, quomodo moritur Moyses, non poterimus advertere, quomodo regnat Iesus.*<sup>142</sup>

If we do not understand how Moses dies, we shall not be able to understand how Jesus reigns.

Origen frequently speaks of Christ and Moses as a pair, representing the New and Old Covenants – God and the Law, respectively. Book 4 of *On First Principles* opens with this image of the dual figureheads, Moses and Christ, representing the unity of scripture. This piece of anti-Marcionite apologetic provides an excellent starting place for understanding Origen's typological reading of the prophets. Origen begins his argument about scriptural unity with the two figures:

καὶ πρῶτόν γε... περὶ Μωσέως καὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. τοῦ νομοθέτου τῶν Ἑβραίων καὶ τοῦ ἐισηγητοῦ τῶν κατὰ χριστιανισμὸν σωτηρίων δογμάτων, ταῦτα διαληπτέον.<sup>143</sup>

Let us speak of Moses, the lawgiver of the Hebrews, and of Jesus Christ, the introducer of the saving doctrines of Christianity.

He notes additionally that Moses – like Christ as saviour – is the only lawgiver in history whose doctrines have appealed across the world to those of different languages:

<sup>139</sup> *Homilies on Exodus* 8.3.

<sup>140</sup> This argument is made in various places. See, for example, *Homilies on Numbers* 17.1.

<sup>141</sup> *Against Celsus* 4.97.

<sup>142</sup> *Homilies on Joshua* 2.1.

<sup>143</sup> *On First Principles* 4.1.1.

πάσα δὲ Ἑλλάς καὶ βάρβαρος ἢ κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην ἡμῶν ζηλωτὰς ἔχει μυρίουσ, καταλιπόντας τοὺς πατρῶους νόμους καὶ νομιζομένους θεούς, τῆς τηρήσεως τῶν Μωσέως νόμων καὶ τῆς μαθητείας τῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ λόγων.<sup>144</sup>

But all over Greece and in the barbarian part of the world there are thousands of zealots who have abandoned their ancestral laws and their recognised gods to observe the laws of Moses and the teaching of the words of Jesus Christ.

In fact, argues Origen, even by the standards of a pagan sage, Moses is a better man than anyone else.<sup>145</sup> While the Stoics proposed the allegorical reading of ancient mythological works for the wisdom concealed in them by the first men,<sup>146</sup> Origen argues that Moses managed to sustain an allegorical composition over five books of the pentateuch, putting him above any other sage. As with Philo's portrayal of Moses, while Origen stops short of calling any prophet sinless, he portrays them in the most laudatory terms possible. Like Apollonius or like Philo's Moses, then, for Origen the final evolution of prophets are as ascetic, pure, virtuous sages who, by virtue of their extreme holiness, are able to prophesy.

## VII Conclusions

There are a number of Biblical figures who are not generally regarded as prophets – such as Adam, Isaac, and Abraham – who Origen refers to as such. In this chapter I have made the case that Origen distinguishes clearly and consistently across his works between prophesying and being a prophet. While there are cases both from the OT and the NT – including Balaam and Caiaphas – of people who make divinely inspired and beneficial prophecies, Origen is clear that there is a threshold of personal virtue which a person has to cross to be considered a true prophet.

While Origen does not explicitly lay out the conditions for morally judging a prophecy or a prophet, the tripartite criteria I have suggested in this chapter – and the tripartite subdivision of the virtue criterion – match Origen's own concerns. As I have tried to show, these concerns were not developed in a vacuum, but, in places, rely upon both

<sup>144</sup>*On First Principles* 4.1.1.

<sup>145</sup>*Contra Celsum* 1.18.

<sup>146</sup>As noted in Chapter 5, p. 150. cf. Boys-Stones (2001), op. cit.

Greek and Philonic understandings of ecstasy, inspiration, and personal virtue.



## Chapter 8

# Christ

τί γὰρ ἂν καὶ ἡ προφητεία ἡ ἐξ ἐπιπνοίας ἁγίου πνεύματος εἶχε τηλικούτον, εἰ ὑπεξήρητο αὐτῆς τὰ περὶ τῆς κυρίου ἡμῶν οἰκονομίας;<sup>1</sup>

For what would prophecy, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, have that is so great, if you leave out of it those things related to the economy of our Lord?

In the 1950s, the Jesuit priest and palaeontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin presented what he called a ‘cosmic’ Christology.<sup>2</sup> Teilhard’s quirky evolutionary theology, of a world marching towards a technological and theological singularity, baffled most of his contemporaries and made him enemies both in the Church and the scientific Academy. His most controversial doctrine was that of the omega-point; he posited that there would be a point at which all conscious life, indeed, all matter, would evolve into a radically individualised union with the person of Christ. This, argued Teilhard, would be what we think of as the rapture, the *apocatastasis*. For Teilhard, this merging of consciousness would itself be an act of creation so profound that it could unite Christ’s roles as saviour and creator, man and god.

A 1979 doctoral thesis by James Lyons shows that Teilhard was deeply influenced by Origen’s christology.<sup>3</sup> Lyons examines Origen’s christology in *On First Principles*

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<sup>1</sup>Commentary on *John* 2.208.

<sup>2</sup>P. T. de Chardin (1959). *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.

<sup>3</sup>James A. Lyons. “The cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin”. DPhil thesis. University of Oxford, 1979, published posthumously as J. A. Lyons (1982). *The cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin*. Oxford Theological Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See, for example, Teilhard’s letter to Bruno de Solages (2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1952): “I’m delighted to know you’re at work. I imagine that Origen is a wonderful subject for tackling and discussing, under colour of history, the hottest questions put to our modern religious thought by the need to rethink Christology within the dimensions

2.1.3, arguing that for Origen, Christ was ‘present everywhere, diffused through all the universe, co-extensive with the world and penetrating the whole of creation’, making the comparison with the Stoic notion of the world-soul.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Lyons draws attention to Origen’s *Homilies on Psalms*,<sup>5</sup> particularly the second homily on Psalm 36:

*Christus ergo cuius omne hominum genus, imo fortassis totius creaturae universalitas corpus est*

Christ’s body is the whole human race, perhaps even the entire universality of creation.<sup>6</sup>

Lyons makes the case that if Origen believed Christ was present in all of creation, then for him it is not just human beings that will be saved in the rapture, but the created world itself. Thus Lyons argues that Origen’s interpretation of Romans 8:19–23<sup>7</sup> is necessarily to be read as cosmic – in the same sense in which Teilhard later used the term. If we were to apply Lyons’s reading of Origen’s christology to the case of prophecy, we would end up with something of the following form: creation *is* Christ; prophecy, therefore, whether it refers to literal, moral, or spiritual truths, whether it refers to the past, present, or future, can by its very nature talk ultimately of nothing but Christ.

This chapter will argue that Christ is the centre of Christian prophecy in Origen’s understanding. While the idea of Christ at the centre of prophecy is now so commonplace as to appear a truism, no thinker had fully espoused this view prior to Origen. It therefore represents an important way in which Origen influenced the framing of later patristic thought about the role and purpose of prophecy – a legacy to which I will return in Chapter 9.

In this chapter, I will make the case that, as Christ is the centre of Origen’s scriptural hermeneutic, so too Christ is the hermeneutic key to the tripartite hermeneutic

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of a ‘new Universe’.”

<sup>4</sup>J. A. Lyons (1979). “The cosmic Christ in Origen and Teilhard de Chardin”. PhD thesis. University of Oxford, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 126–134.

<sup>6</sup>*Homilies on Psalms* 2 on Psalm 36. For the text of these homilies, cf. M. Heintz (2008). “The pedagogy of the soul: Origen’s “Homilies on the Psalms””. PhD thesis. Notre Dame. Additionally, see fragment 164 on Luke, which discusses Colossians 1:20.

<sup>7</sup>“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies”.

of prophecy. While in previous chapters of this thesis I have tried to show the senses of prophecy as distinct from each other, in this chapter I will show how Origen's christological focus can unlock the way to understanding the senses as triune. As I noted in Chapter 5, one of the few points of consensus in the scholarship on Origen's exegetical hermeneutic is the almost universal insistence that, despite the claims of his detractors that he throws away the literal sense of scripture in favour of the allegorical, Origen's tripartite hermeneutic actually insists on the fundamental unity of the somatic, psychic, and pneumatic readings of scripture. I will demonstrate in this chapter how Origen implicitly applies the same principle to prophecy; to do so I will use the example of the role of John the Baptist in Origen's thought.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Origen's particular motivation for this centripetal search for unity. Following on from the argument of Chapter 2, I will make the case that Origen's focus on Christ in the question of prophecy was particularly shaped by the challenges presented by the disunity of the Marcionite system; both his hermeneutic of scripture and – as I will argue – his hermeneutic of prophecy attempt to refute Marcionism by a demonstration of the concordance of the Old and New Testaments through triune somatic, psychic and pneumatic readings. The first section of this chapter will look at some specific examples of Origen's rebuttal of Marcionism, and examine the rhetorical framework in which Origen's anti-Marcionite arguments function.

Then I will move to discussion of John the Baptist in Book 2 of the *Commentary on John*, a text on the nature of prophecy that contains an explicitly anti-Marcionite statement of intent. In this text Origen claims John as among the 'greatest' of the prophets alongside Moses: I will argue that the spur for this claim is that it is a rebuttal of Marcionism; while Marcionites largely cut John from their gospel,<sup>8</sup> Origen here enhances John's position as the figure who ties OT and NT prophecy together. Additionally, I argue that it is evidently deliberate that Origen's argument here – that John is the greatest of the prophets – is followed directly by a passage of anti-Marcionite polemic.

I will examine why Origen makes this claim and why it is important for understanding his overall view of prophets, arguing that for Origen, John the Baptist represents a development of the figure of the prophet even further than that of Moses, the philosopher-sage. John encapsulates, in his proximity to Christ, the fundamental inseparability of the triune prophetic role: John's somatic, psychic, and pneumatic prophecies are almost indistinguishable in their closeness to Christ. While other prophets act as

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<sup>8</sup>cf. Chapter 2, pp. 79–83.

types whose persons and prophecies require careful exegesis, sometimes throwing up difficulties or stumbling blocks,<sup>9</sup> John is a living signpost who points directly at Christ.

In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the relationship between scripture, prophecy, exegesis, and Christ in Origen's thought. I make the case that exegesis and prophecy act as analogues to one another in the somatic, psychic, and pneumatic senses, coming together in their final evolution as a triune reflection of the triune God. In making this case, I argue that Christ is at the centre of prophecy for Origen.

In the case of the pneumatic sense, Christ is the explicit object of both scriptural passages and prophecy as an epistemic phenomenon. In the case of psychic prophecy, Christ is the ultimate moral exemplar, the moral type towards which the morality of the prophets as moral exempla and scriptural passages as moral instruction point. He is, too, the moral yardstick by which true prophecy is separated from false, the true prophecy of the Israelites demarcated from the false inspiration of the Pythian and Phrygian ecstasies. In the case of somatic prophecy, the cosmic Christ is the end-point of creation, of time itself – and thus the final and looming content of the future. Additionally, Christ is the content of the providential arrow of time, and thus for Origen the content of the narrative direction inherent in the notion of somatic prophecy as revelation.

This chapter makes a number of totalising claims. I would like to add two brief caveats to this. First, as discussed in my Introduction,<sup>10</sup> Origen does not make explicit statements about how he understands prophecy taxonomically. Therefore any explicit structure or hermeneutic is my own construction from the evidence. However, this chapter should be taken in tandem with Chapter 5 in which I propose Origen's tripartite hermeneutic of exegesis as a taxonomical parallel to draw out an explicit hermeneutic of prophecy in his thought. Given this, some of the claims made in this chapter are inherently conjectural and are meant to be conjectural; I have attempted wherever possible not to introduce any argumentative or taxonomical anachronism. While I am not claiming that Origen *did* make any of these arguments in this exact form, I hope that these arguments will all work on their own terms as arguments that Origen himself *could* have made.

Second, even if the precise details of my suggested scheme for Origen's hermeneutic of prophecy are wrong, my main focus is to advocate for the existence of a hermeneutic of prophecy in his thought that is structurally analogous to the scriptural hermeneutic. That is to say, a refutation of the details of any one of these arguments does not, I think,

<sup>9</sup>Such as the difficulties discussed in Chapter 6 with free will and foreknowledge, cf. pp. 158–161.

<sup>10</sup>pp. 57–59.

constitute a refutation of the whole underlying idea – which is the central idea of this thesis.

## I Literature

Judith Lieu's work on Marcion's theology, which I discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, makes reference to Origen's reading of Marcion.<sup>11</sup> Lieu comments that in exegetical contexts, Origen 'sharply challenges Marcionite exegesis' on a regular basis. Sometimes, as Lieu notes, Origen seems to use Marcion as something of a placeholder heretic. Often in these contexts Marcion is paired with Valentinus and Basilides, such as at *Homilies on Jeremiah* 10.5,<sup>12</sup> at *Homilies on Jeremiah* 17.2<sup>13</sup> and at *Homilies on Joshua* 7.<sup>14</sup> However, as I will demonstrate, many other comments are more specific and relate directly to Marcionite thought. Overall, Lieu argues that Origen's use of Marcion is primarily as an example of 'a fundamental misunderstanding of the right way to read Scripture'.<sup>15</sup> This is an important observation. However, I wish to extend this conclusion considerably.

In what follows, I argue that Origen's apophatic use of Marcion is not just about defending correct exegetical practice but also about *defining* it. This can be seen from examining his exegetical hermeneutic, which rejects instances of Marcionite literalism and encourages allegorical cross-referencing across the Testaments, as mentioned in Chapter 5.<sup>16</sup> More clearly, it drives his approach to prophecy, in which the NT, writ large, is a prophetic fulfilment of the OT. Particularly, as I began to argue in Chapter 2,<sup>17</sup> Origen is concerned with the Marcionite dismissal of OT prophets and the question of their authoritative status as sources of divine knowledge. I made the case in the previous chapter that part of Origen's response was to counter with the Philonic conception of OT prophets as virtuous sages; this is most clearly identifiable in Origen's portrayal of

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<sup>11</sup>cf. p. 68.

<sup>12</sup>'We inquire if God who has given the Law and the Prophets is good when we see that the "way of the impious prospers" and he does not punish the impious'. Contextually it is clear that Origen is referring here to Marcion, Basilides, Valentinus, who, he claims, name Jesus but do not truly accept him.

<sup>13</sup>'The partridge [which Origen reads as the devil] cried out through Valentinus, the partridge cried out through Marcion, the partridge cried out through Basilides, through all of the heretics.'

<sup>14</sup>In this passage Origen explains the episode in Joshua in which Achan steals an ingot of gold from spoils dedicated to God after the siege of Jericho. Origen's explanation is that the ingot of gold refers to the rhetoric of the 'philosophers' such as Basilides, Valentinus and Marcion – that is to say, as in the metaphor of the Egyptian Gold (cf. p. 93), heretics use rhetoric and philosophy for false and selfish ends.

<sup>15</sup>Lieu (2015), op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>16</sup>cf. pp. 153-155.

<sup>17</sup>cf. pp. 78-84.

Moses.<sup>18</sup>

As also discussed in Chapter 2,<sup>19</sup> interesting work on Origen's anti-Marcionite stance has been done by Ruth Clements – who particularly notes the role of Origen's negative portrayal of Jews and Jewish exegesis in his anti-Marcionism<sup>20</sup> – and Josep Rius-Camps.<sup>21</sup> Both of these scholars focus primarily on *On First Principles*; while in this chapter I use some material from that text, my primary focus is instead on an extended anti-Marcionite passage in *Commentary on John* which pertains particularly to prophecy.

This extended passage also treats John the Baptist in some detail. Although there has been a great deal of work done on John the Baptist in New Testament scholarship,<sup>22</sup> he does not feature prominently in works on patristic theology. Some work within NT studies has been done on John's role as a prophet: for example, Martin Dibelius has argued that John the Baptist's diet was an important sign that he was a prophet.<sup>23</sup> This was taken up by James Kelhoffer, in a detailed study of John's diet as part of his wider ascetic practice.<sup>24</sup>

However, many scholars do mention the fact that Origen considers John the Baptist to be the last of the prophets.<sup>25</sup> This causes some tension in Hällström's theory of prophetic succession; as I mentioned in the Introduction,<sup>26</sup> Hällström claims that Origen has a taxonomy of prophecy which split prophets along two axes: first, whether they were before or after Christ, and second, whether they were 'first-class' or 'second-class' prophets. In the Introduction, I critiqued the idea that there were different classes of prophets. In this chapter I return to the idea of whether, like Hällström, we should read Origen as implying a succession of prophecy after Christ.

Hällström's argument is that, just as the Phrygians had a theory of prophetic succes-

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<sup>18</sup>cf. pp. 230–234.

<sup>19</sup>cf. p. 68.

<sup>20</sup>Clements (2005), op. cit.

<sup>21</sup>Rius-Camps (1975), op. cit.

<sup>22</sup>For example, Josef Ernst's 1989 study of John the Baptist remains the most detailed NT analysis. J. Ernst (1989). *Johannes der Täufer: Interpretation - Geschichte - Wirkungsgeschichte*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

<sup>23</sup>M. Dibelius (1911). *Die urchristliche Überlieferung von Johannes dem Täufer*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

<sup>24</sup>J. A. Kelhoffer (2005). *The Diet of John the Baptist*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 176. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

<sup>25</sup>For example, Nasrallah considers this. cf. L. Nasrallah (2003a). "“Now I Know in Part”: Historiography and Epistemology in Early Christian Debates over Prophecy". In: *Walk in the Ways of Wisdom: Essay in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza*. Ed. by M. Johnson-DeBaufre, C. Kittredge, and S. Matthews. Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, pp. 244–65.

<sup>26</sup>cf. pp. 37–39.

sion – in which they were descended from prophets and represented a direct continuation of the line of prophecy – so too did Origen.<sup>27</sup> Hällström’s most tendentious claim is that Origen considered himself to be a prophet in this direct line of succession, one of the ‘first class’ prophets by dint of his pedagogical prowess, an assertion for which there is simply no evidence. But what of his wider claim, that Origen recognises the continuation of prophecy among the Christians after the sojourn of Christ?

I will argue that for Origen it is the scriptures that contain the necessary revelation for future generations.<sup>28</sup> To understand this, we must understand Origen’s notion of inspiration and of revelation, and his notion of the relationship between scripture and prophecy. I began to address this question in Chapter 5.<sup>29</sup> Various positions have been put forward on elements of this question. First, there is a thread in the scholarship which approaches Origen’s notion of inspiration pejoratively as hyperliteral. Thus R.P.C. Hanson:

Origen’s theory of inspiration very often drives him into exasperatingly atomistic exegesis, just because he is determined to believe that every verse, and sometimes every word, is an oracle in itself, independently of its context; this is indeed a result which the embarrassing theory of a hidden sense latent in all Scripture is eminently calculated to promote.<sup>30</sup>

In Hanson’s view, Origen’s theory of inspiration is circular and platitudinous.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Benjamin Drewery refers dismissively to Origen’s ‘atomistic inspirationalism’,<sup>32</sup> a term which clearly follows Hanson, although Drewery does not cite him. On the other hand, Zöllig and, following him, De Lubac, have examined the issue in less blatantly polemical terms, concluding that for Origen, revelation simply refers to those statements (written or spoken) that are directly divinely inspired.<sup>33</sup>

George Boys-Stones has additionally considered the role of revelation alongside reason in Origen’s thought.<sup>34</sup> He argues that Origen’s understanding of the world, as contingent and temporally unique, depends on his understanding of free will: that is, a

<sup>27</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., 2ff.

<sup>28</sup>cf. R. Hanson (1962). *Tradition in the Early Church*. London: S.C.M. Press, pp. 190–191.

<sup>29</sup>cf. p. 164.

<sup>30</sup>Hanson (1959), *Allegory and Event*, p. 188.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>32</sup>B. Drewery (1960). *Origen and the Doctrine of Grace*. London: Epworth Press, p. 28n14.

<sup>33</sup>A. Zöllig (1902). *Die Inspirationslehre Des Origenes: Ein Beitrag Zur Dogmengeschichte*. Freiberg: Herder.

<sup>34</sup>G. Boys-Stones (2007). “Human autonomy and divine revelation in Origen”. In: *Severan Culture*. Ed. by S. Swain, S. Harrison, and J. Elsner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 489–499.

world which is radically indeterminist necessarily cannot be understood by reason alone, in contradiction to the Platonic and Stoic positions. This is a helpful contribution, to which I return later in the chapter in my discussion of somatic prophecy.

Mark Edwards has given the question the most comprehensive treatment. He argues that revelation for Origen involves the experience of God's triune being as reflected in his creation.<sup>35</sup> Under this analysis, Christ as Logos is the source of revelation, and scripture his 'prime disclosure'.<sup>36</sup> The human person's role is, therefore, the understanding of scripture, although, as Edwards cautions, Origen is clear that this does not entail human participation in God, who is present 'only through the historical epiphanies of his world.'<sup>37</sup>

## II Origen against Marcion

In Chapter 2 I argued that Marcionite understandings of prophecy strictly excluded the notion that Christ was prophesied in the OT. The Marcionites considered the Jewish prophets to be capable of making predictions, but they were neither divine nor morally legitimate; in Chapter 7 I showed the structural similarity to this line of thinking in Origen's own rejection of pagan prophecy.<sup>38</sup>

It is clear from Origen's writings that the concerns of the Marcionite movement left a deep imprint on his thought. He mentions the Marcionites regularly in his works, both in specific exegetical contexts and in more general sections of polemic. In this section I will look at Origen's more explicit mentions of Marcionism. I argue that Marcion's challenge to the role of prophecy in scripture posed a profound epistemic challenge to Origen. As I argued in Chapter 5, for Origen, scripture is an epistemic building-block, the true source of knowledge about God and his interactions with human beings. Given this, he argues, we must base our understanding of the phenomenon of legitimate prophecy on scripture; it is only by comparing scriptural prophecy to inferior, illegitimate forms of prophecy (such as pagan oracular prophecy) that we can understand what true prophecy is. I argued in Chapter 7 that this is exactly what Origen did in his own consideration of problematic prophets. But if, as Marcion suggests, we cannot trust the

<sup>35</sup>M. J. Edwards (1998). "Christ or Plato? Origen on Revelation and Anthropology". In: *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*. Ed. by L. Ayres and G. Jones. Christian Origins 1. Oxford: Routledge, pp. 11–25.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>38</sup>cf. pp. 204–209.

evidence of pre-Christian scripture on the question, then how do we know anything about prophecy – and worse, how do we know *what* we know about prophecy?

It is with this tangle of questions that Origen contends in his anti-Marcionite polemic, found scattered throughout his work. As I argued in Chapters 2 and 7, while Origen may have dismissed the Phrygian movement and, as we know, *did* dismiss the pagan oracles straightforwardly as *particular* incidences of false prophecy – or even as representative of a general false approach to prophecy – neither example forces him to question the very notion of prophecy. Conversely, when he engages with Marcionite attacks on the authority of the OT prophets, Origen cannot ignore the foundational question and thus often spends a great deal of space explaining exactly why and how those prophets are legitimate and authoritative sources of knowledge.

There are several things we can establish about Origen's picture of Marcionite doctrine. First, Origen is aware that the Marcionites reject the OT because they find it impossible to account for actions of God that appear to be unjust. Origen diagnoses the Marcionite solution, of 'cut[ting] off the New from the Old' (διακόποντας ἀπὸ τῶν παλαιῶν τὰ καινὰ)<sup>39</sup> as based on a false understanding of both Testaments, and argues that this solution does not solve the problem that the Marcionites purport to be dealing with:

*Marcion ergo, et omnes qui de schola eius velut erpentium germina pullularunt, horum absolutiones ne extremo quidem digito attingere audebunt: quippe qui propter huiuscemodi quaestiones Vetus Instrumentum, sicubi forte in eo tale aliquid legerant, abiecerunt. sed quid eis profuit, cum similibus nihilominus Novi Instrumenti quaestionibus praefocentur?*

Marcion and all who spring forth from his school like a brood of vipers shall not dare to touch the solution of these matters, not even with their fingertips, since they have thrown away the Old Testament on account of these sorts of problems, wheresoever they happened to have read such things in it. But what good did it do them? For they are no less strangled by similar problems in the New Testament.<sup>40</sup>

We see here the same idea about Marcionite theology as found in Eusebius's unnamed source, that the introduction of theological dualism is really about avoiding the problem

<sup>39</sup> *Commentary on Matthew* 10.15.

<sup>40</sup> *Commentary on Romans* 1.18.3.

of evil.<sup>41</sup> Origen, whose solution to the problem of evil relies on his narrative understanding of human free will, naturally cannot see the need for such a drastic action.<sup>42</sup> For him, just as scripture itself tells us the way to read scripture in general,<sup>43</sup> scripture itself also informs us how to understand the relationship of the Testaments:

καὶ διὰ τούτων δὲ δυσωπητέον τοὺς ὅσον ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς τὴν θεότητα διαιροῦντας καὶ διακόπτοντας ἀπὸ τῶν παλαιῶν τὰ καινά, ὡς μακρὰν τυγχάνοντας τῆς πρὸς τὸν οἰκοδεσπότην ὁμοιώσεως, προφέροντα ἐκ τοῦ θησαυροῦ αὐτοῦ καινὰ καὶ παλαιά.<sup>44</sup>

By means of the prophets we must refute those who, as far as they can, cut God in two and cut off the New from the Old, so that they are very unlike the householder who brings out of his store-house things both new and old.

Origen's use of a scriptural metaphor to explain the failure of Marcionites to recognise the centrality of scripture is characteristic of his polemic; according to him, the Marcionite error is in failing to recognise the authority of scripture not only in a first-order sense, but also as an authoritative source of information on itself. Thus they can speak of 'the demiurge, the God of the prophets'<sup>45</sup> without understanding that he is the same god as the God of Christ:

ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐντεῦθεν οἴονται οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι κατασκευάζειν τὸ ἀσεβὲς αὐτῶν δόγμα, ὡς ἄρα ἄγνωστον ὄντα τὸν πατέρα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῖς ἐν τῇ παλαιᾷ ἀγίοις.<sup>46</sup>

The heterodox think that they can construct their impious dogma from this starting point: that the Father of Jesus Christ was completely unknown to the holy men of the Old Testament.

Origen is aware that the Marcionites altered the gospel, and he disapproves of it.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Origen is aware that the Marcionites do not accept the notion that the life and mysteries of Jesus Christ constitute fulfilment of OT prophecies:

<sup>41</sup>cf. pp. 80–81.

<sup>42</sup>As I argued in Chapter 6.

<sup>43</sup>cf. Chapter 5.

<sup>44</sup>*Commentary on Matthew* 10.15.

<sup>45</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 12.5.

<sup>46</sup>*Fragments on Luke* 162.

<sup>47</sup>*Against Celsus* 2.27: 'I do not know of people who have altered the gospel apart from the Marcionites and Valentinians'.

οἱ δὲ ἓνα μὲν τηροῦντες θεόν, ἐξουδενοῦντες δὲ τὰς προφητείας οὐκ ἐδίψησαν τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον τὸ ἐν τοῖς προφήταις, διὰ τοῦτο οὐ πίνονται οὐδὲ ἀπὸ τῆς πηγῆς τῆς πατρικῆς.<sup>48</sup>

Those who keep the one God, but who deny the prophecies, do not thirst for the Holy Spirit in the prophets, and so they never drink from the paternal wellspring.

As part of his anti-Marcionite polemic, Origen provides two lists of prophecies: those which he claims are made by Christ and have been fulfilled in the time since his death (Mark 13:31;<sup>49</sup> Matthew 10:18 / Mark 13:9;<sup>50</sup> and Matthew 7:22–23 / Luke 13:26–27<sup>51</sup>), and those from the OT which he claims are fulfilled in Christ (including Genesis 49:10,<sup>52</sup> Hosea 3:4;<sup>53</sup> Deuteronomy 32:21,<sup>54</sup> Psalms 45:1–3;<sup>55</sup> Psalms 72:7–8;<sup>56</sup> Isaiah 7:14,<sup>57</sup> Isaiah 8:8–9,<sup>58</sup> Micah 5:2;<sup>59</sup> Deuteronomy 9:24;<sup>60</sup> and Job 3:8).<sup>61</sup> This practice of this exercise, says Origen, is the link that draws Christ and the OT together, the way of refuting Marcionism:

<sup>48</sup> *Homilies on Jeremiah* 18.9.

<sup>49</sup> “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

<sup>50</sup> “As for yourselves, beware; for they will hand you over to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them.” (Mark 13:9).

<sup>51</sup> “Then you will begin to say ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ But he will say, ‘I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!’” (Luke 13:26–27).

<sup>52</sup> “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, / nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, / until tribute comes to him; / and the obedience of the peoples is his.”

<sup>53</sup> “For the Israelites shall remain many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim.”

<sup>54</sup> “They made me jealous with what is no god, / provoked me with their idols. / So I will make them jealous with what is no people, / provoke them with a foolish nation.”

<sup>55</sup> “My heart overflows with a goodly theme; / I address my verses to the king; / my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe. / You are the most handsome of men; / grace is poured upon your lips; / therefore God has blessed you forever. / Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one, / in your glory and majesty.”

<sup>56</sup> “In his days may righteousness flourish / and peace abound, until the moon is no more. / May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>57</sup> “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.” (LXX παρθένος).

<sup>58</sup> “It will sweep onto Judah as a flood, and, pouring over, it will reach up to the neck; and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. / Bind together, you peoples, and be dismayed; / listen, all you far countries; / gird yourselves and be dismayed; / gird yourselves and be dismayed!”

<sup>59</sup> “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, / who are one of the little clans of Judah, / from you shall come forth for me / one who is to rule in Israel, / whose origin is from old, / from ancient days.”

<sup>60</sup> “Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.”

<sup>61</sup> “Let those curse it who curse the Sea, / those who are skilled to rouse up Leviathan.”

ἀποδεικνύντες δὲ ὡς ἐν ἐπιτομῇ περὶ τῆς θεότητος Ἰησοῦ καὶ χρώμενοι τοῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγοις προφητικοῖς, συναποδείκνυμεν θεοπνεύστους εἶναι τὰς προφητευσάσας περὶ αὐτοῦ γραφάς, καὶ τὰ καταγγέλλοντα τὴν ἐπιδημίαν αὐτοῦ γράμματα καὶ διδασκαλίαν μετὰ πάσης δυνάμεως καὶ ἐξουσίας εἰρημένα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἐκλογῆς κεκρατηκότα.<sup>62</sup>

When we show briefly the divinity of Jesus and use the prophetic words about him, we show simultaneously that the writings which prophesy about him are divinely inspired, and the letters that announce his sojourn and his teaching were spoken with all power and authority, and because of this they have prevailed over the chosen people from the nations.

One text, in which Origen makes an explicit argument about prophecy and prophets, is particularly illuminating on Origen's anti-Marcionite stance: *Commentary on John* 2.175-209. The text contains an extended passage specifically critiquing the Marcionite view of prophecy. I do not think this is incidental, nor a case of Marcion being used as a placeholder heretic in a wider discussion of prophecy. Indeed, let us look at the structure of this text: it comprises a sustained argument that John the Baptist is the 'best of the prophets' (2.175-185), followed by an anti-Marcionite generalisation (2.185-199), followed by a general discussion of the role of prophecy as it pertains to Christ on the basis of what has been demonstrated about John the Baptist (2.199-209). We will return to the section on John later in this chapter.<sup>63</sup>

In the anti-Marcionite section, Origen puts forward the Marcionite position on OT prophecy – that it was not necessary for Christ to be witnessed nor foretold. According to Origen's summary, Marcion argues that the prophets themselves do not need to be foretold to be believed, thus Christ, who is greater, should not require it either.<sup>64</sup> Origen dismisses this as a curiously instrumentalist view of prophecy noting that the evidence of miracles, which are one-time events, is much more powerful when combined with corresponding prophecies. Additionally, Origen points out that witnesses to Christ in his lifetime are not judged to be conferring favour on him, and thus Origen does not see

<sup>62</sup>*On First Principles* 4.1.6.

<sup>63</sup>pp.249–255.

<sup>64</sup>*Commentary on John* 2.200: 'If Moses had been believed because of his word and mighty works, and did not need any witnesses before him who announced him, and each of the prophets too was received by the people as sent from God, how is it not more so that he who excels Moses and the prophets can accomplish what he wills and benefit the human race without prophets testifying to the things about him?'. It is not clear if this is a paraphrase of Marcion, or Origen's own interpretation of the Marcionist position. For more, see (Lieu [2015], op. cit., pp. 77–81).

why the Marcionites should take the prophets as doing so: in fact, Origen argues the prophets themselves receive honour from witnessing Christ before his incarnation, to those in former generations.<sup>65</sup> The most explicit statement of his christological position is in 2.208, quoted at the start of this chapter ('what would prophecy... have that is so great if one from it exclude...our Lord?'). Similarly:

ὡς γὰρ ἡ θεοσέβεια κεκόσμηται τῶν διὰ... παρακλήτου... προσερχομένων  
τῷ τῶν ὄλων θεῷ... οὕτως καὶ ἡ τῶν πάλαι θεοσέβεια τῇ νοήσει καὶ πίστει  
καὶ προσδοκίᾳ Χριστοῦ ἱερὰ ἦν καὶ παρὰ θεῷ ἀποδεκτὴ.<sup>66</sup>

Just as the faith of those who approach the God of the universe is mediated through an advocate [Christ]... so too 'the religion of the ancients was holy and acceptable to God by its understanding of, and faith in, and expectation of Christ.'

Overall, Origen takes prophecy as fundamentally a method for the ancients to come to knowledge of Christ. This is a remarkably christocentric definition of prophecy. Indeed, it is because the Marcionites do not believe that Christ needs to be foretold that leads them therefore to a false view of *all* prophecy – since Christ is at the centre of all prophecy. Structurally, the text is also a very clear demonstration of both the main arguments of this chapter and Chapter 5 – that Origen's conception of prophecy is multi-layered and structurally centred around Christ, and that Marcionite views of prophecy are an important spur for this taxonomy.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, the Marcionites excised from their gospel many references to OT prophecy. One of the more interesting editorial decisions was the removal of much of the narrative of John the Baptist from the Gospel of Luke. To understand the significance of this omission, and why John the Baptist is – in Origen's eyes – such an essential piece of the anti-Marcionite puzzle, we must turn to Origen's discussion of his role as a 'prophetic forerunner' (πρόδρομος)<sup>67</sup> of Christ.

### III John the Baptist

John the Baptist has from the earliest times been read as an ambiguous figure. His role, as the last prophet of the old covenant, means he cannot fit comfortably in the NT. Yet

<sup>65</sup> *Commentary on John* 2.207.

<sup>66</sup> *Commentary on John* 2.209.

<sup>67</sup> *Commentary on John* 2.186.

he plays an important role in all of the Gospels, featuring at greatest length in Luke in a miraculous narrative in which he makes his first prophecy while still in the womb.

As we saw in Chapter 7, Moses is clearly portrayed by Origen as somebody who exhibits all three types of prophecy: he is a forerunner of Christ, but also a moral and future-telling prophet. While Origen's understanding is based mostly on the Philonic reading of Moses as a sage, he goes a step further than Philo in his use of the argument that Moses is a type of Christ. In the case of John the Baptist, I will argue that Origen pushes this tripartite structure even further. Origen claims John the Baptist as among the 'greatest' (μεῖζων) of the prophets, on the same level as Moses. Clearly this is a claim that Jewish thought would not endorse, and in this sense Origen deviates from Philo again. But it is also highly irregular in Christian thought prior to his period, in which John the Baptist was a peripheral figure for most.<sup>68</sup> Given this, we must account for why John the Baptist is so important to Origen, and why it matters that he is.

In this section, I examine the portrayal of John in two texts: *Homilies on Luke* and *Commentary on John*. In *Homilies on Luke* Origen discusses the circumstances surrounding John's conception and birth, discussing John's father Zechariah and his mother Elizabeth, and the relationship of the unborn John to his cousin Jesus. The discussion in Book 2 of the *Commentary on John* – directly before the anti-Marcionite generalisation discussed above – seeks to demonstrate not only that John the Baptist is a true prophet in Origen's eyes, but that he is the archetypal prophet. As in Origen's consideration of the status of Balaam in his *Homilies on Numbers*, Origen discusses several different criteria for John's suitability and status as a prophet. I make the case here that Origen's argument for John's prophetic importance throws light on the tripartite hermeneutic in several ways.

First, John's literal prophecies of Christ's advent are demonstrably fulfilled, and provide a completely unproblematic example of the fulfilment of somatic prophecy in Christ. Second, Origen clearly and explicitly reads John as a moral exemplar who points towards Christ's moral perfection. Third, John is shown to raise all sorts of important questions about the soul, as well as more mystical matters.

If we turn to the discussion of John's birth and early life in *Homilies on Luke* we see three immediate grounds on which Origen can claim that John is among the most

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<sup>68</sup>John the Baptist is mentioned only once in the Apostolic Fathers, in an aside about baptism in Ignatius's *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* (1:1). The most significant early patristic discussion of him is in Tertullian's *On Baptism*, but even there he does not play a particularly major role in and of himself, and is used primarily as a vehicle for discussion of legitimate and illegitimate baptism.

important prophets: first, that his life is prophesied in the OT;<sup>69</sup> second, that he is a member of the extended family of Jesus Christ; and third, that both of his parents are prophets in their own right.

First, and most importantly, Origen endorses John's claim at John 1:23 that he is a fulfilment of Isaiah 40:3:

εἶτα τὸν Ἡσαΐαν παρίστησι τοῦτο αὐτὸ φωνοῦντα. τί γὰρ φήσιν; φωνὴ βο-  
ῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ.<sup>70</sup>

But we read this scriptural passage from the prophet Isaiah. For it says, “the voice of one crying in the desert”.

In addition to the prophecy in Isaiah, Origen notes that John is also the subject of a prophecy by his father Zechariah the priest:

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
by the forgiveness of their sins.<sup>71</sup>

Origen discusses this prophecy – and Zechariah's subsequent muteness – at some length and concludes that it is ‘quite clear’ (*manifestissime*) that Zechariah is a prophet.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, Origen discusses the prophecy made by John's mother Elizabeth, claiming that she too ‘prophesied and spoke from the Holy Spirit’ (προεφήτευσεν ἡ Ἐλισάβετ καὶ ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου ἐλάλησε).<sup>73</sup> Origen notes that Elizabeth received the Holy Spirit ‘on account of her son [John]’, arguing that Elizabeth ‘was filled with the Spirit second, following John’ (ἀλλὰ προηγουμένως πλησθέντος Ἰωάννου δευτέρως ἢ μήτηρ).<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, as he notes in the following homily, it is clear that both Elizabeth and Mary, mother of Jesus, are prophets in their own right. Indeed, his position is that the prophecies of Elizabeth and Mary are so important that they constitute the beginning of salvation:

<sup>69</sup>Origen notes that this is not uniquely the case for John, citing Elijah and Josiah, but acknowledges the importance of the prophecies concerning John. cf. *Commentary on John* 2.117.

<sup>70</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 21.5.

<sup>71</sup>Luke 1:76–77.

<sup>72</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 5.1 – ‘*manifestissime*’ is Jerome's word: in the Greek, the clarity of Zechariah's status is expressed through the repeated use of the noun προφήτης. See also *Homilies on Luke* 10.1: δύο δὲ γενικὰς προφητείας προφητεύει Ζαχαρίας, τὴν προηγουμένην περὶ Χριστοῦ, τὴν δὲ ἐξῆς περὶ Ἰωάννου· (‘Zechariah speaks two general prophecies: the first about Christ, the second about John’).

<sup>73</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 6.2.

<sup>74</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 7.3.

πρὸ Ἰωάννου Ἐλισάβετ προφητεύει, πρὸ τῆς γενέσεως τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν ἢ Μαρία προφητεύει. καὶ ὡσπερ ἤρξατο ἡ ἀμαρτία ἀπὸ τῆς γυναικὸς καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο ἔφθασεν ἐπὶ τὸν ἄνδρα, οὕτω καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ἀπὸ τῶν γυναικῶν ἤρξατο.<sup>75</sup>

Elizabeth prophesies before John; before the birth of our saviour, Mary prophesies. Just as sin began from the woman and then spread to the man, in the same way, salvation had its first beginnings from women.

Thus Origen builds the case that John is not only the fulfilment of an OT prophecy from Isaiah, but also that he is the fulfilment of a family of prophets who prophetically anticipate his birth. John's own first prophetic act is his recognition of Jesus while both of them are still unborn:

ὅτε γὰρ Μαρία συνέλαβε καὶ ἦλθε πρὸς αὐτήν καὶ ὅτε ἐγένετο ὁ ἀσπασμὸς αὐτῆς εἰς τὰ ὦτα αὐτῆς, ἐσκίρτησεν ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει τὸ βρέφος ἐν τῇ κοιλίᾳ τῆς Ἐλισάβετ.<sup>76</sup>

When Mary conceived and came to Elizabeth, and “her greeting resounded in her ears, the child in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy.”

Origen is also clear that John is accepted as a prophet by the community before he is born:

λαληθέντων οὖν αὐτῶν ὡς περὶ θείας συλλήψεως καὶ ὡς περὶ προφήτου μέλλοντος γεννᾶσθαι ἐν τῷ λαῷ.<sup>77</sup>

A rumour spread among the people that Elizabeth bore a prophet in her womb, and that what she was carrying was greater than a man.

It is awareness of this rumour, argues Origen, that means that the Pharisees, when they see John, ask if he is ‘the prophet’. Origen treats the Pharisees' questions, and John's answers to them, at some length in *Commentary on John* 6. He is particularly interested in John's denial of two claims made by the Pharisees: first, that he is Elijah, and second, that he is ‘the’ prophet (ὁ προφήτης). Origen uses this passage to inveigh against the claim made by the Valentinian Heracleon on the basis of John's denial that he was not a prophet. Origen's rebuttal, unsurprisingly, revolves around the difference between ‘a’

<sup>75</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 8.1.

<sup>76</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 6.2.

<sup>77</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 6.2.

prophet and ‘the’ prophet. But further, he also uses the passage to discuss the role of Christ as prophet and John’s status as such a close forerunner to Christ that the confusion is possible.<sup>78</sup>

We see then that Origen argues extensively for John’s exceptionality as a prophet on various grounds. In the rest of the section, I will demonstrate how Origen reads John as a prophet in each of the somatic, psychic, and pneumatic senses. First, John is a supremely important prophet in terms of the somatic fulfilment of his prophecies, which are directly concerning Christ. What do I mean by this? It is clear from some of Origen’s comments on the somatic fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies that he considers it a boon for a prophet to be able to see his prophecies somatically fulfilled. He refers to Luke 10:23–24, in which Jesus tells the disciples that “many prophets and kings desired to see what [they, the disciples] see, but did not see it”:

νομίζουσιν οἱ ἀπλούστεροι, ὅτι· <<πολλοὶ προφηῆται προφητεύοντες τὰ περὶ ἐμοῦ ἠθέλησαν γενέσθαι κατὰ τοὺς ἐμοὺς χρόνους, ὥστε >ιδεῖν, ἃ βλέπετε, καὶ ἀκούσαι, ἃ ἀκούετε.>> ἀλλ’ οὐκ εὐτύχησαν φθάσαι εἰς τοὺς καιροὺς τούτους, ἐν οἷς ὑμεῖς τούτων ἠξιώθητε.<sup>79</sup>

Simpler believers think these words mean “many prophets who prophesied about me wanted to live during my times, so as to ‘to see what you see and hear what you hear.’” But they were not successful in reaching these times, which you are worthy of.

But Origen does not find this satisfactory as a total exegesis of the passage; he feels that it does not explain the designation of ‘many’ prophets rather than ‘all’ – surely all prophets would, under that reading, have wished to live at the time that Christ lived? Origen seeks further readings, cross referencing to his own exegesis of John 8:56 in which he discusses Abraham, who ‘saw the day of Christ and rejoiced.’<sup>80</sup> He suggests, therefore, that some of the greatest of the prophets did not desire to see the day of Christ exactly because they already had foreseen him fully. John, as a prophet who did in fact get to see his prophecies fulfilled, ranks among the greatest of the prophets. Indeed, for Origen, the lack of time between John’s prophesying and the somatic fulfilment of his prophecies is evidence of his greatness. This is in line with other patristic writers, who also consider

<sup>78</sup>cf. *Commentary on John* 6.88ff.

<sup>79</sup>*Fragments on Luke* 165.

<sup>80</sup>*Commentary on John* 2.208.

John as occupying some liminal space in which he is both prophet and apostle.<sup>81</sup>

With respect to psychic prophecy, John is portrayed as a moral exemplar in a number of ways. First, his renunciation of human society and his retreat into the desert at a young age is portrayed by Origen as an ascetic practice that brings him closer to God:

ἀνεχώρησεν φεύγων τὸν ἐν πόλεσι θόρυβον καὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ὄχλοις ἀηδίαν,  
ἵνα ἐν ταῖς ἐρημίαις τυγχάνων, ἐπεὶ μηδέπω ἐβούλετο αὐτὸν ὁ θεὸς ὑπηρε-  
τεῖν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ βαπτίσματος.

He withdrew, fleeing from the tumult of cities and the vices of the towns. He went into the wilderness, since God had not yet willed for him to minister to the mystery of baptism.<sup>82</sup>

For Origen, the fact that John enters the wilderness as a child is evidence that he is greater – at least in moral terms – than Moses, who did not enter the desert until the age of 40.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, Origen notes that John’s diet is more extremely ascetic even that of Jeremiah.<sup>84</sup>

In pneumatic terms, John is clearly himself a mystically complicated figure. In *Commentary on John* 2, Origen discusses the possibility that John might in fact be an angel: he begins with the question of where prophets are sent from, if they are sent. In the literal sense, explains Origen, John was sent to Israel; according to the deeper meaning he was sent into the world. He conjectures that John was sent ‘from heaven, or from paradise, or from whatever other place there may besides this place on earth.’<sup>85</sup> Thus, says Origen, we can explain why John as a foetus recognised Christ. This was, argues Origen, because he had, in some other world, seen him before.

<sup>81</sup>Thus Irenaeus: ‘For all the other prophets preached the advent of the paternal Light, and desired to be worthy of seeing Him whom they preached; but John did both announce [the advent] beforehand, in a like manner as did the others, and actually saw Him when He came, and pointed Him out, and persuaded many to believe on Him, so that he did himself hold the place of both prophet and apostle. For this is [what it is] to be more than a prophet.’ *Against Heresies* 3.11.4.

<sup>82</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 11.4.

<sup>83</sup>*Homilies on Luke* 10.7: *Moyses... postquam expletis quadraginta aetatis suae annis fugit ex Aegypto... Johannes vero, statim ut natus est, transiit ad deserta... maiora nutrimento dignus apparuit.* ‘Moses... after he had completed his fortieth year, fled from Egypt [into the desert]... but John, as soon as he was born, went into the desert... as he was clearly worthy of a greater upbringing.’

<sup>84</sup>Kelhoffer argues that the description in the Evangelists of John’s diet was initially meant to convey that he was a vegetarian – a dietary choice associated with asceticism. For example, we saw in Chapter 3 that for Apollonius of Tyana, a vegan diet was explicitly connected with his ability to prophesy, cf. pp. 112–113.

<sup>85</sup>*Commentary on John* 2.176.

For Origen, then, John is a prophet in all three senses. He is so close to Christ as to function practically as a living gospel; in the great analogy of prophecy and scripture, John functions as evangelism, as the announcement, account, and proof-text of Christ. This analogy between prophecy and scripture, which runs through the Commentary on John and is most clearly encapsulated in Origen's discussion of John the Baptist, puts prophecy alongside scripture right at the centre of Origen's theology.

## IV Prophecy after Christ?

In Chapter 2, I argued that the Phrygians posed the difficult question of whether there could be prophecy after Christ. While polemicists such as Apollinarius had a decidedly negative view of Maximilla's claim to be the final exegetical prophet, Tertullian defended the notion that the Phrygians represented an advance in prophecy beyond even that of the NT, taking their inspiration to be of a 'mature' kind, the next step in the development of revelatory clarity.<sup>86</sup> In defending the Phrygians as a manifestation of mature prophetic insight – insight that could clear up the remaining ambiguities of scripture – Tertullian revealed an essential worldview of a world marching forward in revelatory clarity towards the end-times, in which later prophets have epistemic priority over those who come earlier – and even over scripture itself.

I have argued above that for Origen, John the Baptist's importance as a prophet was partially due to his temporal proximity to Christ, the undeniable somatic obviousness of his prophetic ministry, and the unity in the different types of prophecy in which he participated. Does this imply support of Tertullian's worldview, in which a prophet *after* Christ, with the available information that entails, may have epistemic priority over those earlier? Hällström has argued that this is the case. He takes as evidence the following statement from *Commentary on Matthew*:

δοκεῖ μοι ὅτι, ὡσπερ ὁ νόμος καὶ οἱ προφηταὶ μέχρι Ἰωάννου, μεθ' ὃν ἔληξεν ἡ προφητικὴ ἀπὸ Ἰουδαίων χάρις.<sup>87</sup>

It seems to me that the law and the prophets were until John, after whom the grace of prophecy ceased from among the Jews.

Hällström argues that Origen means this pedantically – that John was the last of the *Jewish* prophets, but [implicitly] there were Christian prophets who came after Christ.

<sup>86</sup>cf. p. 77.

<sup>87</sup>*Commentary on Matthew* 10.1.

Much of his claim involves reading the above passage in tandem with the following, from *Against Celsus*:

ἀεὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς τῷ ἑαυτῷ λόγῳ, κατὰ γενεὰς εἰς ψυχὰς ὁσίας μεταβαίνουντι καὶ φίλους θεοῦ καὶ προφήτας κατασκευάζοντι, ἐπανορθοῖ τοὺς ἀκούοντας τῶν λεγόντων. καὶ ἐν τῇ Χριστοῦ δ'ἐπιδημίᾳ ἐπανορθοῖ τῷ κατὰ χριστιανισμόν λόγῳ οὐχὶ τοὺς μὴ βουλομένους ἀλλὰ τοὺς τὸν κρείττονα βίον καὶ ἀρέσκοντα τῷ θεῷ ἐλομένους.<sup>88</sup>

God, by means of his word, which passes into holy souls through the generations, making them friends of God and prophets, always reforms those who listen to his words; by the coming of Christ he reforms, through Christianity, not those who are unwilling, but those who have chosen a better life, and those things which are pleasing to God.

Hällström takes this to mean that after the ceasing of prophecy among the Jews with John, there was a subsequent continuous succession of prophets among the Christians.<sup>89</sup> I think there are several problems with this interpretation. First, in the sentence immediately following what is quoted above from the *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen goes on to refer to John as ‘the last of the prophets’ (τοῦ τελευταίου τῶν προφητῶν) rather than just the last of the *Jewish* prophets. Thus, as with Hällström’s initial set-up of his taxonomy of ‘first class’ and ‘second class’ prophets as discussed in the Introduction,<sup>90</sup> I think that his interpretation involves reading into the text a distinction that Origen is not actually making.

Second, as I also argued in the Introduction,<sup>91</sup> I do not think it is tenable to use this passage of *Against Celsus* – which is quite clearly part of a highly specific apologetic point – as evidence of any kind of *continuous* succession of prophets; indeed, the Greek verb (μεταβαίνουντι) does not strictly imply the process is *ongoing* in the way that Hällström takes it to.

In fact, when we look to the other works, we can see that in the commentaries, Origen takes a different – and consistent – line that John the Baptist was the last of the prophets. For example, the following, also from the *Commentary on Matthew*, which is unambiguous:

<sup>88</sup>*Against Celsus* 4.3.

<sup>89</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., pp. 4–9.

<sup>90</sup>cf. pp. 37–39.

<sup>91</sup>cf. pp. 32–33.

διὰ τὸ τὸν Ἰωάννην ἀποκεκεφαλίσθαι καὶ τὸν νόμον καὶ τοὺς προφήτας, οἳ ἦσαν μέχρι Ἰωάννου, πεπαῦσθαι.<sup>92</sup>

After the beheading of John both the law and the prophets, who were until John, had ceased.

Other examples include a passage from the *Commentary on John*, where Origen states as if it is quite uncontroversial that John was the last of the prophets,<sup>93</sup> apparently citing Matthew 11:13<sup>94</sup> in support of his claim. A number of scholars, including Nasrallah, take these statements uncomplicatedly to mean that Origen thinks prophecy is over.<sup>95</sup> I think this is the only reading of the evidence that does not stretch the text. Unlike Hällström – who does in fact acknowledge some of these passages<sup>96</sup> – I do not see this issue as centrally important to Origen, which may account for the apparent inconsistency of his views.

Indeed, as I have argued in Chapters 2 and 7, contemporary claims of prophecy were not of much interest to Origen.<sup>97</sup> I began to account for why this might be the case in Chapters 2 and 5, noting that Origen’s views of prophecy were firmly set in a scriptural-exegetical paradigm. However, to fully answer this point, I shall now address directly a question about the epistemology of prophecy and scripture that has remained – until now – implicit in much of this thesis: what is the relationship between prophecy and scripture in Origen’s thought?

## i The Somatic Relationship of Scripture and Prophecy

We saw above the OT prophecies that Origen regarded as fulfilled. For him these examples showed both the divinely inspired nature of the OT and the divinity of Christ who fulfilled them.<sup>98</sup> As Hanson has noted, there is a certain circularity in this argument, in which Christ is claimed to prove the divinity of the scripture which itself proves his own divinity.<sup>99</sup> I argue in this section that, analogously, Origen also regards scripture and prophecy as reciprocally proving one another.

<sup>92</sup>*Commentary on Matthew* 11.1.

<sup>93</sup>*Commentary on John* 6.88. See also *Commentary on Matthew* Commentary series 40: *nequaquam sunt in prophetis visiones post Iohannem*. ‘There not by any means prophetic visions after John.’

<sup>94</sup>‘The Law and the prophets were until John.’

<sup>95</sup>Nasrallah (2003a), op. cit., p. 260n44.

<sup>96</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>97</sup>cf. p. 199

<sup>98</sup>cf. pp. 247–248.

<sup>99</sup>Hanson (1959), loc. cit.

First, let us consider how scripture acts as proof for the possibility of true prophecy. As I have argued in Chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, one of the ways in which the Marcionites challenged the authority of scripture was by rejecting the authority of the prophets. For Origen, for whom a true conception of prophecy must rest upon the scriptural evidence, this was a profound epistemic challenge. His response was to use the Philonic conception of the OT prophets as supremely virtuous sages, thus arguing that on the grounds of their virtue it was evident that they were truly divinely inspired. Their record – that is, the OT – is on these grounds reliable.

The proof of this reliability is to be found in the fulfilment of their prophecies. This argument appears on a number of different occasions in various formulations in Origen's texts, both in *Against Celsus* and other works. For example:

λεκτέον δὲ ὅτι τὸ τῶν προφητικῶν λόγων ἔνθεον καὶ τὸ πνευματικὸν τοῦ Μωυσέως νόμου ἔλαμψεν ἐπιδημήσαντος Ἰησοῦ. ἐναργῆ γὰρ παραδείγματα περὶ τοῦ θεοπνεύστους εἶναι τὰς παλαιὰς γραφὰς πρὸ τῆς ἐπιδημίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ παραστήσαι οὐ πάνυ δυνατὸν ἦν.<sup>100</sup>

I must say that it was with the advent of Jesus that the divine inspiration of the prophetic words and the spiritual nature of Moses's law were proved. Before the advent of Christ it was not in any way possible to bring forward clear proofs of the divine inspiration of the Old Testament.

I believe Origen's claim here is – like the Aristotelian logic puzzle<sup>101</sup> discussed in Chapter 4 – that the truth-value of the OT was epistemically unavailable to most people before the arrival of Christ: only in the Christian era has it become widely apparent that the OT was divinely inspired. That is not to say the OT did not *have* a truth value – it did, but it was known only to the prophets, who knew through a 'divine sense' with 'a sense which was not sensible.'<sup>102</sup>In contrast, while the ordinary Jews who lived before Christ were correct and pious to consider the OT holy, they did not have the same kind of proof as those living after Christ. The conclusion of this striking line of thought is that meaningful exegesis of the OT is not really possible until after Christ – that is to

<sup>100</sup>*On First Principles* 4.1.6.

<sup>101</sup>cf. pp. 126–128.

<sup>102</sup>*Against Celsus* 1.48. For discussion of this passage in particular, see Hauck (1989), op. cit. Similarly, *Commentary on John* 2.10: 'By coming to the prophets the Word enlightens them with the light of knowledge, causing them to see things which they had not perceived before his coming as if they saw him before their eyes'.

say, Christ is the necessary element for understanding the OT as a whole as a prophecy, but also the necessary element that proves the divine inspiration of scripture:

λεκτέον δ'ἔτι πρὸς τοῦτο ὅτι ἔστι τις οἰκεία ἀπόδειξις τοῦ λόγου, θειότερα παρὰ τὴν ἀπὸ διαλεκτικῆς Ἑλληνικῆν. ταύτην δὲ τὴν θειότεραν ὁ ἀπόστολος ὀνομάζει ἀπόδειξιν πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως ὡς πνεύματος μὲν διὰ τὰς προφητείας ἱκανὰς πιστοποιῆσαι τὸν ἐντυγχάνοντα μάλιστα εἰς τὰ περὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ...<sup>103</sup>

The gospel has a proof which is a peculiar to itself, and which is more divine than a Greek proof based on a dialectical argument. This more divine demonstration the apostle calls a 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power' – of spirit because of the prophecies and especially those which refer to Christ....

Boys-Stones considers Origen's use of the proof-from-prophecy trope in a discussion of the importance of revelation in Origen's cosmology, contrasting it with Stoic and Platonist models.<sup>104</sup> Since Stoic and Platonist understandings of the world revolved around the notion that all things were understandable by reason, there was no place for divine revelation or intervention in their systems. This was particularly true in the case of the Stoics, whose determinist worldview – as we saw in Chapter 4 – posited the (potential) total explicability of all causes and their effects by reason.<sup>105</sup> Clearly Origen, whose theology had as central tenets both the revelation of scripture and the human exercise of free will, could not endorse such doctrines. Boys-Stones argues that because of the contingency and uniqueness inherent in Origen's world due to the exercise of free will, revelation goes where reason cannot penetrate.

This is an illuminating reading of Origen which takes his notion of free will appropriately seriously in metaphysical terms. Where I want to go further than Boys-Stones is a direct consideration of how the roles of prophecy, free will, and foreknowledge tie to Christ. Boys-Stones notes that Christ, for Origen, provides an important exemplar of the possibility of perfect morality and freedom of the intellect: that is to say, the perfect soul of Christ is proof that there is nothing inherent to the intellect that determines that it should fall. But once we take into account the cosmic christology of Origen, as posited by James Lyons, we can begin to understand Christ's full place in providence.

<sup>103</sup> *Against Celsus* 1.2.

<sup>104</sup> Boys-Stones (2007), op. cit., p. 490.

<sup>105</sup> cf. pp. 125–126.

I believe we must understand somatic prophecy at the centre of this picture. As I argued in Chapter 6, somatic prophecy can only be fulfilled when human free will accords with God's foreknowledge and the prophesied event comes to pass. What Boys-Stones hints at, but does not draw out in his article, is that prophecy not only provides the proof for the inspiration of scripture with its fulfilment, but also itself is contingent upon the co-operation of human free will. This, the co-operation of free will and divine foreknowledge, is the action of providence. Since providence is God's map of the time between creation and the *apocatastasis*, Christ is not only central to it as the conduit by which human beings might be saved, but is, under the cosmic reading, the literal content of the end of time.

## ii The Psychic Relationship of Scripture and Prophecy

In Chapter 7 we saw the role of the OT prophets as moral reformers, particularly in the example of prophets such as Jeremiah and Isaiah. The focus on the moral role of prophets is taken to its extreme in the example of somebody like Jonah, a minor prophet whose prophecy of the impending destruction of Nineveh turns out not to happen. While this example, of divine deception (that is, God said he would do something which he did not do) has often been seen as theologically problematic, for Origen, it is clearly a stumbling block. The fact that God 'repents' before he saves Nineveh, is for Origen explicable by a wider approach to God and free will. Thus, from the *Homilies on Jeremiah*:

ὅταν δὲ ἐπιπλέκηται ἀνθρωπίνοις πράγμασιν ἡ θεία οἰκονομία, φέρει τὸν ἀνθρώπινον νοῦν καὶ τρόπον καὶ λέξιν. καὶ ὡσπερ ἡμεῖς ἐὰν διετεῖ παιδίῳ διαλεγώμεθα, ψελλίζομεν διὰ τὸ παιδίον... τοιοῦτόν τι μοι νόει καὶ περὶ τὸν θεόν, ὅταν τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος.<sup>106</sup>

Whenever the divine economy involves human matters, it carries the human mind and manners and speech. And just as we, if we are talking to a two-year-old child, baby-talk because of the child... something like this seems to me the case with God whenever he manages the race of men.

Origen goes on to say in these cases that God pretends not to foreknow the future.<sup>107</sup> This is, I believe, the prophetic equivalent of an exegetical stumbling-block: in both cases, God is providing a pedagogical prod in order that the human being engages morally.

<sup>106</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 18.6

<sup>107</sup>*Homilies on Jeremiah* 18.6.

In the case of Jonah, the prophecy was given to morally reform the inhabitants of Nineveh rather than as a bald statement of the future, and therefore had to be understood psychically. In the case of exegetical stumbling blocks, as we saw in Chapter 5, the advancement of the exegete requires moral engagement. The psychic sense thus, following Dively Lauro's reading, acts as the conduit for the moral engagement of the exegete that elevates them to pneumatic understanding of the text and thus closeness to Christ. However, in most cases, the prophets are straightforwardly moral instructors:

οἱ μὲν οὖν προφητῆται ὅσα ἦν αὐτόθεν νοηθῆναι τοῖς ἀκούουσι χρήσιμα καὶ συμβαλλόμενα τῇ τῶν ἠθῶν ἐπανορθώσει.<sup>108</sup>

The prophets said whatever could be immediately understood as beneficial to their hearers and helpful towards the reformation of their behaviour.

Thus both through their words and their conduct, as established in the previous chapter, prophets are moral exempla to which the good Christian can turn for moral training in Christian virtue. Since the ultimate moral exemplar is Christ, and the prophets are also forerunners of Christ, their own morality is necessarily pointing towards Christ. Similarly, since all prophecies have a psychic reading, these readings are also part of the moral landscape which points the good Christian towards Christ. Thus the ultimate fulfilment of psychic prophecy is Christ's final triumph over evil. As prophecy and scripture had a joint and mutually reinforcing role in the somatic sense as proof-texts, so too in the psychic sense, they have a parallel moral-pedagogical role.

### iii The Pneumatic Relationship of Scripture and Prophecy

I gave examples in Chapter 5 of texts that did not appear to be prophecies, but became, under a pneumatic reading, clear prophetic announcements of Christ.<sup>109</sup> If we take the above insight, that for Origen the meaning of the OT was not exegetically apparent until after the advent of Christ, the whole of the OT becomes, in its pneumatic sense, a prophecy of Christ. This section considers the relationship between scripture and prophecy under this reading, in which the *entirety* of scripture is prophetic.

Above, I noted the criticisms of Hanson and others of Origen's 'atomistic' approach to inspiration – that is to say, the criticism that Origen considers each and every word of

<sup>108</sup> *Against Celsus* 7.10.

<sup>109</sup> Such as the events at Ai, cf. pp. 169–169.

scripture to be inspired.<sup>110</sup> Edwards argues that we should indeed read Origen this way, claiming that for him that ‘no word in the scriptures would have any meaning’ if each word was not itself an expression of God.<sup>111</sup> Under this reading, for Origen, meaning is built through intense cross-referenced agglomeration of such units, and it is only the ‘synthesis of all contexts’ that comprises any scriptural term’s meaning.<sup>112</sup> Thus exegesis is an iterative process, an ‘ascent’ through ‘grades of knowledge.’<sup>113</sup> If exegesis, in this sense, is the participation of the human reader in the inspired word of scripture in order to reach Christ, what is prophecy?

In this section I posit a new reading of Origen’s understanding of prophecy: I argue that Origen understood prophecy and exegesis as inverse processes, reflections of each other in the mirror of scripture. As such, they are hermeneutically equivalent: both can only be fully realised in the agglomeration of the their triune layers of meaning, achieved through Christ. This triunity is, as Edwards argues, for Origen a reflection in the created world of the triune God.

It is clear from Origen’s own descriptions that he considers prophecy to be the emanation of the Word, and scripture its inscribed format:

*quamquam prophetis saepe et patriarchis ceterisque sanctorum etiam sine vocis sono verbum Dei factum esse referatur, sicut ex omnibus sacris voluminibus abundanter docemur. in quo, ut breviter dicam, illuminata mens per spiritum Dei formatur in verba.*<sup>114</sup>

The word of God is said to have occurred often to the prophets and patriarchs and the rest of the holy men also without the sound of a voice as we are copiously taught from all the sacred volumes. In which case, to speak briefly, the mind which has been illuminated by the spirit of God is directed to words.

If we accept the above argument – that every verse of scripture is at some level a prophecy of Christ – then, through Origen’s own theory of inspiration and exegesis, it must be theoretically possible to begin the exegetical process from any verse of scripture. Furthermore, because the tripartite process of exegesis is a reflection of the triune God, the

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<sup>110</sup>cf. pp. 243–244.

<sup>111</sup>Edwards (1998), op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>114</sup>*Homilies on Genesis* 3.2.

starting-point does not matter, as the exegete will only reach the full triune meaning through the agglomeration of somatic, psychic, and pneumatic meanings.

Similarly, according to Origen, prophecy also is fundamentally concerned with the manifestation of the divine:

τάχα δὲ αἱ προφητικαὶ μρτυρίαι οὐ μόνον κηρύσσουσι Χριστὸν ἐλευσόμενον οὐδὲ τοῦθ' ἡμᾶς διδάσκουσι καὶ ἄλλο οὐθέν, ἀλλὰ πολλήν θεολογίαν σχέσιν τε πατρὸς πρὸς υἰὸν καὶ υἱοῦ πρὸς πατέρα ἔστι μαθεῖν οὐκ ἔλαττον ἀπὸ τῶν προφητῶν, δι' ὧν ἀπαγγελλουσι τὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ ἢ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων.<sup>115</sup>

The prophetic witnesses not only proclaim the Christ who will come, nor teach us this and nothing else. In fact, they teach much theology. It is possible to learn about the relationship of the Father to the Son and of the Son to the Father through the things which the prophets announce about him no less than from the apostles.

What does this mean? I believe it means this: as the tripartite process of exegesis is a reflection of the triune God, so too prophecy, which is tripartite, is a reflection of the triune God. It, like exegesis, '[teaches] much theology'.

To draw together the threads of this explanation, I will use a pair of analogies, both of which are concerned with the idea of mirrors. First, and more easily, a temporal analogy. For Origen, if John the Baptist is the last of the prophets, and if Christ fundamentally changed the nature of both prophecy and exegesis, we can see prophecy and exegesis as mirror-images of one another in time, reflected in Christ. In the period before Christ, the way to come to knowledge of Christ and of God was through prophecy, through direct divine inspiration. While the words of the prophecies were over time recorded in scripture, pneumatic readings of scripture were not epistemically available (because Christ had not yet sojourned on earth), and thus exegesis could not be complete as a process. Particularly it could not be a reflection of the triune God in the created world. However, after Christ, the way to come to knowledge of Christ and God was through scripture, as pneumatic readings became epistemically available. Whereas the task of the prophet was to look forward to Christ as recorded in scripture, the task of the exegete is to begin with scripture and work back towards Christ. Revelation is no longer by direct inspiration, but by the progress of the exegete through the tripartite senses to reach a triune understanding of scripture, itself reflective of the triune God.

<sup>115</sup>*Commentary on John* 2.205.

The second analogy, which is more complex, is not temporal but conceptual, and involves more centrally the idea of a mirror. In ancient optical theory, rays of light emanated from the eye, bounced off an object, and returned to the eye. In this analogy, the rays of light from the eye represent prophecy through divine inspiration. The rays of light from the mirror back to the eye are exegesis, the inverse of inspiration. The mirror is scripture, and the eye is God. The reflection of God, to be found somewhere behind the mirror, is all that human beings have access to in the created world, other than the mirror itself – scripture. In this analogy, in order to reverse the process of prophecy, to move from scripture to God, the reader must practice exegesis on the text. So we see through a glass, darkly.

## V Conclusions

In Chapter 5 I analysed Origen's transferring of the tripartite hermeneutic to subjects other than scripture, including both to Greek intellectual disciplines and also to the persons of three patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and three books of the OT, considered as whole units (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs).<sup>116</sup> But there is actually another division Origen makes in his discussion of the Greek intellectual disciplines:

*nonnulli sane apud Graecos etiam logicen, quam nos rationalem possumus dicere, quarto in numero posuere. alii non extrinsecus eam, sed per has tres, quas supra memoravimus, disciplinas innexam consertamque per omne corpus esse dixerunt. est enim logice haec vel, ut nos dicimus, rationalis, quae verborum dictorumque videtur continere rationes proprietatesque et improprietates, generaque et species, et figuras singulorum quorumque edocere dictorum, quam utique disciplinam non tam separari quam inseri ceteris convenit et intexi.*<sup>117</sup>

Some among the Greeks add a fourth branch of learning, Logic, which we can describe as rational. Others have said that Logic is not standalone, but is connected and intertwined with the three subjects that we mentioned before. For Logic is, as we say, rational, inasmuch as it concerns meanings and proper and improper significances, the classes and types of words and expressions, and educates concerning the form of each and every saying; and

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<sup>116</sup>See pp.161–164.

<sup>117</sup>*Commentary on the Song of Songs* pr.3

this discipline certainly must not be separated from the others, but must be mingled and interwoven with them.

I discussed in Chapter 5 the correspondence of the three other subjects, Physics, Ethics, and Enoptics, to the somatic, psychic, and pneumatic senses – this much is quite clear from Origen’s own statements. But with the above passage, Origen provides almost no explanation, moving straight on to talk about other matters with an apology for not dwelling longer on this tantalising suggestion.

If the three subjects correspond to the three senses, to what does the fourth subject, Logic, correspond? We know that, in order for the parallelism to work, the corresponding sense cannot just be another example like the other three, but must be something of a slightly different category, must be something that underlies and underpins the three, and is mixed inextricably with them.

I would like to propose that in the case of the senses, Origen’s answer for the identity of this additional but essential interwoven component is Christ. Christ satisfies the conditions – he is clearly *sui generis*, underlying, archetypal. Like logic he is a meta-language of human holiness and piety, morality and knowledge. In other cases, Origen certainly does use Word (λόγος) in this way to refer to Christ’s inherent logic.<sup>118</sup>

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that Christ is at the centre of Origen’s thought about prophecy, as the ultimate content of all somatic, psychic, and pneumatic prophecy. I have argued that Origen’s elevation of John the Baptist, the ultimate prophetic witness to Christ, is due to the potency and unity of his prophetic role. I have also argued that for Origen, there is a very clear relationship between scripture, prophecy, and exegesis – a relationship in which prophecy and exegesis are inverse processes. If this is the case, then it provides the foundation for the central argument of this thesis, that we not only can but *must* understand Origen’s hermeneutic of prophecy as structurally equivalent to his tripartite hermeneutic of exegesis.

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<sup>118</sup>cf. *Fragments on Luke* 162: βούλεται δὲ ἀποκαλύψει ὡς λόγος οὐκ ἀλόγως, καὶ ὡς σοφία σοφῶς, καὶ ὡς δικαιοσύνη δικαίως. (‘as Word he wills to reveal not irrationally, and as Wisdom wisely, and as Justice justly’).



## Part IV



## Chapter 9

# After Origen

For they say that his manner of life was as his doctrine, and his doctrine as his life.<sup>1</sup>

As I have argued in Part I, Origen's writing on prophecy arose out of specific intellectual problems and open questions in those authors he had read and studied. I have attempted to argue in Part II that Origen's response to the definitional and rhetorical challenges of his day concerning prophecy was an attempt to parcel the question into one neat solution: that prophecy takes a tripartite structure, just as scripture more widely. Yet Origen does not set this out in any single text, and my sketch of this theory is inherently conjectural. However, as we looked at those in the generations before Origen to see what he was responding to, so we must look in the generations after him – to see which aspects of his work authors after him respond to.

In this chapter, which acts as something of an epilogue to the thesis, I will take a brief look at a text of Eusebius' on the question of prophecy. I argue that Eusebius's *Prophetic Eclogues*, a text which comprises of excerpts of Old Testament prophecies with annotations on their fulfilment in Christ, follows very closely what I have proposed as Origen's hermeneutic of prophecy.

## I Eusebius

Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–339/340) has a good claim to be the first and fiercest Origenist. In Eusebius's time – just a couple of generations after Origen – the Alexandrian

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<sup>1</sup>Eusebius *Church History* 6.3.7.

was widely seen as the most important Christian thinker of that century. Eusebius's master, Pamphilus of Berytus, ran the school of Caesarea, having moved there to revitalise it after the disruption of the Decian persecutions.<sup>2</sup> Neither Eusebius nor Pamphilus, as far as we know, ever met Origen in person, although Eusebius was very keen to portray them both as Origen's students.<sup>3</sup>

The *Prophetic Eclogues*, the work on which I focus in this chapter, is a collection of proof-texts about Christ and ecclesiological matters written around 311 or 312.<sup>4</sup> Each eclogue is a quotation of a prophecy from the Septuagint, with some notes from Eusebius on how the prophecy has been fulfilled through Christ.

Sébastien Morlet argues that in large part, these notes are cribbed from Origen's various commentaries and homilies; Eusebius regularly points readers who want more information in the direction of a well-known commentator, and given the frequent other references to Origen, this can only mean him. Morlet also points out that Eusebius uses Origen's terminology of exegesis, referring, for example, to somatic, psychic, and pneumatic interpretations of prophecies.

Let us take a closer look at a couple of examples in order to show how closely Eusebius is following Origen, and what this might mean for the overall argument of this thesis about Origen's understanding of prophecy. These examples come from the Psalms and have rather fragmentary attestations in Origen.

## i Psalm 1:1-2

These verses, commented upon in *Prophetic Eclogues* 2.1, run as follows:

μακάριος ἀνὴρ ὃς οὐκ ἐπορεύθη ἐν βουλήν ἄσεβων καὶ ἐν ὁδῶ ἀμαρτωλῶν  
οὐκ ἔστη καὶ ἐπὶ καθέδραν λοιμῶν οὐκ ἐκάθισεν.

<sup>2</sup>The manuscript history is not clearly recoverable, but Eusebius reports on Pamphilus's efforts in collecting and organising the works of Origen in such a way that we may well suspect many works would not have survived without him. cf. *Church History* 6.32.3.

<sup>3</sup>"Pamphilus is [presented as] an authoritative teacher who inherits Origen's teaching mantle at Caesarea and is also in possession of the fullest knowledge of Origen's knowledge, which passes in turn to Eusebius." E. C. Penland (2013). "The History of the Caesarean Present: Eusebius and Narratives of Origen". In: *Eusebius of Caesarea, Tradition and Innovations*. Ed. by A. Johnson and J. Schott. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup>For detailed analysis of the *Prophetic Eclogues* see S. Morlet (2013). "Origen as an Exegetical Source in Eusebius' Prophetic Extracts". In: *Eusebius of Caesarea, Tradition and Innovations*. Ed. by A. Johnson and J. Schott. Harvard University Press. See also C. Curti (1982). "L'eglesi di Eusebio di Cesarea: caratteri e sviluppo". In: *Le trasformazioni della cultura nella Tarda Antichità*. Università degli Studi. Catania, pp. 459-478.

ἀλλ' ἢ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ κυρίου τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ αὐτοῦ μελετήσει  
ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός.<sup>5</sup>

Happy is the man  
who does not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers.  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.

Eusebius proposes that μακάριος ἀνὴρ can refer only to Christ. He argues this on the grounds of the grammar – that the article is present before ἀνὴρ in the Hebrew text, and thus it refers to ‘the’ man, not just any man: thus it can only refer to Christ.

We know, however, that Eusebius did not read Hebrew, and we know also both from Jerome on the same subject,<sup>6</sup> and from a fragment of Origen,<sup>7</sup> who did read Hebrew, that this interpretation was originally Origen’s. We also know that Origen posed two other interpretations: the first, that μακάριος ἀνὴρ refers to Josiah – the ‘Jewish’ interpretation, as Jerome calls it, and the second, that μακάριος ἀνὴρ refers in general terms to any given blessed man. Morlet highlights these points.

But I propose that we go further here. We can quite clearly reconstruct that Origen formed three readings of these verses, a somatic reading (that the μακάριος ἀνὴρ is Josiah), a psychic reading (that the μακάριος ἀνὴρ is any virtuous man), and a pneumatic reading (that the μακάριος ἀνὴρ is Christ). We also know that there was more information on the pneumatic reading – of the μακάριος ἀνὴρ as Christ – in Origen’s lost *Commentary on Psalms*, as Eusebius specifically directs the reader to it for further information.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, as Morlet states, Eusebius ‘selected, from the three possible exegeses mentioned by Origen, the one that best suited his purpose’.<sup>9</sup> We will return, after two more examples, to what this purpose actually is.

<sup>5</sup>LXX.

<sup>6</sup>*Homilies on the Psalms* 1.1. Notably, Jerome repudiates this interpretation and does not follow Origen’s tripartite structure of exegesis.

<sup>7</sup>Fr. 3 in É. Goffinet (1963). “Recherches sur quelques fragments du commentaire d’Origène sur le premier psaume”. In: *Le Muséon* 76, pp. 145–163.

<sup>8</sup>cf. also *Commentary on Romans* 14, where Origen makes a similar argument.

<sup>9</sup>Morlet (2013), op. cit., p. 218.

## ii Psalm 2:1-2

This is a very popular Psalm for Christian exegesis, commented upon by Eusebius in *Prophetic Eclogues* 2.2:

ἵνα τί ἐφρούραξαν ἔθνη καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά;  
παρέστησαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ  
κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ διάψαλμα<sup>10</sup>

Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the Lord and his anointed.

Unsurprisingly, ‘against the lord and his anointed’ (τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ) is taken by all the Christian writers in question to refer to God the Father and Christ. ‘The kings of the land’ (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς) is subject to a few different readings: Eusebius takes it to refer to the plot of all the kings and nations against Christ. In Acts, οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς is taken more specifically to refer to Herod and Pilate.<sup>11</sup> In a surviving fragment, Origen uses it to refer to demons, but also to the Jews.<sup>12</sup> Jerome refers to Herod and the demons.<sup>13</sup>

Again, as far as we can tell, for Origen, this forms a tripartite reading: on the somatic level, οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς refers to Herod and Pilate, on the psychic level, the demons, and on the pneumatic level, the kings and nations against Christ.

## iii Psalm 18 (19): 4-7

These verses constitute *Prophetic Eclogues* 2.10:

εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκου-  
μένης τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ ἔθετο τὸ σκῆνωμα αὐτοῦ  
καὶ αὐτὸς ὡς νυμφίος ἐκπορευόμενος ἐκ παστοῦ αὐτοῦ ἀγαλλιάσεται ὡς  
γίγας δραμεῖν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπ’ ἄκρου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἢ ἔξοδος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ

<sup>10</sup>LXX.

<sup>11</sup>Acts 4:25–26.

<sup>12</sup>Migne *Patrologia Graeca* vol. 12, p.1109, column A, lines 9ff.

<sup>13</sup>*Little Commentary on Psalms*.

κατάντημα αὐτοῦ ἕως ἄκρου τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὃς ἀποκρυβήσεται  
 τὴν θέρμην αὐτοῦ  
 ὁ νόμος τοῦ κυρίου ἄμωμος ἐπιστρέφων ψυχὰς ἢ μαρτυρία κυρίου πιστή,  
 σοφίζουσα νήπια<sup>14</sup>

Their voice goes out through all the earth,  
 and their words to the end of the earth.  
 In the heavens, he has set a tent for the sun,  
 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,  
 and like a strong man runs its course with joy.  
 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
 and its circuit to the end of them;  
 and nothing is hid from its heat.  
 The law of the Lord is perfect,  
 reviving the soul;  
 the decrees of the Lord are sure,  
 making wise the simple.

Eusebius takes the ‘voice’ (φθόγγος) going out ‘to all the land’ (εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν) to refer to the apostles and evangelists spreading the news of Christ. He then takes the sun to be Christ’s divinity, and the mention of the ‘bridegroom’ (νυμφίος) to refer to Christ as the bridegroom of the Church.

We know from Pamphilus’ *Apology* that Origen also reads the sun (and thus the rest of the verses) as about Christ.<sup>15</sup> But we have no corresponding fragment of Origen. Morlet proposes here that Eusebius may have been copying from Clement’s *Prophetic Extracts*;<sup>16</sup> while I have no objection to the suggestion, I do not see why we it might not also be possible to posit a tripartite reading of these verses in Origen – of which the pneumatic reading is the christological and ecclesiological reading present in Eusebius of the bridegroom/sun as Christ, and the voices his apostles spreading the word of his Church. The somatic and psychic readings may be lost, but one can easily imagine what they might have been.

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<sup>14</sup>LXX.

<sup>15</sup>Pamphilus *Apology* 147-8.

<sup>16</sup>Morlet (2013), op. cit., p. 220.

## II Conclusions

In all these examples, we have seen (or easily imagined) a set of tripartite somatic, psychic, and pneumatic readings of Psalm verses in Origen, of which Eusebius has used the pneumatic for his *Prophetic Eclogues*. What is the significance of this? Morlet argues, in his conclusion, the following:

Eusebius may follow his master so closely that when he does, he sometimes *reproduces literally* (with little or no modifications) what Origen writes. The consequence is that the *Prophetic Eclogues* are a *major* witness of Origen's lost exegesis.<sup>17</sup>

And, as a wider point, therefore:

The *Prophetic Eclogues* were not only a collection of proof-texts. They were also a kind of epitome of Origen's exegesis addressed to beginners. The "concluding formulas" show that it could even be used, in Eusebius's view, as an introduction to Origen's commentaries.<sup>18</sup>

I want to take these conclusions of Morlet's and push them a little further in light of what we have learnt about Origen's view of prophecy. I believe that Eusebius knew what he was doing here; that, in compiling, in Morlet's terms, an 'epitome' of Origen's exegesis on the topic of prophecy, Eusebius was deliberately choosing the pneumatic readings as prior in importance to the somatic and psychic readings. Eusebius had understood the point that I have been arguing throughout this thesis: that for Origen, the pneumatic reading of a prophecy – the sense in which all prophecy deals with Christ and his dispensation – is what makes sense of the phenomenon as a whole.

Further to all of this, Morlet suggests tentatively that, if, as was likely, Eusebius had compiled his own anthologies of christological quotations from Origen's works, he would likely have used the same anthologies for the *Church History* and the *Proof of the Gospel*.<sup>19</sup> If we accept this suggestion, I propose that this means the notion of Christ as the centre of prophecy is actually central to Eusebius's entire way of thinking.

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<sup>17</sup>ibid., p. 222. Italics Morlet's.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 223.





## Chapter 10

# Conclusion

In the Introduction, I quoted a definition of prophecy given by Origen in the *Commentary on Corinthians*. We are now in a place to analyse this definition in some detail. The definition was as follows:

προφητεία ἐστὶν ἢ διὰ λόγου τῶν ἀφανῶν σημαντικὴ γνῶσις, ἢ εἶδησις τῆς τοῦ κόσμου συστάσεως καὶ ἐνεργείας στοιχείων καὶ χρόνων.<sup>1</sup>

I translated as follows:

Prophecy is the semantic knowledge of obscure things through reason, the understanding of the structure of the cosmos and of the functioning of the elements and of time.

Hällström translates διὰ λόγου as ‘through speech’.<sup>2</sup> But there is a translation of this phrase that is equally tenable which has vastly more pointed overtones: we could instead use ‘by the Word’. In light of the arguments of the previous chapter, I believe we should take λόγου as referring not to speech or reason, as it is usually translated and understood, but to Christ:

Prophecy is the knowledge that makes obscure matters known through Christ, the understanding of the structure of the cosmos and of the functioning of the elements and of time.

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<sup>1</sup>*Commentary on Corinthians* 55.

<sup>2</sup>Hällström (1985), op. cit., p. 21.

There are three lines of argument running through this thesis, each of which – if I have structured it successfully – should be able to stand alone. First and most easily identifiable, there is a quite specific argument in Chapters 4 and 6 about fate, free will, foreknowledge, and Origen’s development of a Christian metaphysics of free will which places prophecy at the centre of questions about human free will. While it has been argued both that Alexander of Aphrodisias changed the nature of the discussion about free will, and that Origen had read Alexander, I hope my work has showed exactly *how* Origen’s framing of free will was different from other early Christians. I also hope that I have showed why Origen’s is the first discussion of free will and foreknowledge as a logical-metaphysical problem to revolve directly around the notion of prophecy. I think this also serves as a justification of the importance of the topic as a whole: that is to say, what and how Origen thought about prophecy was instrumental in his development of an innovative form of Christian compatibilism that saw human free will not just as about the importance of human moral accountability, but about the intersection of the divine and human metaphysical planes.

Second, there is also a strand that is concerned with the figure of the prophet in both post-Hellenistic Greek and hellenised Jewish and Christian thought. This takes as its narrative beginning the comparatively opaque and ambiguous roles of prophets both in Old Testament Jewish and Archaic and Classical Greek thought. That there was a fundamental shift in Jewish ways of thinking brought about by Philo has to be taken on faith in this thesis since it is beyond the scope of my work. But my argument really is this: it was neither neutral nor inevitable for Origen to understand the Old Testament prophets through either Greek or Philonic lenses. There are conceivably other Christian ways of understanding the Old Testament prophets which does not see them as supremely moral all-knowing sages. It was possible for Christians to see Old Testament prophets as fundamentally other, morally inferior because they are Jewish, accidental oracles – it would, in short, be quite conceivable for Christian thinkers to read all prophets as Balaams or Caiaphases. Indeed, there are numerous examples: Marcion reads the prophets as completely irrelevant, the Phrygians and Tertullian read them as a lesser and past incarnation of Montanus, Maximilla and Priscilla, and Athenagoras reads them as ecstatic vehicles for the spirit.

Third, there is a strand that is concerned with prophecy as part of a scriptural-exegetical paradigm. This argument began in Chapter 2 with the consideration of exactly why the Marcionite challenge to prophecy was so potent. Since, for Origen, prophecy was rooted firmly in a scriptural-exegetical paradigm, the Marcionite rejection of the

epistemic basis of prophecy forced him to consider prophecy in its most foundational sense. I have argued that triune prophecy, the inverse of triune exegesis, is for Origen a fundamental and foundational piece of the divine economy.

There are – of course – some limitations to this study. First, I still have not given my own definition of prophecy, or proposed any solutions to the difficult taxonomical problems presented in the Introduction. While this thesis does not offer a solution to these problems it does offer some evidence that ancient thinkers also thought deeply about these taxonomical questions, and, in the case of Origen, came up with solutions quite different to our own. The tripartite hermeneutic of prophecy, while idiosyncratically Origenic, nonetheless takes seriously the notion that prophecy is a multifarious phenomenon with a number of different conceptual angles. I think Origen's recognition of this fact is, by itself, important and worthwhile.

The second limitation concerns my reading of Origen's christology. Part of the central argument of Chapter 8 has been that Christ is at the centre of Origen's thought about prophecy. I have doubts about the profundity of this statement: just as maybe it is not that interesting to point out that Christ is at the centre of Origen's understanding of scripture, perhaps also it is not that interesting or surprising to point out that he is at the centre of prophecy. Additionally, because I have not undertaken my own full examination of Origen's christology, I am not sure that all my arguments in Chapter 8 are as nuanced as they could be.

That said, I have argued that this does nevertheless constitute the first rigorous Christian formulation of this line of thought specifically as regards prophecy which is, after all, my focus. It was neither obvious nor inevitable which interpretive directions Christian writers might go in with the concept of prophecy: strictly speaking, the only thing that was obvious was that they would say that the birth and life of Christ were the fulfilment of *at least some* Old Testament prophecies. I have tried to argue that – just as Origen's view of the prophets was not some inevitable development but specifically dependent on trends in Jewish and Greek thought – so too his view of prophecy is a technical and philosophical construct that drew from his intellectual context.

The third limitation is more structural, and therefore more significant. I spent some time at the start of Chapter 5 discussing the various different interpretations that scholars have put forward of Origen's tripartite hermeneutic of scripture. I have, nevertheless, presented the scriptural hermeneutic as straightforward in all other chapters, and especially in my argumentation of the parallelism between prophecy and scripture. Thus, in a sense, my argument of a hermeneutic of prophecy rests on a slightly sanitised ver-

sion of the hermeneutic of scripture. As with the tripartite hermeneutic of scripture, sometimes it is just clear that the tripartite of prophecy does not quite fit.

Finally, from a wider historical point of view, this thesis does not adequately establish the extent to which Origen's view influenced his successors. While in Chapter 9 I have begun to sketch out some of Eusebius' positions on prophecy, there is, clearly, a great deal more to be done. My aim in that chapter was to search for evidence in Origen's successors of his tripartite hermeneutic as specifically applied to prophecy. Nevertheless, because the text I examined, the *Prophetic Eclogues*, is such a tight paraphrase of Origen, it is conceivable that the chapter does not really tell us much about Eusebius but acts instead as a piece of additional proof for the views of Origen. Without a wider examination of Eusebius' approach to prophecy as a whole, it is hard to say whether he truly understood Origen's thought in the way I have proposed. A full engagement with Origen's successors would also have to take in the thought of the Cappadocians: in particular, an investigation of Gregory of Nyssa's concept of providence and the *diastema* in relation to Origen's views of prophecy and providence could be quite profitable.

During the writing of this thesis, I have worked on several topics which were too peripheral to the central argument of my thesis for me to have been able to pursue them further, but which I could extend substantially. First, I am not convinced that there has been an adequate comparative study of free will in patristic thought. Scholars have written on a number of individual fathers, but the only more general work I have seen is that of Michael Frede, which – with all due respect to his work – treats Christian writers as a coda to Stoic philosophers rather than extensively in their own right. Second, in Chapters 2 and 8, I have made the – admittedly contested – case that the Marcionites reduced the rule of John the Baptist significantly in their scriptural canon, or perhaps omitted him completely. This deserves its own study as part of a wider attempt to understand the Marcionite view of prophecy.

I also have two more substantial suggestions for avenues of further research. Both concern Origen's wider place in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and beyond; this is the area of this thesis that, from a historical perspective, I consider weakest. I suggested above that in order to adequately trace Origen's thought in his successors, it would be necessary to undertake a detailed study of Cappadocian views on prophecy. I also think there are several later figures that it would be worth investigating on this front. For example, a thorough comparative examination of Origen and Augustine on the topic of prophecy could be extremely illuminating. Such a study could also help to bridge some quite unnecessary divides within patristic scholarship between those who work on the Latin Fathers and

those who work on the Greek Fathers, a split which tends to favour the Latin. Second, a study of Origen's influence on mediaeval thinking about prophecy has potential both for some interesting insights into long-scale trends in Christian thought about prophecy, and also for studies of Origen's reception and circulation in the Middle Ages and beyond. For example, there would be definite value in a comparative discussion of Origen and Thomas Aquinas on the topic of inspiration, or of Origen and Luis de Molina on the metaphysics of free will.

The other more substantial suggestion revolves around putting Origen back into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century narrative for histories of prophecy. I argued in the Introduction that histories of Christian prophecy often relied on unfounded and problematic assumptions about ecstatic prophecy; I also argued that the work of Nasrallah and others has gone some way to addressing this problem in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century context. This has not been done for the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, but I hope my work on Origen could be helpful in beginning to construct a more nuanced picture of this difficult age.



## Chapter 11

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