

Article

# Origen and the Platonic Tradition

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**Abstract:** This study situates Origen of Alexandria within the Platonic tradition, presenting Origen as a Christian philosopher who taught and studied philosophy, of which theology was part and parcel. More specifically, Origen can be described as a Christian Platonist. He criticized “false philosophies” as well as “heresies,” but not the philosophy of Plato. Against the background of recent scholarly debates, the thorny issue of the possible identity between Origen the Christian Platonist and Origen the Neoplatonist is partially addressed (although it requires a much more extensive discussion); it is also discussed in the light of Origen’s formation at Ammonius’s school and the reception of his works and ideas in “pagan” Platonism. As a consequence, and against scholarly perspectives that tend to see Christianity as anti-Platonism, the final section of this paper asks the question of what is imperial and late antique Platonism and, on the basis of rich evidence, suggests that this was not only “pagan” institutional Platonism.

**Keywords:** Origen of Alexandria; Origen the Neoplatonist; Platonism; Ammonius Saccas; Plotinus; Porphyry; Hierocles; Proclus; Patristic Platonism

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## 1. The Perspective: Origen, the Importance of Philosophy, Plato, and Platonism

Origen of Alexandria († 255ca.) is one of the most prominent patristic Platonists along with Eriugena—and, to a lesser extent, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius, Augustine, and Dionysius. With him, as partially already with Justin and Clement of Alexandria, Christianity acquired a strong philosophical, mainly Platonic, foundation, so as to resist charges of befitting irrational people [1]. His intellectual personality, and his very place in the history of Platonism, as will be concisely suggested in this essay, is hard to square with scholarly presentations of Christianity as anti-Platonism. While he stopped teaching literature (Eus. *HE* 6.3.8–9), Origen never stopped teaching philosophy, using the Socratic method of questioning and argumentation [2]. Many learned pagans who had received a philosophical education were conquered by his teaching (Eus. *HE* 6.3.13). Even after handing the basic courses to Heraclas (*HE* 6.15.1), Origen did not cease teaching philosophy, and “many renowned philosophers” attended his classes “to be instructed not only in the divine things, but also in pagan philosophy,” i.e., “the doctrines of the various philosophical schools”; he exegeted the writings of the philosophers and was celebrated as a great philosopher even by “pagans” (*HE* 6.17.2–3).<sup>1</sup>

Origen deemed philosophy most valuable (*C.Cant.* 2.1.28), although even the best pre-Christian philosopher, Plato, was unable to remove sin (*ibid.* 2.5.30), which requires divine grace. Origen acknowledged the philosophers’ temperance and wisdom (*H.Ier.* 5.4). He himself often expounded

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<sup>1</sup> On “pagans” and Christians in Origen’s third century see, e.g., ([3], pp. 242–76).

Christian philosophy to “pagans” with anti-Christian biases, without presenting it as Christian; after persuading them rationally, he disclosed that this was “the Christian *logos*” (*H.Ier.* 20.5)—that to which Celsus had opposed his *True Logos*, claiming Plato’s heritage for “pagan” Platonism alone. According to the *Thanksgiving Oration* of a disciple of his, traditionally identified with Gregory Thaumaturgus, Origen “claimed that it is impossible to be authentically religious without practicing philosophy.”<sup>2</sup> Origen imported both methods and contents from Greek philosophy into Christian thought: for instance, philosophy’s “zetetic” method applied to biblical and Platonic exegesis alike, as well as allegoresis. Origen read his textual authority, Scripture, in light of Platonism, mirroring contemporary Platonists’ exegetical method—and a Platonist, Amelius, read John’s Prologue against the backdrop of Origen’s exegesis (see below). But Origen allegorized also Plato’s writings, as I shall point out. Origen relied on imperial philosophy to construct his innovative notion of hypostasis as individual substance, as opposed to a common essence (*ousia*), with which he may have influenced even “pagan” Platonists such as Porphyry.<sup>3</sup> Origen also imported the formula, “there was a time when *x* did not exist,” never used in Christianity before him, from imperial philosophy into Christology, where it became prominent in the “Arian” controversy.<sup>4</sup>

Origen was attacked by both Christians for being a (Platonist) philosopher, and “pagan” Platonists for being a Christian. He defended his identity of Christian philosopher before his fellow-Christians (*ap.* Eusebius *HE* 6.19.14; Homilies on Jeremiah 20.5). He intended to create an “orthodox” Christian Platonism, against Christian “heresies” such as Marcionism, against “pagan” and “Gnostic” Platonisms (not Plato or Platonism tout court), and against non-Platonic philosophies, such as materialistic Stoicism, hedonistic and “atheistic” Epicureanism, and Aristotelianism, which denied the soul’s immortality, sublunar providence, and prayers’ usefulness (e.g., *CC* 2.13; *On Prayer* 5.1) [6]. Notably, Plotinus addressed the same criticisms as Origen did against Stoics, Epicureans, and Gnostics.<sup>5</sup> Similarly Porphyry, like Origen, attacked atheism as the rejection of providence and prayer (*C.Timaeus* F28 Sodano), targeting Aristotelianism no less than Epicureanism. Of course, Origen’s criticism of Aristotelianism does not mean that he had a poor knowledge of Aristotelian texts and doctrines; on the contrary, I argued that he had an excellent knowledge of Aristotelianism, probably gained also through Alexander of Aphrodisias [5]; further research is required and underway.

Origen attacked “pagan” and “Gnostic” Platonism and non-Platonic philosophies, but not Plato, whom he admired and whose ideas he furthered. He did not support metempsychosis, which, implying the eternity of the world, clashed with Scripture, but Plato alluded to it only mythically, for instance in *Republic* 10. Origen opposed metempsychosis (a soul entering various bodies) to ensomatosis (a soul uses one single body, which will be transformed according to the soul’s state: *Commentary on John* 6.85). Porphyry, a holder of metempsychosis, probably in polemic with Origen used ἐμψύχωσις, “animation” of a body (*Gaur.* 2.4; 11.1–3), a rare term, employed only once by Plotinus (*Enn.* 4.3.9) and Galen (4.763), and μετεμψύχωσις, “transanimation” or transmigration of souls (*Abst.* 4.16). Porphyry never used “ensomatosis” or “metempsychosis”; Plotinus used “metempsychosis” twice (*Enn.* 2.9.6; 4.3.9), but never Origen’s own term, “ensomatosis.”

For Origen, theology was the culmination of philosophical investigation, based on Scripture and Plato, because Plato was inspired by Scripture or by the Logos that is also ‘incarnate’ in Scripture. He divided philosophy into ethics, physics, epoptics, and logic (the Stoic tripartition plus *epoptica*), identifying the crowning of philosophy with epoptics, i.e., theology (*de divinis et caelestibus*)—a term already used by Clement and the Eleusinian mysteries. Theology is part and parcel of philosophy and cannot be studied without philosophical foundations (*C.Cant.* prol. 3.1–3). Since Christ is Logos, faith and reason cannot conflict. In Origen’s philosophical masterpiece, *First Principles*, theology is

<sup>2</sup> *Or.* 6.78–79.

<sup>3</sup> Argument in [4].

<sup>4</sup> Demonstration in [5].

<sup>5</sup> On Plotinus’s criticisms see, [7].

studied on (Platonic) philosophical underpinnings; in the Prologue Origen programmatically opens to philosophical investigation the issues left unclear in Scripture and tradition, and Book 4 includes Biblical philosophical exegesis within philosophy. For the soul must stick to reason and faith together (*C.Cant.* 2.10.7): no reason without faith, since Origen's philosophy is Christian, but no faith without reason, because Origen's Christianity is *philosophy*—both a way of life and a worldview grounded in the Logos. Greek philosophers drew inspiration from Solomon's wisdom (*C.Cant.* prol. 3.4). Scripture provides Christian philosophy with a special kind of demonstration besides dialectical demonstration (CC 1.2), but it teaches the same as does the best of Greek philosophy—Plato.

Origen indeed embraces, and presents as true philosophical doctrines, Plato's theories. For instance, his ideal of assimilation/likeness to God was a tenet of both Plato's ethics and Scripture's creation account. Also, Origen calls "the general theory concerning the soul" (*C.John* 2.182) what was the *Platonic* doctrine, and accepts it (albeit with a proviso): "that the soul is not sown together with the [mortal] body, but preexists it and is later clothed with flesh and blood for various reasons." Origen appropriates Plato's definition of God, "father of the universe," presenting this tenet as typical of those philosophies which posited providence (*Princ.* 1.3.1). Providence was maintained by Platonists and Stoics, against Epicureans and Peripatetics, the latter group criticized by Origen for denying providence (CC 3.75). Here Origen states that to lead people to the true (Christian Platonic) philosophy it is necessary to remove them from false philosophies: Aristotelianism, materialistic Stoicism, and hedonistic and anti-providential Epicureanism—but, remarkably, *not Platonism*.<sup>6</sup> Origen refrains from including Platonism among false philosophies. His attacks on false philosophies held not only from the Christian perspective, but also from the Platonic one; the denial of providence, hedonism, and materialism were unacceptable to all Platonists. Origen accused the Epicureans of denying providence (CC 1.10; 1.13), the Aristotelians of deeming prayers useless,<sup>7</sup> and Aristotle of repudiating Plato's doctrines of the soul's immortality and of the Ideas/Forms,<sup>8</sup> both of which Origen supported. The "few Greek philosophers" who "knew God" (CC 4.30) certainly include Plato. Origen rejects not philosophy tout court, but that "of this world," that is, "any philosophy based on false concepts"; he contrasts Plato's philosophy, which is not of this kind, with Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Aristotelianism (CC 1.13), and quotes *Sixth Letter* 322DE, where Plato himself distinguished between human and divine wisdom, calling the latter "true wisdom" (CC 6.12–13). This is Origen's Christian Platonism.

As I suggested elsewhere ([8], chapter 1), Origen, who sided with Plato and as a Christian Platonist criticized the other philosophical schools, represented the Platonist Celsus as an Epicurean not so much because he was mistaken about his identity,<sup>9</sup> but because he was much more comfortable attacking Epicurus than Plato, maybe even in front of his Ammonian colleagues. Origen was aware that Celsus upheld Platonic doctrines, such as divine providence and God's transcendence (CC 1.8; 4.54; 4.83), and admired Plato (CC 6.18; 47), treating him as an authority. In many respects Celsus "acted as a Platonist" (CC 4.83): "either he is dissimulating his Epicurean view, or... has changed his opinion for a better one, or...is but a homonym of the Epicurean," being indeed a Platonist (CC 4.54). The 'better opinion' was of course Platonism. Origen was reluctant to concede that Celsus, who taught so many Platonic tenets, *was* a Platonist—admitted hypothetically in 4.54—because it was more congenial to him to refute an Epicurean or a "false Platonist" than a true Platonist. For Origen, true Platonism was Christian Platonism, for which he claimed the heritage of Plato.

Eusebius followed Origen when criticizing Greek philosophical schools such as Epicureanism, Stoicism, Skepticism, and Aristotelianism (*PE* 11–15), but *not Platonism*, and he praised Plato's

<sup>6</sup> See also ([8], chapter 2), for other passages in which Origen criticized false philosophical doctrines in Stoicism, Aristotelianism, and Epicureanism, but not in Platonism.

<sup>7</sup> See also *Or.* 5.1. For Origen on Epicureanism, see [9].

<sup>8</sup> CC 2.13; also criticized for his philosophy of language (CC 5.45) and else.

<sup>9</sup> Although he may have been, since he identified, or purported to identify, Celsus with the Epicurean who lived under Hadrian (CC 1.8).

philosophy (PE 11–13), “the true philosophy” (C.Hier. 45.4), “superior to all” (PE 11 pro. 3), declaring Plato “amazing, extraordinary” (PE 11.8.1; 11.9.5). Eusebius only dropped metempsychosis, also rejected by Origen (PE 13.16). In *Against Celsus*, more than with Plato, Origen is eristic with Celsus’s Plato, that is, the Plato of “pagan” Platonism, for instance when he criticizes Celsus’s interpretation of *Tim.* 28C (CC 7.42ff). The “pagan” anti-Christian Middle Platonists he knew were interpreting Plato wrongly—like the “Gnostics.” Origen quotes Celsus citing Plato in his anti-Christian polemic, and regularly responds by arguing, not that Plato was wrong, but that Celsus misunderstood or misrepresented Plato.

Origen is highly appreciative of Plato himself, for instance praising his myths methodologically and epistemologically. He also assimilates Plato’s myths to Biblical “myths,” for example the Poros myth to the Eden myth (CC 4.37–39; Commentary on Genesis): Christians, Origen argues, will not deride Plato, such a great philosopher; so, why should “pagan” Platonists deride Scripture? Both should be read allegorically-philosophically [10]. Origen likens Jesus’s resurrection to the reviving of Plato’s Er (CC 2.16), and compares the Christian paradise to Plato’s ascent of the soul and contemplation of hyperouranios (CC 3.80), which Origen Christianizes (CC 7.44). Origen also assimilates Plato’s notion of the deities’ purification of the earth through water to the Christian concept of purification by Christ (CC 4.20; 4.62). He corrects Celsus’s misrepresentation of Plato as teaching that evil will never be reduced (*Theaet.* 176A) by pointing out that Plato theorized the divinities’ purification of the earth in *Tim.* 22D (CC 4.20). Origen overtly appreciated Plato’s criticism of “pagan” mythology as unworthy of the divinities (*Philb.* 12B; CC 4.48).

Origen expresses deep respect for Plato, his style, and his philosophy’s nobility and usefulness (CC 6.2 and elsewhere). Plato taught the same truths as Scripture, possibly because he knew the “Jewish philosophy” (CC 4.39), more ancient than Plato (e.g., CC 6.7)—likewise for Eusebius, Plato “followed the philosophy of the Hebrews,” hearing/reading it or being inspired by God-Logos (PE 11 pro. 2; 11.8.1). Origen ranks Plato as the best of all philosophers, the closest to scriptural doctrines (CC 1.10). Origen explicitly agrees with Plato on the supreme Good’s inexpressibility in the Seventh Letter, and praises him as inspired by God (CC 6.3). Indeed, all good results in philosophy—ethics, represented by Abraham; physics, by Isaac; and theology-epoptics, by Jacob—depend on the Logos (C.Cant. pro. 3.18–20). If every Christian could devote his or her life to philosophy, this would be ideal (CC 1.9).

To create an “orthodox” Christian Platonism, Origen developed his restoration (*apokatastasis*) doctrine from his polemic against “Gnostic” determinism [11].<sup>10</sup> The tenet of human freewill informed Origen’s *apokatastasis* theory: in *First Principles* Book 3, he refutes “Valentinian” determinism, arguing that Scripture teaches freewill, and counters the Marcionite and “Gnostic” separation of God’s goodness from God’s justice. On these grounds, he theorizes the restoration of all rational creatures after purification and illumination. *Apokatastasis* is based on theodicy and the defense of freewill against determinism, as Rufinus was aware (*Ap.Hier.* 2.12). Origen rejected determinism and casualism (*Princ.* 3.5.5) to support freewill, and, as in Plato’s myth of Er—often cited by Origen—theodicy was Origen’s primary concern in his polemic against “Gnostic” (and Stoic) determinism.

Origen found in Scripture many (Middle) Platonic tenets—just as Clement claimed, e.g., that the Platonic intelligible-sensible divide was already in Scripture (*Strom.* 5.93.4). The theoretical pillars of *apokatastasis*, for example, belong to both Scripture and Platonism: Origen adduced Scripture, but this for him teaches the same as Plato does.<sup>11</sup> Origen’s concept of the Logos one-and-many, One as God but many as Logos, subsuming all multiplicity into unity, is grounded by him in Scripture, but must be considered within Middle Platonism, in which Plato’s Ideas had become thoughts of God, located in God’s Mind-Logos. The Logos is the seat of the Ideas/Forms (the noetic cosmos), which are

<sup>10</sup> On *apokatastasis* in Origen, see also ([12]; [13], pp. 198–99), referring to ([11], pp. 144–56).

<sup>11</sup> Thorough demonstration in [11].

the paradigms of reality, and joins them all in unity. For Christian Middle Platonists, God's Logos is Christ; therefore, Christ/Logos is the place of all Ideas and unifies them—the notion of God's Logos being “all things as One.” Clement theorized this in *Strom.* 4.155.2–157.2,<sup>12</sup> adding that the Logos contains the Ideas (*Protr.* 7; *Strom.* 5.73.3), God's thoughts (*Strom.* 5.16.3). Origen develops Clement's concept of the Logos “One as All”: whereas the Father is “absolutely simply One,” Christ-Logos is “One through the many” and “One as All” (*C. John* 1.20.119). Christ is said to be “the first and the last” in Revelation—a passage already quoted by Clement—because he is the first, the last, and all in between, as Christ-Logos is “all things” (*C. John* 1.31.219). Christ is “all in all” (*C. John* 1.31.225). The Platonic unity/multiplicity dialectic is clear in the initial section of Origen's *Commentary on John*, describing Christ as one, yet having many *epinoiai*—a good parallel is Plotinus's *Nous*, the second hypostasis, which is also “one-many” (*Enneads* 5.9.[5.]6.8; 6.4.[22.]4.25; 6.9.[9.]5.16).<sup>13</sup>

As a philosopher Origen planned his *First Principles* (*Περὶ ἀρχῶν*); precedents were not in Christian writings, but in Greek philosophy and its *Περὶ ἀρχῶν* tradition.<sup>14</sup> These principles (*ἀρχαί*) are the Hypostases of the Trinity: this is why in *Princ.* 1.4.3 Origen calls it *archiken Trinitatem*. These three Hypostases-Arkhai open Origen's treatise and, significantly, reappear as *τρεῖς ἀρχικαὶ ὑποστάσεις* not only in Eusebius but also in the titles given by Porphyry to Plotinus's treatises.<sup>15</sup> For Origen, God-*ἀρχή* replaces Middle Platonism's three *ἀρχαί* (God, matter, and forms), but is triune; thus, Origen posits three *ἀρχαί* but not three gods [4,8]. Against Monarchianism,<sup>16</sup> which posited one *ἀρχή*, and against imprecise theologies of the Logos, which subordinated it to God, Origen elaborated his Trinitarian notion of hypostasis: the Logos is one of the three divine hypostases, which are three *ἀρχαί* in one God.

## 2. Ammonius, Origen, Plotinus, Hierocles, and Proclus: Two Origenes or One?

### 2.1. Origen the Christian, Origen the Platonist, and Porphyry

The Christian Platonist Origen, most probably a disciple of Ammonius Saccas like Plotinus,<sup>17</sup> may have been the same as Origen the Neoplatonist.<sup>18</sup> Chronological, doctrinal, and authorial objections have been raised against the one-Origen hypothesis, all of which can be addressed and solved. I have endeavored to do so in some essays and will do so in further scholarship ([2,8,29,30] and elsewhere); here I have no room to expand on all proofs, arguments, and counterarguments, but will address some points, including the chronological and some aspects of the doctrinal and authorial ones, very briefly.

Porphyry, later a disciple of Plotinus, also studied with Origen the Christian,<sup>19</sup> who seems to have exerted a strong influence on his thought.<sup>20</sup> His awareness of the importance of Origen's Christian Platonism led Porphyry (CCF39=Eusebius *HE* 6.19) to admire him as a philosopher, but criticize him as illegitimately applying Greek philosophy and allegoresis to Biblical exegesis ([2]; [34], pp. 73–74). For Porphyry, Origen had Greek parents and received Greek education, but then “inclined

<sup>12</sup> Analysed in [14].

<sup>13</sup> A systematic comparison between Origen's and Plotinus's thought, updating and completing Crouzel's, is in the works.

<sup>14</sup> Argument in [2].

<sup>15</sup> As argued in [4].

<sup>16</sup> On which see now [15].

<sup>17</sup> That Ammonius Saccas taught both Origen and Plotinus is accepted by most scholars, including ([16], p. 284; [17], p. 24; [18], chapter 2), and indicated even in sourcebooks such as ([19], p. 29).

<sup>18</sup> To cite only some recent works, the identification is considered possible, e.g., by ([20,21]; [22], p. 351; [23]; [24], p. 531): “Origen the Pagan, or the Neoplatonist, has never existed, and the Origen we meet three times in Nemesius's treatise is always the only Christian and Platonist Origen, known to Christian and pagan writers without any distinction”; DePalma Digeser ([25], pp. 97–218); [26], pp. 18, 51 and *passim*); Johnson ([27], pp. 90, 153); Marx-Wolf ([28], chapter 1); Ramelli [2,8,29,30] with further arguments and responses to objections to the possibility of this identification. Tarrant [31] and Prinzivalli ([16], p. 284): “there is insufficient evidence to affirm with certainty that [Porphyry] thinks of them as two different individuals” are also open to the possibility that Origen the Christian and Origen the Platonist may have been one and the same person.

<sup>19</sup> See [2]; likewise ([32], p. 10). Socrates *HE* 3.2, about Porphyry's initial adhesion to Christianity and discipleship of Origen the Christian in Caesarea, derives from Eusebius's lost *Against Porphyry*. See ([33], p. 8; n. 26).

<sup>20</sup> e.g., [4]. Simmons [32] agrees and also supports this view.

toward the barbarian audacity [τόλμημα].” Porphyry contrasts Origen’s way of life—against the law as Christian—and Origen’s philosophy, Greek. In metaphysics and theology Origen was a Greek philosopher—having studied these disciplines with Ammonius—but he interpreted Scripture in light of philosophy, which Porphyry denounces as inconsistent [2,35]. The same alleged incompatibility between Platonism and Christianity emerges also from the Christian side in Marcellus of Ancyra (fr. 88 Klostermann=22 Seibt/Vinzent): “as soon as Origen detached himself from the philosophical disciplines, he chose to converse with the divine Scriptures, but before having an accurate grasp of the Bible . . . and was led astray by philosophical arguments, because of which he wrote some things incorrectly. And it is clear: since he still remembered Plato’s opinions, and the difference among the principles that is found in his writings, he wrote a work, *First Principles*,” which at the beginning echoed Plato’s *Gorgias*. Eusebius was responding to such attacks when he stresses that Plato never wrote any *First Principles*, and Origen did not teach the same protological doctrines as Plato (C.Marcell. 1.4.27).

## 2.2. Ammonius, the Competition for His Legacy, and Origen’s “Ammonian” Treatises

Origen’s appropriation of Plato may be seen as antagonistic to, or in dialectic with, “pagan” Platonism. Origen and Plotinus competed for the legacy of Ammonius Saccas, the founder of Neoplatonism,<sup>21</sup> and for the very identity of Platonism. Elizabeth Digeser, among many others, agrees with me about the probable identity of Origen the Christian with the Neoplatonist, and argues that Origen’s later branding as a monster by two groups, Christians and “pagan” Platonists, means that he occupied a conceptual borderland between them [37]. “That these attacks came from *two* communities, both of whom branded him as monstrous because he bore too many attributes from the ‘other side,’ suggests that Origen’s career unfolded in the borderland *between* two groups who were fashioning their identities in opposition to one another—without perhaps there being very many truly salient differences between them . . . Origen used the exegetical tools developed in Ammonius’s classroom to do for Christian scripture what Plotinus would later do for the teachings of Plato: he strove to fashion an intellectually consistent *summa theologica* that would guide students toward God, the highest truth.” ([37], pp. 19, 21). With his attack on Origen, Porphyry “was attempting to marginalize Origen and the theologian’s many heirs who had appropriated salient aspects of Platonist metaphysics and exegetical strategies only to apply it to their own Christian Scriptures.” ([37], p. 26) Likewise Jeremy Schott sees Porphyry’s attacks on Origen and the Christians as “a dispute between remarkably similar yet competing attempts to negotiate cultural and religious difference.” ([34], p. 54).

Origen is reported by Porphyry, Longinus, and Proclus to have expounded Ammonius’s ideas in *On Daemons/Spirits/Rational Beings* and *The King Is the Only Creator*. Many clues suggest the attribution of these treatises to Origen the Christian [2,8,29], besides the full correspondence of the latter’s title with Origen’s *Sel.Ps.(cat.)* PG 12.1560.42: God’s “creative kingship governs all.” Porphyry (F39) contrasts Ammonius with Origen: Ammonius was raised as a Christian, but when he received philosophical instruction he “began to behave according to the laws” (κατὰ νόμους); Origen received Greek education, but lived “against the laws” (παρὰ νόμους). Porphyry wrote when Christianity was illegal: he, or someone inspired by him, attests, like Tertullian, to the *senatus consultum* that made Christianity illegal [35]. According to Eusebius, Ammonius was a Christian all his life long and wrote a treatise on the agreement between Moses and Jesus (*HE* 6.19.10)—which should not surprise in a Christian Platonist, and perhaps even in a non-Christian Platonist. For the Middle Platonist and Neopythagorean Numenius too, who was neither Christian nor Jew and was enormously esteemed by both Plotinus and Origen, allegorized the Old and the New Testaments (Origen CC 4.51). Nemesius, *NH* 2.8, links Numenius with Ammonius Saccas, and Tarrant surmises that Origen engaged with Numenius owing to his importance in Ammonius’s background ([38], p. 39). He is speaking of the Neoplatonist, but Numenius was equally important to Origen the Christian, who was also a disciple of Ammonius

<sup>21</sup> On competition in late antique Platonism, see [36].

and may have been the same as Origen the Neoplatonist. Like Numenius, Ammonius was open to non-Greek philosophical and religious traditions, which also explains Plotinus's desire to become acquainted with the Indian sages' wisdom as a result of his eleven-year training under Ammonius (Porphyry *Vit.Plot.*3). Ammonius's openness to "barbarian" philosophical theologies squares well with his identity as a Christian Platonist and his influence on Origen, although it would even befit a non-Christian Platonist. Digeser ([26], p. 43) is probably right that "as a philosopher, Ammonius retained an active interest in Christian texts and doctrine, but also probably continued to identify as a Christian interested in assessing for himself the truth claims of scripture." The incompatibility between *philosopher* and *Christian* was more in Porphyry's polemic and in many modern scholars' minds (see [2]).

Ammonius was likely also the teacher of philosophy of Heraclas, the Christian philosopher and presbyter—later bishop—Origen's colleague. Origen in a letter (Eusebius *HE* 6.19.12–14) attests that Heraclas, "who now sits in the *presbyterion* of Alexandria," was first found by him in Alexandria "at the teacher of philosophical doctrines." Heraclas had studied there for five years before Origen began to attend those classes. Heraclas, a Christian philosopher, was still studying the "books of the Greeks" and dressing as a philosopher while a presbyter. For Ammonius, Christianity and Platonism were thoroughly compatible and this attitude, inherited by his disciples Origen and Heraclas, may have given rise to the aforementioned divergent interpretations concerning his religious allegiance.

The Neoplatonist Hierocles described Origen and Plotinus as Ammonius's brightest and most remarkable and illustrious disciples. Ammonius was "divinely taught," and maintained that Plato and Aristotle agreed on the main doctrines; he traced their philosophies to one and the same intention/mind (*νοῦς*) and "transmitted philosophy without conflicts to all his disciples, especially the best of those acquainted with him, Plotinus, Origen, and their successors" (*ap.* Photius 214.172ab; 251.461b). Ammonius's interest in the harmonization of Plato and Aristotle<sup>22</sup> was shared by Porphyry, Plotinus's disciple, more perhaps than by Plotinus himself—or Origen. Indeed, while Ammonius harmonized Plato and Aristotle, Origen criticized Aristotle (and not Plato), as mentioned, but so also did Plotinus, and yet he was for sure a disciple of Ammonius Saccas, just as Origen very probably was.

Eusebius was well acquainted not only with many Platonists of the past, but also with Plotinus, Porphyry, Longinus, and Amelius, whom he designates as *νέοι* and *οἱ καθ' ἑμᾶς* (*PE* 3.6.7; 11.18.26; 15.20.8). His knowledge of Plotinus is described by George Karamanolis as "unusual, since . . . Plotinus was relatively unknown outside his circle in the early fourth century." ([40], p. 175). However, this knowledge does not surprise me, given that Eusebius was a great admirer and knower of Plotinus's fellow-disciple at Ammonius's, Origen, and that Plotinus in his *Enneads* expounded Ammonius's doctrines. It is likely that Eusebius was so interested in Plotinus because of his closeness to Origen thanks to Ammonius.

Mark Edwards suggested that Origen's teacher was another Ammonius, a Peripatetic whose erudition is also praised by Philostratus (*VS* 2.27) ([41], p. 89). But the existence of this Ammonius does not imply that he was Origen's master: although, as I mentioned, Origen had a good knowledge of Aristotelianism, he criticized major Peripatetic tenets, like Plotinus, so it would seem unlikely that he could have been the devoted disciple of an avowed Peripatetic; it is more likely that he was the disciple of a Platonist, however harmonizer, such as Ammonius Saccas. Besides, Aristotle is not in the list of Origen's favorite readings according to Porphyry *C.Chr.* F39; additionally, Aristotle was widely used by Plotinus too,<sup>23</sup> whose teacher was nevertheless no Peripatetic, but the Platonist Ammonius Saccas. As Edwards himself admits with Kalligas and Brisson, "the Peripatetic Ammonius is not the Platonist who taught Plotinus," but this does not prove that he was the teacher of Origen either. Moreover, Longinus calls this Peripatetic Ammonius a philologist and learned man, but not a philosopher—and

<sup>22</sup> On which, see ([39], pp. 191–215).

<sup>23</sup> (Porphyry *V.Plot.* 14; [6]).

Longinus himself was styled a philologist rather than a philosopher by Plotinus. Porphyry identifies the Christian Origen as a disciple of Ammonius (Eusebius *HE* 6.19.6), and when speaking, praisefully, of Ammonius the teacher of Plotinus and Ammonius the teacher of Origen the Christian, he never distinguishes the two—as he never distinguishes two Origenes.

Theodoret, *Cur.* 6.60–73, setting Ammonius Saccas under Commodus, presents Origen the Christian and Plotinus as his disciples. He outlines Ammonius’s metaphysics, which is well compatible with Origen’s: the principles are the *Nous* and (deriving from this) the *Logos*, by which the universe is created and maintained in existence and harmony [42]. Ammonius was a supporter of divine providence and of the Stoic-Platonic principle that “only the good are happy” as are “the gods.” Remarkably, Theodoret has no problem with Ammonius’s mention of gods—just as Origen hadn’t—while Eusebius felt the need to claim that Ammonius always remained a Christian. Porphyry *C.Chr.* F39 remarks that Ammonius was a Christian, but, after studying philosophy, “he changed his way of life conformably to the laws”—the opposite of Origen’s living *παράνομως* (see above). Porphyry might mean that Ammonius offered some non-bloody sacrifices, or simply stopped participating in masses, but, as we have seen, this does not entail that Ammonius dismissed his deep interest in Christian texts and doctrines.

Plotinus brought Ammonius’s mind into his own research (Porphyry *V.Plot.* 14), and with Origen and Erennius promised not to divulge the doctrines, expounded at Ammonius’s esoteric lectures (*ἄκροάσεις*). But when Erennius broke the promise, Origen did divulge them; however, he did not write down these doctrines, apart from composing treatises *Περὶ τῶν δαιμόνων* and *Ὁ τι μόνος ποιητῆς ὁ βασιλεύς* (*V.Plot.* 3). This has been regarded as incompatible with the Christian Origen’s extensive literary production, for example recently by Proctor: “Origen the Neoplatonist largely refrained from recording his teaching in writings, a practice that stands in direct contrast to Origen the Christian’s prolific writing career” ([43], p. 419; see also [41], p. 89). But Porphyry is not stating that Origen wrote only these two treatises in his whole life, but that he did not expound Ammonius’s esoteric doctrines in written works apart from these. Likewise, Longinus (*ap.* Porphyry *V.Plot.* 20) says that Origen wrote *On Daemons/Spirits* as an example of his few Neoplatonic Ammonian systematic works, among which was also *The King is the Only Creator*; he does not at all say, “Origen exclusively wrote *On Daemons* in all of his life.” Therefore, the identification of Origen the Christian with the author of the two “Ammonian” treatises implies no authorial impossibility. Plotinus, instead, wrote nothing for ten years, just teaching orally on the basis of Ammonius’s classes (*ap.* Porphyry *V.Plot.* 20).

The *δαίμονες* comprised angels and humans for Ammonius (Photius 251.461b–462a) as for Origen, coinciding with *νόες/λογικά* (e.g., *Princ.* 2.9.1). *The King is the Only Creator* refers to Plato’s Second Letter, with the “three kings” indicating God, which Clement interpreted in a Trinitarian sense and Origen cites, referring to God as universal king (CC 6.18). Origen may have confronted Numenius—one of his, Ammonius’s, and Plotinus’ preferred readings—who distinguished the King from the Creator, identifying the former with the first God, who creates nothing, and the latter with the second (fr.12 Des Places). Ammonius emphasized that God is the creator of all, attaching to Plato a quasi-*creatio ex nihilo*—taken over by Porphyry<sup>24</sup>—and ascribed to God-Creator (*ποιητῆς*) the kingship (*βασιλεία, βασιλεύειν*), manifest in God’s *πρόνοια* (Photius 251.461b). These theories squared with Origen’s Christian Platonism. Origen with *The King Is the Only Creator* may have also been targeting “Gnostics”—famously criticized by Plotinus too—and Marcionites who posited an inferior, and even malevolent, demiurge/creator distinct from the higher God, the King.

*The King Is the Only Creator* was written, according to Porphyry, under Gallienus, who reigned with Valerian 253–260 and alone 260–268. Origen († 255/6) could have written this treatise in the years 253–255/6. Eusebius does not say that Origen died before the accession of Gallienus: his vague expression “in this period” (*HE* 7.1.1), i.e., after Decius’ death, allows a dating around 255 and

<sup>24</sup> Porphyry denied that both God and matter are first principles; only God is (Proclus *C.Timaeus* 456.31–457.11).

does not entail that Origen died under Gallus in 253 ([41], p. 86). Eusebius provides more precise details when stating that Origen was not yet 17 when he lost his father during Septimius Severus's persecution in 202 (*HE* 6.2.2): therefore, he was born in 186 and was 69 in 255, when he died 'in his seventieth year'—no later than 256. It is unnecessary to surmise that Eusebius was lying about Origen's age during Septimius's persecution ([41], pp. 86–87). Thus, the one-Origen hypothesis entails no chronological impossibility.

Origen the Christian Platonist could therefore have written the treatises on God who created the (noetic and material) universe and reigns, and on the λογικά, his central topics in *First Principles* and in his exegesis of Plato's Atlantis myth (see below). As he states in the Prologue to *First Principles*, this was one of the issues left unclarified by scripture and the apostolic tradition and consequently open to philosophical research. That Eusebius does not list these writings among Origen's works does not necessarily imply that they must have been written by another Origen. First, Eusebius may have cited these treatises in the complete list of Origen's works included in Pamphilus's largely lost *Apology*, so this *argumentum ex silentio* is not entirely tenable. But even if Eusebius never mentioned these works, this can well be explained in light of his apologetical agenda—to defend Origen as a pious Christian against his Christian detractors. Indeed, Eusebius in his *Church History* intended to protect Origen from Christian charges of being a “pagan” Platonist; thus, like Jerome Letter 33, he is only mentioning his ecclesiastical works, including *Stromateis* and *Against Celsus*, not even *First Principles*. So, no wonder that he excluded Origen's “Ammonian” treatises there. He did so for the same reason as Porphyry did not record Origen's scriptural exegesis and other Christian writings, even though he clearly knew his commentaries (*C.Chr.* F39). Porphyry disliked Origen's Christian writings, but valued his ideas concerning τὰ πρόγματα and God, deeming them informed by Greek philosophy (*C.Chr.* F39). It is significant that these two issues, existing beings and God, exactly correspond to the “Ammonian” titles that he ascribes to Origen in *V.Plot.* 3: rational creatures and God as creator. This further suggests the identification of the Origen mentioned by Porphyry in *V.Plot.* 3 and 14 (where Origen enters Plotinus's class and the latter stops speaking, since Origen knew already what he was expounding, namely Ammonius's teaching)<sup>25</sup> with the Christian Origen, whom he both admires and criticizes in *C.Chr.* F39.

Here Porphyry attests that Plato was the main reading of the Christian Origen. Indeed, Origen consistently engaged in the (often allegorical) exegesis of Plato's dialogues. Origen's interpretations of Plato reported by Proclus in his commentary on the *Timaeus*, as I shall briefly indicate, are likely ascribable to the Christian Platonist, especially since at school Origen explained the works of Greek philosophers, prominently Plato (*Eus. HE* 6.17), and both his *Against Celsus* and his *Commentary on Genesis* featured sustained exegeses of Plato.

### 2.3. Proclus's Testimonies: Origen's Metaphysics and His Exegesis of Plato's Dialogues and Myths

Proclus also criticized Origen's metaphysics (*Theol.Plat.* 2.4) in such a way as to suggest that he was addressing Origen the Christian's metaphysics.<sup>26</sup> The same criticism that Proclus levelled against Origen was significantly already levelled by Plotinus against Aristotle (*Enn.* 5.1.[10].[9]): he identified the first principle with the Intellect thinking itself, instead of the One. The criticism is the same (and indeed Proclus regarded Plotinus's metaphysics as superior to that of Origen and the latter inspired precisely by Aristotle): namely, failing to go beyond the Nous—although Origen in fact did so only partially. Proclus attacks Origen, who shared the same philosophical formation as Plotinus at Ammonius's school (Ὁριγένην τὸν τῷ Πλωτίνῳ τῆς αὐτῆς μετασχόντα παιδείας), for failing to

<sup>25</sup> Ramelli [2] discusses Porphyry's anecdote in *V.Plot.* 14, thoroughly arguing that no chronological, historical, or philosophical issue prevents the identification of this Origen with the Christian Origen. Moreover, here as everywhere, Porphyry simply speaks of “Origen” without distinguishing a “pagan” Platonist Origen and a Christian Platonist Origen in any way.

<sup>26</sup> As argued extensively in [8,29] with further arguments. Tzamalikos [44] concurs with me that Proclus identifies Origen the Christian with Plotinus's fellow disciple at Ammonius Saccas' school, whose metaphysics Proclus discusses.

posit a principle superior to the Nous. Indeed Origen identifies God the Father with Nous and the Son with Logos, because the Son-Logos reveals the Father just as human *logos* announces the secrets of the *nous*, i.e., what is contemplated by the *nous* (*C. John* 1.277–279; 282). Proclus is both right and wrong that Origen did not go beyond “Nous and the Prime Being,” and did not posit the One as a principle “superior [ἐπέκεινα] to all Nous and all Being.” Origen identified God as both One and Nous. He called the Father “One and simple” (ἐν καὶ ἀπλοῦν, *C. John* 2.23.151), and in *Princ.* 1.1.6—likely influenced by *Parmenides* 137D–142E—“Monad and Henad,” “simple,” and “Nous” source of every intellect.<sup>27</sup> God is “Nous or beyond [ἐπέκεινα] Nous and Being” (CC 7.38). From Plato’s *Republic* 6.509B Origen knew that the Good is “beyond [ἐπέκεινα] Being”—a passage that Origen quotes in CC 6.64, but both here and in CC 7.38 (“Nous or beyond [ἐπέκεινα] Nous and Being . . . simple and incorporeal”) Origen considers God both Being (Οὐσία) and Nous, and beyond Being and Nous, in the former passage suggesting hypothetically that the Son is Being/Essence (Οὐσία) of Beings/Essences and the Father is beyond. In *C. John* 19.6.37, too, God is said to be either Being or beyond Being (ὑπερέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας).

In Proclus’s view, the correct interpreter of Plato was Plotinus, who consistently posited the One beyond Nous and Being. Origen, according to Proclus, thought that Nous is the first Being and first One (τὸ πρῶτως ὄν καὶ τὸ πρῶτως ἔν), which is “bereft of Plato’s philosophy” and, for Proclus, depends on Peripatetic innovations (τῆς Περιπατητικῆς καινοτομίας)—probably because, as mentioned, the same criticism was addressed by Plotinus to Aristotle. Origen knew Aristotelian doctrines, but he felt bound by the equation between God and Being in Ex 3:14, on which he commented philosophically in *C. John* 13.21.123. Moreover, he, like Nyssen after him, was aware that by deeming God nonbeing (beyond Being) he would have made God too similar to evil-nonbeing—what Plotinus in fact did.<sup>28</sup> Origen wanted to keep the opposition between God-Good-Being and evil-nonbeing.

Importantly, Proclus’s criticism of Origen’s protology probably refers to his *First Principles*, *Against Celsus*, and *Commentary on John*—not only his “Ammonian” treatises. This would confirm that Proclus was speaking of the Christian Origen in his (somewhat biased) assessment of Origen’s metaphysics. By composing the first commentary on Origen’s *First Principles*, Didymus had conferred on it the same status enjoyed by Plato’s dialogues. Earlier, almost only commentaries on Plato had been composed (besides some on Aristotle and Epictetus), or, in Jewish and Christian Platonism, commentaries on Scripture read through Platonism, such as Philo’s and Origen’s. Especially in the *Commentary on John*, Origen’s engagement with the Platonic tradition, particularly in the exegesis of the Prologue, stands out as unique among Christian commentaries on Scripture. Amelius, a disciple of Plotinus, also offered a philosophical exegesis of the Johannine Prologue, which therefore seems to have been known in the school of Plotinus. Amelius and Numenius appear to be the only non-Christian Platonists who offered philosophical interpretations of New Testament writings. Amelius’s exegesis of John, preserved by Eusebius, suggests that Amelius read John’s Prologue in light of Origen’s commentary, as I argue in a forthcoming work. This helps explain his claim that John, “the Barbarian,” posited the Logos as principle (ἀρχή).

Thus, just as in Plotinus’s circle Plato was not the only object of exegesis, but the Bible was also commented on, likewise Origen exegeted not only Scripture, but also Plato’s dialogues, such as *Timaeus*, *Republic*, and *Symposium*. Proclus, in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, reports how Origen interpreted Plato’s dialogues and often disagreed with Longinus, whom Plotinus described as “philologist.” Origen allegorized Plato as well as Scripture. Even in *Against Celsus*, as we shall see, he expressed high appreciation of Plato’s myths, indicating the epistemological similarity between Biblical and Platonic myths, which also required the same philosophical allegoresis. And from *Against Celsus*—which is undoubtedly by the Christian Origen—we know that he exegeted Plato’s Poros myth in his lost

<sup>27</sup> The first principle, God, is “intellectualis natura simplex...μονάς et . . . ἐνάς, et mens ac fons ex quo initium totius intellectualis naturae vel mentis est...natura illa simplex et tota mens”.

<sup>28</sup> For Plotinus, see ([7], p. 83, n. 103).

*Commentary on Genesis* too, as I will point out below. Thus, evidence of Origen's exegesis of Plato comes not only from Proclus, but from Origen himself.

Within a debate on the aims and meaning of Plato's *Republic*, Proclus reports that Origen and Longinus diverged about what kind of constitution/state Socrates describes (*C.Timaeus* 1.31.19–27). For Longinus, it was the middle *politeia*, i.e., warlike life, since its guardians were soldiers; for Origen, it was the first, i.e., intellectual life, because its guardians were educated in various disciplines—which were pivotal in the Christian Origen's own formation and at his university. He therefore emphasized their value also in Plato's *Republic*, which represents a state of knowledge and the government of souls—an allegorical/spiritual interpretation that parallels Origen's allegoresis of Scripture. Longinus mentioned Origen as a Platonist, whom he had long frequented; he praised him and Ammonius as “by far superior to all their contemporaries in intelligence” (*ap.* Porphyry *V.Plot.* 20). Longinus (212–273) may have attended Origen's school at Caesarea in the advanced 230s, if not later: Longinus was already about 43 when Origen died, so there would be, again, no chronological impossibility about the one-Origen hypothesis. Both Longinus and Porphyry (*V.Plot.* 14) mention Origen's “Ammonian” treatise *On Daemons/Spirits*, as we have seen. Another disagreement between Longinus and Origen concerned the factors of the good condition of body and soul (*C.Timaeus* 1.162.15–30). For Longinus, it depended on good land and climate; for Origen, on heavens' regular circular movements. Origen based his argument on the exegesis of *Republic* 8.546A.

Origen also exegeted Plato's Atlantis myth. He was well acquainted with Plato's *Timaeus* and, like Philo and Bardaisan [45], read *Genesis* in its light. After discussing whether the Atlantis story is a “narrative” or “a myth and an invention,” Proclus reports that for Origen this myth was an allegory of the conflict of spirits/rational beings (δαίμονες), better against worse, the worse more numerous, the better more powerful and finally victorious (*C.Timaeus* 1.76.31–77.3). Origen allegorized Plato's myth like Scripture. Rational creatures are called here δαίμονες as in the title of one of Origen's “Ammonian” treatises. These beings were the focus of his protology, theodicy, and eschatology—the eventual victory of the better rational creatures squares perfectly well with Origen's doctrine of universal *apokatastasis*, entailing the eventual triumph of the forces of Good over evil [11]. Origen the Christian typically allegorized cosmological descriptions in reference to spirits, for example the “upper waters” in *Genesis* as good spirits, the inferior waters as evil spirits. Origen's spiritualization of Scripture's cosmological myth parallels his spiritualization of Plato's cosmological myth.

Harold Tarrant is right that in Origen's view the Atlantis myth never happened historically ([38], p. 73): this is exactly what Origen the Christian thought about Plato's myths—such as that of Poros, which he analyzed in *Against Celsus* and *Commentary on Genesis*—and Scripture's myths [46,47]. Origen may well have exegeted the Atlantis myth not only in his “Ammonian” treatises, but also in his *Commentary on Genesis*, just as he interpreted Plato's Poros myth there. Origen's exegesis of Atlantis, as Proclus himself remarks (1.77.5–23), influenced Porphyry, who deemed the war between Athens and Atlantis to represent the conflict between superior souls and daemons of the worst kind (Porphyry *C.Timaeus* fr.17 Sodano). Like Numenius and Origen, indeed, Porphyry supported a non-literal, exclusively allegorical interpretation of the Atlantis myth.

Mark Edwards remarked: “Origen construed the war between Athens and Atlantis in the *Timaeus* as a struggle between good and evil daemons: Ramelli rightly observes that it was characteristic of the Christian Origen to find allegorical references to both unfallen and fallen angels in enigmatic passages of scripture. The word in Proclus, however, is ‘daemon’, not ‘fallen angel’: the Christian Origen held that angels and daemons are ontologically of one nature, but in his own vocabulary the name ‘daemon’ accrues to a being of this nature only after it has fallen. Proclus (and, according to him, the Origen of whom he is speaking) divided the race of daemons into the good and malign: to the Christian Origen a daemon is by definition an evil specimen of its nature, just as a criminal is by definition an evil specimen of humanity . . . Ramelli has demonstrated that there is an important sense—albeit not the institutional sense of his day—in which Origen of Caesarea could fairly be characterized as a Christian Platonist. But if he is to be the Origen of the Neoplatonists, he must have

given a meaning to the word ‘daemon’ in one treatise (or at most two) which it does bear anywhere in his extant writings.” ([41], p. 95). Likewise Proctor ([43], p. 419): “Proclus asserts that Origen the Neoplatonist held to the existence of good and malevolent daemons, a tenet that was not held by Origen the Christian, who, in line with his coreligionists, viewed daemons as entirely evil.”

Now, it must be noted that Proclus was using his own vocabulary in his paraphrase, moreover putting forward this hypothesis as one shared by other Platonists, and moreover speaking vaguely of “certain daemons / spirits”.<sup>29</sup> Origen regularly adapted his philosophical vocabulary to a “pagan” or a Christian public, a learned or a non-specialized one; for instance, he avoided the technical terminology of ὑπόστασις in the *Dialogue with Heraclides*, where he had no philosophical interlocutors, but he used it in *Against Celsus* and elsewhere. An older contemporary of Origen, the anonymous early-third-century Christian author of the *Elenchos (Refutation of All Heresies)* or *Philosophoumena*, ascribed to Origen in the manuscript tradition, in his outline of Plato’s philosophy deeply informed by Middle Platonism, states that Plato “accepts the existence of daemons / spirits / rational beings [δαίμωνων] and says that some are good and some evil” (1.19.9)—the same as in Origen’s exegesis of Atlantis. Likewise Philo, well known to Origen and familiar with both Platonic and Biblical terminology, equated δαίμονες with angels and human souls, noting that Scripture calls angels what philosophers call δαίμονες (*Giants* 6; 16).

In his own *On Daemons/Spirits*, Origen was likely using Platonic terminology (δαίμονες) to refer to angels, good or evil, and humans. This is all the more possible in that for him all *logika* share in the same nature, and in light of his usage in *Against Celsus*. In CC 1.31, indeed, he adds a qualifier (φάυλοι) to designate “evil” daemons, thereby implying that there may also be good δαίμονες/spirits. What is more, in CC 3.37 Origen identifies angels with “good daemons” (δαίμονες ἀγαθοί) in an esoteric doctrine, equating “bodiless souls, angels, and daemons.” In 5.5 he clearly states that only in Scripture does the term δαίμονες refer to evil spirits alone. And in 4.24 Origen accepts both terminologies, the “pagan” δαίμονες terminology and the Christian one: “the good and blessed beings, whether, as you say, they are good daemons, or, as we usually call them, God’s angels.”

These observations are reinforced by the possibility that Origen’s daemonology may have influenced a “pagan” Platonist such as Porphyry. Unlike Plotinus and previous Platonists, Porphyry maintained that animal sacrifices were actually performed not to gods, but to daemons, who thereby fattened their pneumatic bodies (*Abst.* 2.36–42; Eusebius *PE* 4.8.4–5); Homer’s gods, being subject to passions, were in fact daemons (*Styx* F377 Smith). Now, this is what Origen also thought (*Mart.* 45 etc.), with all Christian apologists. Highlighting such convergences and Origen’s and Porphyry’s similar descriptions of the effects of evil daemons such as wars, magic, deception, dragging souls down, and local jurisdiction, Travis Proctor hypothesizes, with Heidi Marx-Wolf and others, that the daemonology of Porphyry’s *De abstinentia* depends on Origen.<sup>30</sup> If this be the case, Porphyry’s attribution of this daemonology to “certain Platonists” who “divulged” these theories (ἃ δ’ οὖν τῶν Πλατωνικῶν τινες ἐδημοσίευσαν, *Abst.* 2.36.6) would clearly situate Origen within the Platonic school. I suspect that Porphyry was influenced by Origen’s “Ammonian” treatise *On Daemons*,<sup>31</sup> and Porphyry’s terminology of “divulging” a certain daemonology closely corresponds to that used in his anecdote about Origen who, notwithstanding the compact not to divulge (ἐκκαλύπτειν, *V.Plot.* 3) Ammonius’s esoteric doctrines, he did so in his treatises *On Daemons* and *The King Is the Only Creator*. This would also indirectly confirm, once again, that Porphyry was speaking of one and the same Origen.

Proclus lists Origen among the allegorizers of Plato’s *Timaeus* myth (the expression of “Egyptian” wisdom) together with Numenius, Amelius, and Porphyry—all of whom were known to the Christian Origen. Crantor, instead, read the Atlantis myth as history, without accepting any allegorization, while

<sup>29</sup> Οἱ δὲ εἰς δαιμόνων τινῶν ἐναντίωσιν, ὡς τῶν μὲν μεινόνων, τῶν δὲ χειρόνων, καὶ τῶν μὲν πλήθει, τῶν δὲ δυνάμει κρειπτόνων, καὶ τῶν μὲν κρατούντων, τῶν δὲ κρατουμένων, ὥσπερ Ἰριγένης ὑπέλαβεν.

<sup>30</sup> [43]; see also ([48], pp. 485–86) and especially ([28], chapter 1).

<sup>31</sup> That Porphyry was familiar with Origen’s *On Daemons* is also argued by Marx-Wolf ([28], pp. 22–23).

Proclus later, like Iamblichus and Syrianus, upheld both its historical and its allegorical meaning. The Christian Origen read exclusively allegorically both Plato's protological and eschatological myths and the Bible's protological and eschatological narratives. Longinus deemed the Atlantis myth ornamental or psychagogical, intended to charm the listener on, and Plato concerned with stylistic freshness and variety—and here Proclus reminds readers of Plotinus's judgement of Longinus as "a philologist, not a philosopher" (*C.Timaeus* 1.83.15–25; 1.86.205–26). Origen regarded the myth as invented, not as intended to produce "artificial pleasure and various embellishments," but "spontaneous" and endowed with gnoseological value (*ibid.* 1.83.25–29; 1.86.260–30). Proclus notes the affinity of Origen's positions with those of the Pythagorean Numenius, whom Origen the Christian read assiduously—Numenius was also one of Plotinus's preferred readings; Plotinus was even accused of plagiarizing him. And Proclus singled out symbolism and allegorical interpretation as typical of Pythagorean thought,<sup>32</sup> which he individuated in Plato, Numenius, and Origen alike.

Spontaneity (ἄτοφυσῶς) is a trait of the ideal exegete of Plato according to Proclus (*C.Timaeus* 1.183.19), and interestingly is the same feature that Origen ascribed to Plato's prose and that Proclus in turn attributes to Origen's exegesis (1.89.27–29; 2.275.26). Thus, Proclus praises Origen's interpretations of Plato as having a characteristic of the ideal exegesis of Plato, pursued by Proclus himself. Also, Proclus's own multi-layered spiritual exegesis of Plato<sup>33</sup> is perfectly in line with Origen's. His attitude toward literal readings as often detrimental, but useful to point to higher meanings, is the same as Origen's, and his conviction that sometimes Plato's text has only spiritual meanings, without literal ones, closely resembles Origen's claim that sometimes Scripture has "bare spiritual meanings" (γυμνὰ πνευματικά), without literal-historical ones [50]. Origen applied this principle also to Plato's protological and eschatological myths, which, like those of Scripture, have no historical content, but only spiritual meanings [46].

Origen's positions reported by Proclus also suit Origen's philological, rhetorical, and literary interests related to allegoresis. Origen valued the style of Plato's dialogues (*C.Timaeus* 1.68.11–15). He contended that periphrases such as "Heracles' strength" instead of "Heracles" benefit prose ("historical writing") as well as poetry. He thus assimilated Plato's prose to poetry; one aspect of this is reading symbolic meanings in Plato's dialogues. Origen's exploration into the meanings of ἐλευθερώτατον in *Tim.* 21C (Proclus, *C.Timaeus* 1.93.8–15) parallels Origen's analyses of word meanings in his Biblical commentaries. Origen applied the principle, "interpreting Scripture with Scripture," indebted to the Alexandrian principle, "interpreting Homer with Homer." According to Proclus's Origen (*C.Timaeus* 1.60.1–12), again diverging from Longinus, Plato's metaphors were not aimed at pleasure. Plato's stylistic grace mirrored the grace the Creator instilled in heavenly things; Plato's blend of technique and spontaneity reflects the divine creation. This interpretation corresponds well to Origen's rejection of pleasure as ethical ideal—an obvious tenet of his anti-Epicurean polemic, closely paralleled by that of Plotinus<sup>34</sup>—and his appreciation of Plato's allegory and myths.

Plato, in *Republic* 607E, invited defenders of poetry to show that it is not only sweet, but beneficial to human life, what Middle and Neoplatonists did, including Origen—Proclus's Origen and the Christian Origen. Proclus reports Origen's exegesis of *Timaeus* 19DE (*C.Timaeus* 1.63.20–64.7). The issue was whether Plato included Homer among the ancient poets he agreed with. "Origen spent three whole days shouting, red in his face, sweating, and saying this *hypothesis* was important and problematic"—which parallels Origen the Christian's representation as a tremendous hard-worker; hence the epithets Philoponos/Philoponotatos in Athanasius and Eusebius (e.g., *Ecl.Proph.* 3.6), and Adamantios, only used by Christian sources [52]. Eusebius repeatedly emphasized Origen's laboriousness (*HE* 6.2.7; 9; 6.3.7; 13; 6.8.6; 6.15.11, etc.). Proclus drew this anecdote from Porphyry

<sup>32</sup> *C.Tim.* 1.33.4–10. See also ([49], p. 202).

<sup>33</sup> Highlighted by Tarrant ([38], pp. 53, 57): "the most unpromising snippets of text can yield at least three worthwhile levels meaning: passages where others had sometimes failed to detect one!"

<sup>34</sup> On Origen's polemic see [9], on Plotinus's see [51].

(cited in 1.64.8), who knew Origen the Christian and was equally interested in the allegoresis of Homer and Plato. Porphyry may have learnt this account from Plotinus, Longinus, or someone else from that circle.

Porphyry reports that Origen valued Homer's poetry, because through mimesis "it describes actions of excellence"; Homer "matches the nature of the gods' deeds in his majestic language" (Proclus *C.Timaeus* 1.64.2–7, approvingly). This corresponds to Origen the Christian's attitude to Homer.<sup>35</sup> Origen refers to Homer, never in Biblical commentaries or homilies, but only in *Against Celsus*, which addressed a "pagan" Middle Platonist, and perhaps in his "Ammonian" treatises. Origen's Christian and philosophical works cited different sources, used different terminologies, and mostly had different receptions. The former were mostly cited or alluded to by Christians (but also by Porphyry, and probably Amelius, Hierocles, and Proclus), the latter by Neoplatonists (but Proclus likely knew also Christian works by Origen, from *First Principles* to the *Commentary on John*, as I suggested, like Amelius). Yet their author was likely the same.

Harold Tarrant thinks that Proclus derived the information he gives in his *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* about Origen's exegesis of Plato from Porphyry's lost *Commentary on the Timaeus* ([38], p. 56). In particular, Proclus reported Origen's exegesis of the Atlantis myth (1.77.6–7), Numenius's, and Amelius's "because of their importance for the formation of Porphyry's own views," and Origen's and Longinus's divergent opinions (1.63.24–64.3) derive from an oral encounter witnessed by Porphyry, rather than the reading of their written exegesis ([38], p. 61). This is possible, especially if we accept an early date for Proclus's *Commentary*, written when he was 28. At any rate, Proclus in his whole life probably read Origen's *First Principles*, *Commentary on John*—or parts thereof—and *On Daemons/Spirits*, and perhaps other works such as *Commentary on Genesis* and *The King is the Only Creator*. Origen extensively exegeted Plato's Poros myth in his *Commentary on Genesis* [46,47]. and could well have exegeted others, such as Plato's Atlantis myth, in the same *Commentary on Genesis* or in *On Daemons/Spirits* and *The King is the Only Creator*, composed on the basis of Ammonius's esoteric teaching. Since the Atlantis story was interpreted by Origen in a protological/spiritual sense, its exegesis could easily have been home in Origen's lost *Commentary on Genesis*.

Indeed, the Christian Origen valued Plato's myths epistemologically, equating them with Scripture's protological and eschatological myths [46]. They have exclusively spiritual-noetic-allegorical meanings, not historical, while the rest of Scripture—and of Plato's dialogues—have both a literal sense and spiritual ones. This twofold exegesis reflects the Platonic pattern of two levels of reality (e.g., *C.Cant.* 2.8.17). But when the literal level makes no sense, the Bible has "bare spiritual meanings," not wrapped in literal coverings: "Sometimes even impossible things are prescribed by the Law, for the sake of those more expert and particularly fond of *investigation*, that, applying themselves to the toil of the *examination* of Scriptures, they may be *persuaded by reason* that in Scriptures it is necessary to look for a meaning worthy of God" (*Princ.* 4.2.9). Origen frequently attaches the nomenclature of philosophical research to exegesis, since Scriptural allegoresis, like that of Plato's dialogues, is philosophy (as allegoresis of myths was for the Stoics [51]). This is why Origen theorized Biblical allegoresis in his *philosophical* treatise, *First Principles*, Book 4. In both Scripture and Plato, Origen applied special hermeneutical norms to protological and eschatological myths such as Genesis 1–3 (*C.Cant.* prologue) or Revelation: instead of the literal-and-allegorical multi-layered interpretation, only spiritual meanings will be evinced. Plato most probably inspired Origen's exclusively allegorico-noetic interpretation of protological and eschatological myths, being aware that Plato could use only mythical narratives about protology and eschatology—and Simmons is right that Plato's eschatological myths have not received the attention they deserve.<sup>36</sup> Plato addressed protology-creation in the *Timaeus* and eschatology in his myths on the afterlife.

<sup>35</sup> On which see [29,53].

<sup>36</sup> ([32], pp. 159–60); an investigation into their philosophical reception is in the works.

Origen explicitly commended Plato for using myths to conceal the truth from non-philosophers. For instance, Plato's Poros myth (*Symposium* 203BE) is an allegory: the great Plato, Origen maintains, veiled his teaching in myths to reveal it only to philosophers: "If they investigate philosophically the contents expressed mythically, and can thereby discover what Plato meant, they will see how he could hide under the appearance of myth those doctrines which seemed to him especially sublime, because of the masses, and at the same time revealed them, as is fit, to *those who know how to discover* from myths what the author meant concerning *the truth*" (CC 4.39). Origen describes again allegoresis as a *philosophical* method, to be applied to Plato's myths as well as Scripture's (as in *Princ.* 4.2.9).

Origen is claiming for Scripture in Christian Platonism the same philosophical status as Plato's dialogues enjoyed in Platonism. If Christians should refuse to allegorize Plato's myths, just as Celsus refused to allegorize Scripture, they would ridicule Plato, but if they analyze his myths philosophically and discover what the great Plato meant, they will admire his allegories. So should also "pagan" Platonists appreciate Biblical allegories. Consistently, Origen equated Plato's Poros myth with the Paradise story: "I reported this myth in Plato because there Zeus's garden seems to have something very similar to God's garden, Penia can be assimilated to the serpent in the garden, and Poros, the victim of Penia's intrigue, to the human victim of the serpent's intrigue" (CC 4.39). Origen offered this equation not only in his polemic with the "pagan" Platonist Celsus, but also, and much more extensively, in his *Commentary on Genesis*,<sup>37</sup> where Plato's and Genesis' myths were thoroughly compared.

Origen also extolled Plato's *Symposium*, where the Poros myth is encapsulated (*C.Cant.* prol. 2.1). Moreover, he assimilated Hesiod's Pandora myth to the *Genesis* creation of the woman, emphasizing that both require allegoresis (CC 4.38). Both the *Genesis* myth and Plato's myths of Poros and the soul's fall express the same philosophical content that must be extracted by means of allegoresis. The myth of humanity's receiving the "skin coats" or "tunics", i.e., mortal corporeality (Gen 3:21), has no historical content, but only a symbolic meaning, which Origen likens again to the that of Plato's myth of the soul's descent by the loss of its wings (CC 4.40). Origen explained the parallels between Scripture's and Plato's myths by supposing that in Egypt Plato met exponents of "the Jews' philosophy"—not the Jewish "religion"—which originated what Origen described as Christian philosophy [1]. Origen therefore deemed Biblical allegoresis a quintessentially philosophical task, already performed by Jewish exegetes, such as Philo of Alexandria and Aristobulus (CC 4.51). Origen here remarks that Celsus's criticism of Biblical allegoresis ignored its Jewish representatives. Porphyry's criticism also did so deliberately. It was a typical move of "pagan" Platonists who delegitimized Biblical allegoresis to obscure its precedents in Hellenistic Judaism [10].

Because Origen attached the same epistemological value to Plato's and Scripture's protological and eschatological narratives, classifying both as myths, in interpreting them he derogated from his exegetical rule of keeping both the literal and the allegorical level together. Likewise, Plato in his myths renounced theoretical exposition to hint mythically at otherwise inexpressible truths. Origen even employed Plato's mythical vocabulary, such as the verb *περορρυνέω*, while expounding his Christian view of the fall of rational creatures after Satan's: "evil came about from the fact that some rational beings *lost their wings* and followed the first who had *lost his wings*" (CC 6.43). He thus assimilated Plato's myth of the soul's fall to the Biblical account of the fall.

### 3. The Meaning of Proclus's Reception of Origen: What is Imperial and Late Antique Platonism?

Proclus's Origen, an allegorizer of Plato, like Porphyry's and Hierocles' Origen, may therefore have been the same as the Christian Platonist, who practiced an allegorico-symbolic-spiritual exegesis of both Scripture and Plato's dialogues. In this case, Proclus appreciated the exegesis of Plato by

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<sup>37</sup> "Now it was not the right occasion for going through both Plato's myth and the story of the serpent and God's garden and what happened there according to Scripture. For I have already treated all this in depth, as the main subject, in my commentary on *Genesis*" (CC 4.39).

a Christian Platonist and considered Origen's "Ammonian" treatises to be part and parcel of an authoritative Neoplatonist corpus. Proclus agreed with Origen's *The King Is the Only Creator* when asserting, "the creator of the universe is one" (*C.Timaeus* 1.12.6). Tarrant rightly remarks that this statement contradicts "the tendency to see Proclus as one who unnecessarily multiplied the machinery passed down by Plato" ([38], p. 106). In fact, Proclus's claim might have been influenced by Origen. Besides Origen's "Ammonian" tracts, Proclus very probably knew also Christian philosophical works by Origen, such as *First Principles* and *Commentary on John*—likely known also to Amelius and Hierocles, and certainly to Porphyry—and probably *Commentary on Genesis* and *Against Celsus*. Proclus, indeed, like Hierocles, ascribed to Origen doctrines expressed in *First Principles*, not only in Origen's "Ammonian" treatises which could be attributed to a "pagan" Origen.<sup>38</sup> It is not exactly the case that "no ancient author ever includes works attributed to Origen the Neoplatonist and Origen the Christian in the same bibliography." ([43], p. 419). Conversely, Porphyry attaches to the Christian Origen Greek metaphysical and theological doctrines (*C.Chr.* F39)<sup>39</sup> to which Hierocles and Proclus also refer. Porphyry, Hierocles, and Proclus respected Origen as a (Platonist) philosopher, and may even have been influenced by him in some regards. For instance, Porphyry noted Origen's innovative notion of hypostasis as individual substance especially as applied to the Hypostases of the Trinity, and projected it onto Plotinus's principles; Proclus very probably had Origen at the back of his mind when theorizing permanent first bodies and *apokatastasis*;<sup>40</sup> even Proclus's tenet that matter is not evil, and his whole doctrine of evil, is closer to Origen than to Plotinus. It is not accidental that Justinian was hostile to the Neoplatonists no less than to Origen.

Thus, Proclus would attest to a Neoplatonic reception of Origen whose exegesis of Plato was held in high regard. Proclus's Origen is rather de-Christianized; I do not think that in criticizing Origen's metaphysics Proclus was setting up an explicit criticism of *Christian* metaphysics. He was treating Origen as belonging to the Platonic tradition, not to an alternative tradition such as Proclus may have regarded the Christian one. These were intra-Platonic discussions. Saffrey singled out very subtle allusions to Christianity in Proclus' works [55]; Tarrant remarks: "It seems equally likely that Proclus cultivated the same frosty indifference to Christians that Plato displayed toward Democritus" in his "pagan religious Platonism" ([38], p. 10). This is why Proclus never mentions that Origen was a Christian, although he was most probably aware of this; but he treated him like all other Middle and Neoplatonists. It seems also significant to me that Marinus in *Life of Proclus* 19 reports that according to Proclus the philosopher should be minister of no particular ancestral customs (not even "pagan"): "the philosopher should be no (religious) minister [θεραπευτήν] of any one city, nor even of any particular people's (religious) ancestral customs [πατρίων], but should be a hierophant [ιεροφάντην] of the whole world in common [κοινῇ δὲ τοῦ ὅλου κόσμου]." The philosopher should expound what is philosophically common to all religions. Thus, Proclus could consider as interesting and authoritative the philosophical side of Origen's Christian Platonism, taking it as Platonism tout court—just as Porphyry had regarded Origen's "Greek" metaphysics and theology as Platonism, to the point of borrowing from there the conceptual novelty of "hypostasis" and projecting it onto Plotinus's own metaphysics and protology.

In an otherwise richly inspiring study,<sup>41</sup> Mark Edwards defined a Platonist "one who professes to navigate by reason alone with Plato as his lodestar" ([57], p. 62). By this definition, neither Philo nor Clement, nor even Origen, Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, or Eriugena (who is universally categorized as a Neoplatonist) were Platonists—and perhaps not even all "pagan" Platonists were; think for instance of an Iamblichus. Surely Origen, like Eriugena, was no "pagan" Platonist, but a

<sup>38</sup> Arguments in [2,8,29].

<sup>39</sup> "In his views on the existing realities and God [τὰς περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξας], his ideas were those of a Greek."

<sup>40</sup> Argument in [4,35,54].

<sup>41</sup> Its many strengths are highlighted in [56].

Christian Platonist; like Philo, he took the Bible as his authoritative text, reading it through the lens of Platonism [10,33], while also valuing and exegeting Plato's dialogues and allegorizing his myths, assimilating them to Scripture's myths—just as “pagan” Platonists held as authoritative not only Plato's dialogues, but also religious texts such as the *Chaldean Oracles* (Porphyry commented on them, and Iamblichus and Proclus treated them as a source of revelation), and in some cases also exegeted the Bible (e.g., Numenius and Amelius). Origen found in Scripture Plato's teachings, thinking that Plato was inspired by Scripture or by the same Logos that is also manifested in Scripture. Components of Origen's identity as a Christian Platonist are, as I have argued in this essay, his philosophical views, his attitude to Plato including explicit praise and admiration of Plato, his valuing and interpretation of Plato's myths in ways reminiscent of pagan Platonist interpreters and his assimilation of Scripture's myths to Plato's myths, as well as Proclus's interest in, and reception of, his ideas and exegesis.

When Edwards and other scholars speak of Platonism, one must normally understand “pagan” Platonism, to the exclusion of Christian (and Jewish) Platonism. As Daniel Boyarin also noted, “For Edwards, one can be properly called ‘Platonist’ only if Platonism is understood as antonym to Christianity” ([58], p. 203)—as “pagan” anti-Christian Platonism. Doerrie [59] famously viewed Christianity as “anti-Platonism” (*Gegenplatonismus*), a view criticized with strong arguments for instance by Strutwolf, Ramelli and Kobusch [2,60,61]. I think there was an important strand of Christian Platonism in imperial and late antiquity that was quintessentially Origenian and is part and parcel of the history of Platonism.

Drobner [62] is basically right that in the same way as philosophy formed the understanding of the Christian faith in its formative period, faith changed and molded philosophy. Just as Drobner questions the Harnackian tag “Hellenization of Christianity,”<sup>42</sup> so did I, pointing to the “Christianization of Hellenism,” the presence of Hellenism in the Bible itself, and a reassessment of that [2]. Christoph Markschies too, who calls Hellenization an *umstritten* or contested category [63,64], defines the Hellenization of Christianity as “first and foremost a transformation of the Alexandrian educational institutions and their scholarly culture in the theological reflection of ancient Christianity” ([63], p. 121) and refers to Ramelli [2], agreeing that Scripture itself was already Hellenized ([63], pp. 119, 138).

Kobusch ([65], pp. 26–33) is on the same line as Ramelli [2] against Harnack's model of the Hellenization of Christianity as a denaturation of an originally Biblical Christianity supposedly not Hellenized. Both Kobusch and Ramelli contend that such a model implies an incompatibility between Christianity and philosophy. Many Christian thinkers, instead, represented Christianity as a philosophy, the coronation of philosophy—patristic thinkers did not know the modern distinction between philosophy and theology. As Kobusch observes, “Das Christentum ist, seinem Selbstverständnis nach, und also auch für uns, in erster Linie eine Form der Philosophie, die, wie andere Philosophien in der Antike, zugleich auch Religion ist,” [65] and for instance Fürst [66] concurs with Kobusch and Ramelli.

As Harold Tarrant notes concerning imperial Platonism, “What it meant to be a Platonist was still far from clear.” [67] Platonism in the time of Origen, and in part even later, was not only “pagan” institutional Platonism. The school of Ammonius was probably both Platonist and Christian, like Ammonius himself. Origen defended philosophers who were also presbyters, such as Heraclas, who was a Platonist, disciple of Ammonius, and dressed as a philosopher still as a presbyter. Origen himself not only was a Christian Platonist and a presbyter, but had “pagan” philosophers at his Christian school, where he taught philosophy, and was admired and respected by Platonists—from Porphyry (and likely Plotinus) to Proclus—as a philosopher. Plotinus had Christian disciples (certainly some “Gnostics” and probably other Christians) at his “pagan” Platonic school, which—even in its rather informal structure—would be regarded as an “institution” of “pagan” Platonism. Porphyry seems to

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<sup>42</sup> It is questionable, though, that Lucian's “Peregrinus committed suicide in order to be with his [Christian] God, and that all Christians had better follow his example” ([62], p. 4) because at the time of his suicide Peregrinus had broken with the Christians for a while, as Lucian himself notes.

have attended Origen's Christian school before attending Plotinus's. Later, Synesius was a disciple of the Neoplatonist Hypatia and attended her "pagan" Platonic school in Alexandria, possibly along with other Christians.<sup>43</sup> Even as a bishop, he continued to stick to Platonic tenets and rejected, for instance, a literalist understanding of the resurrection (*Ep.* 105), as Origen also had done. For him, Hypatia was and remained "the genuine leader of the rites of philosophy" (*Ep.* 137.276). Rigid boundaries between "pagan" "institutional" Platonism and Christianity turn out to have been often blurred in some way. Origen, Plotinus, and Porphyry were all negotiating the legacy of Ammonius—Neoplatonism, and Origen took part from the inside in what Tarrant ([67], p. 70) calls "internal quarrels about Platonism's true nature." Therefore, it would seem reductive to identify imperial Platonism only as "pagan" "institutional" Platonism.

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<sup>43</sup> Bregman [68]: "She probably taught a form of more or less Porphyrian later Platonism, not inherently anti-Christian."

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