CONTENTS	
JOHN GRANGER COOK, Porphyry's Attempted Demolition of Christian Allegory	1
ANNE SHEPPARD, Rhetoric, Drama and Truth in Plato's <i>Symposium</i>	28
WILLIAM WIANS, Aristotle and the Problem of Human Knowledge	41
Critical Study	65
Book Reviews	76

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ISSN: 1872-5082 (print version)
ISSN: 1872-5473 (online version)

The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition
VOLUME 2 NO. 1 2008
BRILL

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THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE PLATONIC TRADITION

Aims & Scope

The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition is published under the auspices of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies. The journal will include articles that examine philosophical ideas originating with Greek Presocratic philosophy and culminating in our modern world. The dialogues of Plato act as a prism through which the writings and beliefs of the earlier Presocratic period are refracted and come to influence later authors, from Aristotle onwards. *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* will feature articles on the philosophers of the Greek and Roman world and beyond. Papers will investigate these materials from various perspectives (philosophical, historical, religious, etc.) and will include all areas of the scholarly world (Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Pagan, etc.) in all time periods. The large and diverse world of Platonism will be celebrated in all its aspects. Papers will be published in English, French, and German. The journal will also feature reviews of books on the Platonic tradition. The journal welcomes book submissions by publishers and encourages authors to contact the review editor about their recently published work.

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The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition (print ISSN 1872-5082, online ISSN 1872-5473) is published 2 times a year by Brill, Plantijnstraat 2, 2321 JC Leiden, The Netherlands, tel +31 (0)71 5353500, fax +31 (0)71 5317532.

Subscription Rates

For institutional customers, the subscription price for the print edition plus online access of Volume 2 (2008, 2 issues) is EUR 159 / USD 210. Institutional customers can also subscribe to the online-only version at EUR 143 / USD 189. Individual customers can only subscribe to the print edition at EUR 53 / USD 70.

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Porphry's Attempted Demolition of Christian Allegory

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Abstract

Porphry wrote the *Contra Christianos* during the time of the persecutions, and later several Christian rulers consigned it to the flames. In that work Porphry included a penetrating critique of Christian allegory. Parts of his argument reappeared in the Protestant Reformers and subsequently in modern biblical research. Scholarship on Porphry's text often is dominated by the historical problems that beset the fragment. Such problems can be temporarily put aside to carefully study the key terms in Porphry's argument. The net gain of such an approach is to understand the power of the argument and its structure in a clearer light.

Keywords

Porphry, Origen, allegory

φιλέλληνι in memoriam: Hendrikus Wouterus Boers

Porphry's attack on Origen and the Christian interpretation of the Septuagint, which survives in Eusebius, is a rare glimpse into the language of the great critic of Christianity. This is so because Eusebius is one of the few sources remaining for the *Contra Christianos* who actually saw

^{*}) I thank Richard Goulet and Michael Chase of the Centre Nationale de Recherche Scientifique and Robert Lamberton of Washington University for their many critical comments on this essay. Steven Strange of Emory University has generously supported my work with advice and resources. At the 2005 Society of Biblical Literature meeting in Philadelphia, I read an earlier version of the paper. LaGrange College gave me a summer research grant in 2005 to study the *Contra Christianos* with Richard Goulet at the C.N.R.S. in Paris.

it.¹ Treatments of this fragment usually concentrate on historical questions such as the issue of whether one should identify Origen the Neo-Platonist with Origen the Christian and whether one should trust Porphyry or Eusebius concerning Origen.² It is easy to get lost in that minefield.

Some recent scholars have taken a refreshing new direction. Maria de Pasquale Barbanti, after summarizing many prior studies, examines Origen's Platonist background, but does not identify him with Origen the Neo-Platonist.³ Marco Zambon has carefully analyzed Porphyry's charge concerning Origen's lawless way of life in light of Porphyry's views on the laws of different nations and the natural law of the philosophical life.⁴ Carlo Perelli has offered a close exegetical study.⁵

Much is to be gained by a careful interpretation of Porphyry's own language, and it will help illuminate the effectiveness and structure of Porphyry's intended destruction of Christian allegory. To accomplish this I will present a fresh translation, discuss the setting and purpose of the *C. Chr.*, study a number of key terms in Porphyry's argument, compare the fragment with several other texts associated with the *C. Chr.*, and summarize his basic argument against Christian allegory. The net gain is valid even if one cannot solve the knotty historical problems that beset the fragment.

The Text

Eusebius argues that many Greek philosophers of Origen's day mentioned him in their works and even dedicated their books to him. He continues:⁶

¹ On the ancient responses to Porphyry, see A. von Harnack (1916) 35-37 = E.A. Ramos Jurado (2006) 84-86. Eusebius' twenty-five volume critique of Porphyry may have survived into the modern era. Cf. J.G. Cook (1998) 120-121.

² The bibliography on the fragment from this perspective is vast. Particularly useful for me has been P.F. Beatrice (1992) 351-367; T. Böhm (2002) 7-23 (attempts to identify the two Origenes). See R. Goulet (2001) 267-290 for the argument that there are two Origenes and that the Christian Origen's teacher of philosophy is unknown. Cf. also L. Brisson and R. Goulet *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques* (= *DPhA*) 4:804-807; G. Dorival *DPhA* 4:807-842.

³ M. de P. Barbanti (2002) 355-373.

⁴ M. Zambon (2003) 553-563.

⁵ C. Perelli (1988) 233-261.

⁶ Eus. *H.E.* 6.19.2-9 (558,2-560,23 Schwartz) = Porphyry *C. Chr.* frag. 39 Harnack = 24 Ramos Jurado.

Why is it necessary to say these things, when Porphyry, who in our time lived in Sicily, composed writings against us and through them attempted to slander the divine scriptures; and while mentioning those who had interpreted them was not able in any way to make an evil accusation against the doctrines and being at a loss for arguments he turned to reviling and slandered the exegetes—among them especially Origen. He said that he knew him at a young age. He tries to slander him, but unknowingly actually commends him,⁷ telling the truth about some things in which it was not possible to speak otherwise, and yet he lied about some things—in which he thought he would be undetected. He at one time accused him as a Christian and then described his devotion to philosophical learning. Listen therefore to what he says verbatim:

Some who are eager not for an abandonment of the depravity of the Jewish scriptures, but who seek a solution [for it] have been driven to interpretations that are not compatible with or harmonize with what has been written—not producing an apology for the alien texts⁸ but rather acceptance and praise for the writings of their own group. For they boast that the things that are said clearly by Moses are enigmas, and they ascribe inspiration to those sayings as if they were oracles full of hidden mysteries. Bewitching the mind's critical faculty through nonsense, they bring forward interpretations.

Then after other things he says:

Let this manner of absurdity be taken as an example⁹ in the case of a man whom I also chanced to meet when I was very young—he was very well thought of and is still well thought of because of the writings he left—whose fame has been greatly spread among the teachers of these doctrines. For this individual was an auditor of Ammonius, who in our time

⁷ I have adopted J.E.L. Oulton's translation here (1980) 57. MSS TER have apparently corrected the text with: "but in this seeming to revile he rather commends him." Cf. Eus. *H.E.* 6.19.3 (558 app. crit. Schwartz) and the textual note in Figure two.

⁸ Goulet (2001) 267 translates "strange ideas" here (for τῶν ὀθνείων). The usage below ("alien myths") probably implies that texts are meant from another culture.

⁹ See Goulet (2001) 268, n. 3 who refers to other grammatical forms of the verb (παρειλήφθω) with similar meaning (used to introduce an example). One should add Achilles Tatius *Isagoga excerpta* 37 (74,7-8 Maass): "For the sake of example let [the constellation] 'Kneeler' (Heracles) be considered" (παραδείγματος δὲ χάριν παρειλήφθω ὁ Ἐγγόνασι). Origen is the example and not the originator (cf. the French of Eus. *H.E.* 6.19.5 [114 Bardy]).

had made most progress in philosophy; he came to possess much help in the experience of doctrines¹⁰ from the teacher, but with reference to the right choice of life he chose the opposite journey to that person. For Ammonius on the one hand was a Christian raised in Christian teachings by his parents, and when he engaged in thinking and philosophizing he immediately changed to a life in conformity with the laws, but Origen, a Hellene brought up in Hellenic doctrines ran aground on the Barbarian temerity and taking himself toward it he peddled himself and his ability in doctrines, living like a Christian and in a lawless way in his life, but in opinions about things and the divine he thought as a Hellene and hid the traditions of the Hellenes under alien myths. For he was always with Plato and consorted with the writings of both Numenius and Cronius, both Apollonophanes and Longinus, also Moderatus and Nicomachus, and of men held in regard among the Pythagoreans; he also used the books of both Chaeremon the Stoic and Cornutus, from whom he learned the metaleptic style of the mysteries found among the Hellenes and attributed it to the Jewish scriptures.

These things were said by Porphyry in the third volume of the writings by him *Against the Christians*¹¹—while telling the truth about the man's mode of life and his great learning, he clearly lied (why would the one [writing] against the Christians not do?) when he said that he converted from Hellenic doctrines and that Ammonius from a life of godliness fell away to a Gentile way of life).¹²

¹⁰ This expression (τῶν λόγων ἐμπειρίαν) can refer to skill in letters (Plut. Mor. 58A) or in argumentation (rhetoric) as in Plut. Mor. 792D, Ps. Zonaras *Lexicon* Διάλεξις (511,10 Tittmann). But it can have a larger compass as in Plut. Alex. 7.5-7 (BiTeu 2.2; 160,1-13 Ziegler) where λόγος can refer to ethics, politics, and other forms of knowledge. The context below (Origen's adaptation of Greek opinions) seems to support a wider reference than rhetoric alone.

¹¹ Bardy translates the expression as a title. Oulton translates "his writings against Christians." This formula (κατὰ Χριστιανῶν), however, is the only title Eusebius knows for the book, and the reference to the third volume would seem to encourage a translator to take the expression in a titular sense. See R. Goulet (2004) 68-75. P.F. Beatrice includes all the fragments of the alleged *Contra Christianos* in the treatise Eusebius knows as *De philosophia ex oculis haurienda*. Cf. Beatrice (1994) 233-235. Goulet's article is a withering critique of Beatrice's questionable hypothesis.

¹² Eus. *H.E.* 6.19.2-9 (558,2-560,23 Schwartz). Eusebius' remark about the other Greek philosophers who mentioned Origen is *H.E.* 6.19.1 (556,28-558,2 Schwartz). Author's ET.

The Purpose and Setting of the *Contra Christianos*

This text from the *C. Chr.* is one of the most important since it contains Porphyry's *ipsissima verba*. It shows one of the goals of the *C. Chr.*—a rejection (ἀπόστασιν) of the Jewish scriptures. That is an example of deliberative rhetoric of the apotreptic variety since the text persuades Christians to reject their faith.¹³ Porphyry may have written his work in the service of the Great Persecution of Diocletian or one possibly contemplated by Aurelian—although the evidence is scarce. Augustine remarks that Porphyry was alive (*in rebus humanis*) during the persecutions, so he certainly wrote during their existence.¹⁴ Clearly, however, Augustine does not tie the *C. Chr.* to any particular persecution nor does he mention it during his discussion of Porphyry's reaction to Christianity during the time of persecution. That Porphyry's work was actually quite effective in certain instances can be shown by the fact that Constantine¹⁵ and Theodosius II both felt obliged to burn the book.¹⁶ Severian (ca 400) wrote in his introduction to a Porphyrian treatment of the Eden narrative that Porphyry “caused many to abandon the divine dogma” (καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόγματος πολλοὺς ἀποστήσαντι).¹⁷ This contradicts Chrysostom's view that anti-Christian

¹³ H. Lausberg (1990) § 61.2b.

¹⁴ Cp. T.D. Barnes (1994) 65 examined in J.G. Cook (2000) 120-123 (includes references to Aurelian), 133. Porphyry *C. Chr.* frag. 1 Harnack = 15 Ramos Jurado = Eus. *P.E.* 1.2. 1-4 (GCS Eusebius Werke 8.1; 8,20-9,5 Mras) holds Christians to be worthy of “punishments” for abandoning ancestral customs (the text is probably from Porphyry). Porphyry (*H.E.* 6.19 above) mentions Origen's “lawless” life which Barnes notes would call for punishment. In *Ad. Marc.* 4 Porphyry explains the necessity for his separation from his wife with: “the need of the Greeks called and the gods urged on with them...” Cf. Aug. *De civ. Dei* 10.32 (310,52-311,57 Dombart/Kalb). Cf. R. Goulet (2003) 1.117-118, 123.

¹⁵ Socrates *H.E.* 1.9.30-31 = Porphyry test. 38 Smith with reference to the Council of Nicaea begun in 324. H.G. Opitz attributes the basis of the text to Athanasius and dates the decree against Arius to 333. Cp. the text in Opitz (1935) *Urkunde* 33 (pp. 66-68) in which it is a capital crime if one is found to possess one of Arius' works and does not immediately bring it forward for burning (the Arians are called Porphyrians). Probably the same treatment applied to those possessing Porphyry's work against the Christians, but enough kept it that it was burned again a hundred years later.

¹⁶ *Cod. Just.* 1.1.3 = Porphyry test. 40 Smith (Theodosius II and Valentinian) on Feb. 17, 448.

¹⁷ Porphyry *C. Chr.* frag. 42 Harnack (Harnack notes that it is not certain that this text is from the *C. Chr.* although it is probably from that work) = 110 Ramos Jurado = Sev. *De mundi creatione orat.* 6 (PG 56.487).

writings had little effect on Christian readers. Chrysostom claimed that the critics “could persuade (μεταπειῶσαι ἰσχυρῶς) ... no wise or unwise person, no man or woman, not even a small child.”¹⁸ Their texts must have had an effect on some readers—otherwise we probably would have more of Porphyry’s book than we do—as it is now left only in a few nominal fragments and others that have a more or less clear relation to the original text.¹⁹ The fragments from Macarius Magnes, for example, can no longer be used to reconstruct Porphyry’s words, although they for the most part probably take their arguments and form from him.²⁰ Despite the fact that Origen dismissed Celsus’ effect on serious Christians, in his case too it is clear that he would not have devoted such a magisterial work to his task if he did not feel that Celsus posed a serious threat—at least in the case of “weak” Christians.

Thus one is left with a clear impression that Porphyry’s book was a powerful weapon in the arsenal of paganism. In a sense this result conflicts with Eusebius’ claim that Porphyry found nothing against Christian doctrine, but only was able to revile the teachers (*H.E.* 6.19.2). By attacking the exegetes he is attacking also the words of scripture and their doctrines. The fact that Eusebius devoted a twenty-five book response to Porphyry also indicates that he was deeply troubled by the *C. Chr.*

Key Terms in the Argument

Some of the words in the fragment are central to the course of Porphyry’s argument and deserve careful attention. Although this kind of analysis cannot solve the historical difficulties (such as the question whether Origen the Neo-Platonist is the same as the Christian), it is important for following the logic of the text.

¹⁸ Chrysostom *De Babylo* 11,24-6 (SC 362; 106 Schatkin/Blanc/Grillet). Origen *C. Cels. Proem.* 3, 4, 6 (3,24-4,7.28-33 Marcovich) did not believe Celsus’ treatise would persuade a Christian with a strong faith, so he wrote for those with a weak faith (or none at all).

¹⁹ Two recent translations of many Porphyrian texts are: R.M. Berchman (2005) and Ramos Jurado (2006). Berchman must be used with caution. See the review by P.W. van der Horst (2006) 239-241.

²⁰ Goulet (2003) 1.112-149 (Porphyry is the probable source). Cp. Barnes (1994) 53-65 (the words of Macarius’ pagan cannot be identified with Porphyry’s words) and Cook (2000) 172.

Depraved and Alien Texts

Porphyry's description of the Jewish scriptures as "depraved" should be read in the context of the *C. Chr.* where he is attacking Christianity. In other texts he admires certain Septuagint passages and concepts.²¹ He uses the term in a passage where he notes the common opinion that we punish "evildoers who as by a certain influx of their own nature and depravity are driven to harm the person they encounter."²² An unknown Hellene (possibly Porphyry) criticizes Christians for abandoning the ancient tradition: "And how is it not a proof of utter depravity and recklessness lightly to put aside the customs of their own kindred, and choose with unreasoned and unquestioned faith the beliefs of the impious enemies of all nations?"²³ The Hellene goes on to criticize Christians for abandoning both the Jewish God and laws and their own ancestral tradition. Porphyry's description of the Jewish texts as "alien" (ὀθνείων) is pejorative as in a use of the word in *On Abstinence* (*De abst.*) where it refers to a person's body "weighed down by alien juices (ὀθνείων χυμῶν) and passions of the soul."²⁴ The same unknown pagan mentioned above accuses Christians of having "abandoned their ancestral traditions and becoming zealots for alien Jewish mythologies, which are of evil report among all people."²⁵

²¹ See *De antro* 10 = Numenius frag. 30 des Places which approvingly quotes Gen 1:2; *C. Chr.* frag. 79 Harnack = Theod. *Graec. affect. curatio* 7.36-37 in which Porphyry seems to use the prophets to buttress his views against animal sacrifice; Porphyry *De abst.* 2.26.1-4 = Eus. *P.E.* 9.2.1—a text where he quotes Theophrastus' summary of Jewish sacrificial practice and makes other approving comments concerning the Jews. Porphyry expresses admiration for the Hebrew God in texts such as Porphyry frag. 343, 344 Smith = Aug. *De civ. Dei* 19.23 (690,1-691,27.29-36 Dombart/Kalb).

²² *De abst.* 2.22.2: ὑπό τινος πνοῆς <τῆς> ἰδίας φύσεως καὶ μοχθηρίας φερομένους... Cp. the almost identical text in 3.26.2. He speaks of a "perversity of soul" in 1.30.7. On the term see Perelli (1988) 244.

²³ Porphyry *C. Chr.* frag. 1 Harnack (Eus. *P.E.* 1.2.4 [9,10-2 Mras]) = 15 Ramos Jurado: πῶς δ' οὐ μοχθηρίας εἶναι καὶ εὐχερείας ἐσχάτης τὸ μεταθέσθαι μὲν εὐκόλως τῶν οἰκείων, ἀλόγῳ δὲ καὶ ἀνεξετάστῳ πίσκει τὰ τῶν δυσσεβῶν καὶ πᾶσιν ἔθνεσι πολέμιον ἐλέσθαι...

²⁴ *De abst.* 2.45.

²⁵ *C. Chr.* frag. 1 Harnack (Eus. *P.E.* 1.2.3 [9,8-10 Mras]) = 15 Ramos Jurado: οἱ τῶν μὲν πατρίων φυγάδες ὀθνείων καὶ παρὰ πᾶσι διαβεβλημένων Ἰουδαϊκῶν μυθολογημάτων γενόμενοι ζηλωταί.

Apostasy

The “abandonment” (ἀπόστασιν) of the “depravity” of the scriptures that Porphyry is really encouraging can be compared to his censure of Castricius for abandoning vegetarianism. Porphyry uses the word in the context of detachment from the passions in his *De Abst.*²⁶ For Porphyry, Castricius scorned the “ancestral laws of philosophy” (τῶν πατρίων... φιλοσοφίας νόμων) when he left vegetarianism.²⁷ This kind of apostasy Porphyry obviously rejects. In another work he notes of Christians that they have been led away from philosophy (ἐκ τῆς παλαιᾶς φιλοσοφίας ἀνηγμένοι).²⁸ The anonymous Greek accuses Christians of having abandoned the ancestral gods (πατρώων θεῶν).²⁹

The Solution of Scriptural Problems

Porphyry remarks that interpreters (by implication Christians) look for a “solution” (λύσιν) of the problems posed by the Jewish scriptures.³⁰ This is a term from his Homeric interpretation. In a comment on Homer *Od.* 1.165 he remarks that Odysseus is on Calypso’s island of Ogygia (and therefore not near), but that the poet describes him as being “near” Ithaca: “It is explained from the word. For ‘near’ is applied to both time and space... ‘Near’ is not spatial but chronological. He was in the island of Ogygia. This is the solution (λύσις) for the *aporia* (τοῦ ἀποροῦντος questioner) concerning ‘near’.”³¹

²⁶ *De abst.* 1.32.1, 1.33.4, 1.47.1.

²⁷ *De abst.* 1.2.2. Cp. Zambon (2003) 562 who compares this text to Porphyry’s charge that Origen turned to a “lawless” life.

²⁸ *De vita Plot.* 16.2-3.

²⁹ *C. Chr. frag.* 1 Harnack, = 15 Ramos Jurado. On the charge see W. Schäfke (1979) 624-627. Cp. Cicero’s “law” (which he argues conforms to ancestral custom) in *De leg.* 2.8.19: *Separatim nemo habessit deos neve novos neve advenas nisi publice adscitos* (no one will separately have gods, either new or alien, unless accepted by the state). See *De leg.* 2.9.23 for the remark about the laws conforming to old custom.

³⁰ Cf. Perelli (1988) 245. LSJ s.v. λύσις II.4.a has a succinct history of this use of the word beginning with Aristotle.

³¹ Porphyry *Quaest. Hom. ad Od.* 2.165 (30,5-9 Schrader). Cp. the similar usage in *Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* lib. I, 16 (with reference to *Il.* 6.251-2 and other texts; 76 Schlunk = 103,15 Sodano) where Porphyry asks if a passage has received a “fitting explanation” (προσήκουσαν... λύσιν)

Incoherent and Inharmonious Interpretations

Porphyry complains about Christian exegetes whose interpretations are not coherent (or “compatible,” ἀσυγκλώστους) with the texts.³² The word is rare (nineteen uses in the TLG) and its only use before Porphyry is by Vettius Valens.³³ Porphyry uses the word in a passage in *De abst.* where he denies that plants have any “compatibility” with reason. Consequently we have no obligation towards them based on justice (and so can eat them).³⁴ He also remarks that the Christians’ interpretations are not harmonious (ἀναρμόστους) with what has been written. Pépin notes a passage in Porphyry’s Homeric interpretation in which three gods try to bind Zeus, where he says the poet is guilty of “irrationality and disharmony” (πολὺ ἔχοντα τὸ ἄλογον καὶ ἀνάρμοστον).³⁵ Porphyry opts for a “physical” (φυσικόν) meaning. Porphyry used the word in a number of other contexts.³⁶ A usage in Origen may illustrate Porphyry’s difficulty. Origen notes that some who do not know how to hear the harmony in the scriptures find the Old Testament “inharmonious” (ἀνάρμοστον) with the New, or the law [inharmonious] with the prophets, or the gospels with one another,

from him. He uses the verb form in similar contexts: “being puzzled... explaining” (ἀποροῦντας... λύνοντες) in *Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* lib. I, 2 (8 Schlunk = 9,14-5 Sodano); “he himself resolves the *aporia*” (λύει δὲ τὴν ἀπορίαν αὐτός) in *Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* lib. I, 5 (14 Schlunk = 18,10 Sodano).

³² J. Pépin understands the reference to mean interpretations that are not “internally coherent” in (1958) 463. He analyzes Porphyry’s allegorical techniques of interpreting Homer in (1965) 231-272.

³³ Vettius Valens *Anthol.* 9.18. Cf. *TLG* (1999). On the term see also Perelli (1988) 246. Positive forms, however, such as συγκλῶθω and σύγκλωσις (cf. LSJ s.v.) were in use among the Stoics.

³⁴ Porphyry *De abst.* 3.18.2: οὐ γὰρ καὶ πρὸς τὰ φυτὰ παρατενοῦμεν τὸ τῆς δικαιοσύνης, διὰ τὸ φαίνεσθαι πολὺ τὸ πρὸς τὸν λόγον ἀσύγκλωστον. The same sort of meaning (with a much different context) can be found in *Suda* II § 1917 (BiTeu 4; 160,25 Adler). The word in its other usages appears, interestingly enough, mainly in the philosophical commentators.

³⁵ Pépin (1965) 252 with reference to *Quaest. Hom. ad Il.* 1.397-406 (13,8-14 Schrader).

³⁶ See Porphyry *Commentary on Ptolemy’s Harmonics* (6,22; 30,6; 152,30 Düring) and cp. Porphyry *Quaest. Hom. ad Od.* 1.1 (2,18-3,1 Schrader) τὸ δ’ αὖ μονοειδὲς ἀνάρμοστον ὅν πρὸς ἀκοᾷς διαφόρους... (Uniformity is inharmonious to different ears).

or the Apostle with the gospel.³⁷ Celsus has the same feelings as Porphyry about Christian allegory: “At least the allegories apparently written concerning them are much more shameful and absurd (ἄτοπώτεροι) than the myths, because they connect (συνάπτουσαι), by an amazing and altogether obtuse foolishness, things that cannot in any way be made to fit together (ἀρμοσθῆναι).”³⁸ It may not be coincidence that Porphyry uses three words that are quite similar to those Celsus uses to describe Christian allegory of Septuagint texts (ἀναρμόστους, ἄτοπίας, προσῆψεν). Julian, on the other hand, was convinced that some Septuagint texts needed to be allegorized. With regard to Gen 2-3 he writes: “Accordingly, unless every one of these is a myth that involves some secret interpretation (θεωρίαν ἀπόρρητον), as I indeed believe, they are filled with many blasphemous sayings about God.”³⁹

Metalepsis

“Metalepsis” is a rhetorical/grammatical term.⁴⁰ Porphyry attacks Origen for ascribing the “metaleptic style” to the Jewish scriptures. A trope that Tryphon (I B.C.E.) defines with reference to Homer *Od.* 15.299 illuminates Porphyry’s term due to its emphasis on replacement: “Metalepsis is a term which through a synonym indicates a homonym, as in ‘From there he made straight for the Quick islands.’ For those which from their form <are called ‘Sharp’ islands> he called by metalepsis ‘Quick’.”⁴¹ Quintilian

³⁷ Origen *Fragmenta ex comm. in evang. Matt.* frag. 3 (GCS Origenes Werke 12; 5,18-21 Klostermann/Benz). See also Perelli (1988) 246 who notes that B. Neuschäfer (1987) 263-276 examines the rhetorical background of ἀρμόζω. Neuschäfer (which Perelli does not note) is discussing prosopopoeia (invented speech in a character’s mouth).

³⁸ Origen *C. Cels.* 4.51 (268,6-10 Marcovich).

³⁹ For this discussion see Julian *C. Gal.* 93d-94a (105,1-106,17 Masaracchia).

⁴⁰ Lausberg (1990) § 571 discusses metalepsis—the use of synonyms that are inappropriate to the context. W. Bernard (1990) 65 treats the method as Stoic “replacement” which refers elements in a text to natural realities. Cf. Perelli (1988) 255. Porphyry can also use the word in the sense of “objection” (part of *status* theory). See M. Heath (2002) frag. 10; Lausberg (1990) § 90-1.

⁴¹ Tryphon *Περὶ τρόπων* 4 (238 West): Μετάληψίς ἐστι λέξις διὰ τῆς συνωνύμου τὴν ὁμώνυμον δηλοῦσα, οἷον

ἔνθεν δ’ αὖ νήσοισιν ἐπιπροέηκε Θοῆσι.

(8.6.37) discusses the trope of metalepsis as one in which meaning changes by a movement from one trope to another (*metalepsis, id est transumptio, quae ex alio tropo in alium velut viam praestat*). Examples he gives are the usage of “swift” and “sharp” discussed above in relation to *Od.* 15.299 and the substitution of names for a Centaur (Ἡσσων for Χείρων).⁴²

Porphyry uses the term in the rhetoricians’ sense in a discussion of Homer *Od.* 1.68 (Poseidon as angry/“tough”): “‘Tough’ [ἄσκελές stubborn] means ‘extremely hard’ (σκληρόν). To dry up is to make hard, and consequently the flesh has become hard. Some use ‘tough’ instead of ‘incessantly’ by metalepsis (ἀντὶ τοῦ ἀδιαλείπτως κατὰ μετάληψιν). For ‘tough’ means ‘impassable,’ ‘not to be travelled.’ And wrath is immovable.”⁴³ Metalepsis is then the movement from one of the usual words for anger to “tough” or “stubborn.” Stoics made use of it also. In a discussion of “place,” Sextus Empiricus notes that Stoics can occasionally use “body” for “an existent” by “the metalepsis [switching] of names.”⁴⁴

Porphyry’s statement that Origen attributed the metaleptic style of the mysteries to the Septuagint can be illustrated by a brief interpretation he offers of the mysteries of Mithras. In *De abst.* he notes that one of the essential beliefs of the Magi was metempsychosis. This, he says, is also present in the mysteries of Mithras. When participants are called “lions,” for example, that signifies (αἰνιττόμενοι) our “community” (κοινότητα) with the animals. The initiates clothe themselves in various animal forms, and Porphyry accepts the interpretation that this means that human souls are clothed with all sorts of human forms.⁴⁵

τὰς γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ σχήματος Ὀξείας καλουμένας νήσους μεταληπτικῶς νήσους Θεὰς εἵρηκε. Cp. Heraclitus *Quaest. Hom.* 45.4 (82 Russell/Konstan): “One can more plausibly undertake to call, in a figurative sense (μεταληπτικῶς), ‘swift’ (θεήν) not sharpness in motion but in form (τὴν κατὰ κίνησιν ὀξεῖαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν κατὰ σχῆμα).” See also *Quaest. Hom.* 26.11, 41.6 (50, 76 Russell/Konstan) for similar uses.

⁴² Both names (Cheiron and Hesson) both mean “inferior” or “worse.”

⁴³ Porphyry *Quaest. Hom. ad Od.* 1.68 (6,22-7,2 Schrader).

⁴⁴ Sextus *Adv. Math.* X 3 = *SVF* 2 § 505. Cp. the Stoic usage in Athenaeus 11.467d = *SVF* 1 § 591.

⁴⁵ Porphyry *De abst.* 4.16.2-4.

Minds Bewitched with Nonsense

Porphyry's argument that Christian interpreters bewitch⁴⁶ the mind's critical faculty is illuminated by a statement of Alcinoos who divides the soul (of gods and of humans) into three parts: "And the soul of the gods possesses herself the critical faculty (τό τε κριτικόν), which may be called the faculty of knowledge, the impulsive faculty (τὸ ὁρμητικόν), which one might call the faculty of excitation (παραστατικόν), and the faculty of appropriation (τὸ οἰκειωτικόν)."⁴⁷ He further explains the faculty of appropriation to mean the one that desires (τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν), and the impulsive faculty to be the one that is irascible (τὸ θυμοειδές).⁴⁸ Porphyry also uses the term to describe the ability of reason to perceive musical harmonics.⁴⁹ The nonsense (τύφου) that Porphyry finds in Christian interpretation of the Septuagint can be contrasted with the lack of it (οὐ τύφος ἦν) he sees in the Egyptians' treatment of their statues.⁵⁰ In a discussion of the Persians' avoidance of certain animal flesh, Porphyry notes that some accuse the ritually pure of sorcery and "pride" or "nonsense."⁵¹

Origen as Lawless

Porphyry charges Origen with "living lawlessly." Theodoret ironically uses similar language to describe those who worship idols.⁵² He also describes

⁴⁶ Cp. Philo *De spec. leg.* 1.9 for the "excision of pleasures, which bewitch the understanding" (ἡδονῶν ἐκτομῆς, αἱ καταγοητεύουσι διάνοιαν). Hesychius *Lexicon* § 1040 (2.421 Schmidt) defines the participle to mean "deceiving" (ἀπατών).

⁴⁷ Alcin. *Didask.* 25 178,39-42 (51 Whittaker/Louis). See their notes on 132-133.

⁴⁸ Alcin. *Didask.* 25 178,44-46 (51 Whittaker/Louis). Cp. Arius Didymus *apud* Stobaeus *Anthol.* 2.7.13 (2.117,11-12 Wachsmuth/Hense) who distinguishes between a rational/critical capacity of the soul and an irrational/impulsive capacity (Τῆς γὰρ ψυχῆς τὸ μὲν εἶναι λογικόν, τὸ δ' ἄλογον· λογικὸν μὲν τὸ κριτικόν, ἄλογον δὲ τὸ ὁρμητικόν). Cp. similar thoughts in Stobaeus *Anthol.* 1.49.69 (1.465,14-7 Wachsmuth/Hense) and 3.1.115 (3.69,11-13 Wachsmuth/Hense).

⁴⁹ Porphyry *Commentary on Ptolemy's Harmonics* (11,32; 12,2 Düring).

⁵⁰ *De abst.* 4.6.6. On this term see also Perelli (1988) 248.

⁵¹ *De abst.* 4.16.8: καὶ ἄγνὸν εἰς γοητείαν καὶ τύφον διαβάλλειν. Porphyry describes Plotinus as being free of all sophistic stage acting and nonsense (τῷ πάσης σοφιστικῆς αὐτὸν σκηνῆς καθαρεύειν καὶ τύφου) in *Vita Plot.* 18,5-6. In *Ep. ad Aneb.* 7 (17,5-6 Sodano), Porphyry notes that certain demons are full of conceit (or nonsense) and rejoice in odors and sacrifices (πλήρεις τε εἶναι τύφου, καὶ χαίρειν ἀτμοῖς καὶ θυσίαις).

⁵² Theodoret *Interpr. in Ezech.* (PG 81.1001): παρανόμως ζῶντες, καὶ δῶρα τοῖς εἰδώλοις προσφέροντες.

Samson as living an undisciplined and lawless life.⁵³ Julian, in his letter to the Alexandrians, compares Paul and the other apostles to those who have transgressed their own law and have paid the punishment that was due, by choosing to live lawlessly and introducing a new proclamation and teaching.⁵⁴ For Julian, Paul abandoned Judaism and was punished. In Porphyry's eyes Origen abandoned Hellenism ("paganism") and chose a lawless Christian life. Zambon compares this to Porphyry's view that Castricius abandoned the ancestral laws of philosophy when he gave up vegetarianism.⁵⁵ Timothy Barnes has pointed out that the charge of "lawlessness" also conveys the sense of disobeying the laws of the state—which would make extremely good sense if Porphyry writes his *C. Chr.* in service of the Great Persecution. Eusebius' anonymous Hellene holds Christians to be worthy of "punishments" for abandoning ancestral customs.⁵⁶ The Hellene may well be Porphyry. In any case "lawlessness" is a loaded word and has strong socio-political overtones.⁵⁷ It puts all Christians under the stigma of living a life contrary to the laws of the state and perhaps of philosophy, in Porphyry's eyes.

Enigma

Unlike Moses' sayings, which are clear, enigmas that do deserve special interpretation are the oracles of the gods, according to Porphyry. In his work on the *Philosophy Drawn from Oracles*, he indicates a necessity to hide the most hidden of hidden things (ὡς ἄρρητων ἄρρητότατα) and then remarks that the gods did not clearly give oracular utterances about themselves, but spoke through enigmas (δι' αἰνιγμάτων).⁵⁸ In his *On the Styx*,

⁵³) Theodoret *Quaest. in Octat.* (Textos y Estudios «Cardinal Cisneros» 17, 304,24 Fernández-Marcos/Sáenz-Badillos): ἐκδεδιγημένως καὶ παρανόμως ζῶν.

⁵⁴) Julian *Ep.* 111, 423c-d (CUFr 1.2;188,10-13 Bidez): οἱ τὸν ἑαυτῶν παραβάντες νόμον ἀπέτισαν ὁποίας ἦν εἰκὸς δίκας, ἐλόμενοι μὲν ζῆν παρανόμως, εἰσαγαγόντες δὲ κήρυγμα καὶ διδασκαλίαν νεαράν.

⁵⁵) Cp. Zambon (2003) 562.

⁵⁶) Barnes (1994) 65. Cf. *C. Chr.* frag. 1 = 15 Ramos Jurado = Eus. *P.E.* 1.2.3 (9,7-8 Mras): ποίαις δ' οὐκ ἂν ἐνδίκως ὑποβληθεῖεν τιμωρίαις οἱ τῶν μὲν πατρίων φυγάδες (And to what kind of punishments would they not justly be subjected, who deserting the ancestral customs...).

⁵⁷) Porphyry makes frequent references to law in his discussions of forensic rhetoric (cf. Heath, [2002] frag. 8, 10, 11a, 13a, 15).

⁵⁸) *De phil. ex oraculis haurienda* frag. 305 Smith (from Eus. *P.E.* 4.8.2).

Porphyry argues that “all the ancients made known things concerning the gods and demons through enigmas (δι’ αἰνιγμάτων).”⁵⁹ According to Porphyry, Homer’s cave of the nymphs (*Od.* 13.102-12) is either historical or a fiction. If it is fictional then Porphyry intends to investigate it as an “enigma.”⁶⁰

Porphyry’s Treatment of Origen’s Mentors

Apollophanes the Stoic (III B.C.E.) does not appear otherwise in the surviving writings of Porphyry.⁶¹ Porphyry quotes Moderatus the Pythagorean (I C.E.) for views concerning matter and the soul.⁶² Chaeremon (I C.E.), whom Porphyry calls a Stoic, describes the nature of the Egyptian priest-philosophers at length in *De abst.*⁶³ His interpretation of the Egyptian gods is discussed by Porphyry in his letter to the priest Anebo.⁶⁴ There Porphyry writes that “Chaeremon and the others do not believe in anything else before the visible worlds; in the account of first principle they place those

⁵⁹ Porphyry *περὶ Στυγός* = frag. 372 Smith (442,3-4). For an ET of the text see R. Lambertson (1989) 113. In the same work (with reference to Homer *Od.* 10.239-240—the sailors turned into pigs) Porphyry says that the myth is an enigma (ὁ μῦθος αἰνιγμα) concerning the things spoken of by Pythagoras and Plato concerning the soul. Cf. Porphyry frag. 382 Smith (462,5-9). Tryphon *Περὶ τρόπων* 23 (246-247 West) has a discussion of enigma as a grammatical figure.

⁶⁰ Porphyry *De antro* 21 (20,31-22,2 Seminar Classics 609; their ET): “So it remains for us to investigate either the intentions of the consecrators of the cave, if Homer’s account is factual (ἱστορίαν), or, at any rate, the poet’s enigma (αἰνιγμα), if his description is a fiction (πλάσμα).” Cp. *De antro* 32 for the “enigma of the cave.”

⁶¹ For the fragments see *SVF* 1 § 404-408. § 408 identifies him as an associate of Ariston; cf. C. Guérard *DPhA* 1:296-297.

⁶² Porphyry frag. 236, 435 Smith. For Moderatus see also: *Vita Plot.* 20.75; 21.7; *Vita Pyth.* 48; B. Centrone and C. Macris *DPhA* 4:548-548.

⁶³ *De abst.* 4.6.1-8.5. (= frag. 10 van der Horst) R. Goulet *DPhA* 2:284-286.

⁶⁴ Chaeremon is also mentioned in: *Ep. ad Aneb.* 2.8c (a passage in which Porphyry criticizes the thesis that the gods can be coerced; 21,1 Sodano) (= frag. 4 van der Horst); *Ep. ad Aneb.* 2.15b (27,1 Sodano) (= frag. 8 van der Horst); and Porphyry frag. 353.10-13 Smith, (= frag. 7 van der Horst) a text in which Chaeremon argues that the Egyptians believe all reality to be ultimately physical/astronomical). This last text clarifies Chaeremon’s statements in *Ep. ad Aneb.* 2.12b (= frag. 5 van der Horst) and is quite similar to it linguistically.

[gods] of the Egyptians, not admitting any other gods but those [stars] called planets and the ones that fill the Zodiac...”⁶⁵ Further in the same text Chaeremon interprets the creative Sun, Osiris, and Isis and the priestly myths to mean the stars and their setting and rising.⁶⁶

Porphry mentions the Pythagoreans Numenius (II C.E.)⁶⁷ and Cronius (II C.E., student of Numenius)⁶⁸ together several times.⁶⁹ He notes approvingly their interpretation of Homer’s cave of the nymphs as an image and symbol (εἰκόνα καὶ σύμβολον) of the cosmos.⁷⁰ Porphry also accepts the view of Numenius’ school that Odysseus is a symbol (εἰκόνα) of one who passes through the stages of genesis.⁷¹ Nicomachus of Gerasa, the Pythagorean (I or II C.E.), is mentioned in Porphry’s *Life of Pythagoras* in a passage discussing the Pythagoreans.⁷² Porphry discusses his teacher Longinus often in the *Life of Plotinus*.⁷³ He mentions Cornutus’ *Art of Rhetoric* and *Reply to Athenodorus*.⁷⁴

⁶⁵ Porphry *Ep. ad Aneb.* 2.12b (23,7-24,3 Sodano) (=frag. 5 van der Horst). Cp. Porphry’s frequent physical interpretations of statues in his discourse *Περὶ ἀγαλμάτων* (frag. 351-360a Smith).

⁶⁶ Porphry *Ep. ad Aneb.* 2.12c (24,7-9 Sodano) (=frag. 5 van der Horst). In sum they interpret all things to be physical and nothing to be incorporeal and living beings (καὶ ὅλως πάντα εἰς τὰ φυσικὰ καὶ οὐδὲν εἰς ἀσωμάτους καὶ ζώσας οὐσίας ἐρμηνεύοντας). Cf. *ibid.* 2.12c (25,1-2 Sodano) (= frag. 5 van der Horst). These texts are found in Eus. *PE.* 3.4.1-2. On Stoic allegory see: A.A. Long (1992) 43, 46-48. Long denies the Stoics were responsible for any claim that Homer was a “strong allegorist” who intended his works to be understood in that sense. R. Goulet offers some possible exceptions to Long’s position ([2005] 93-119).

⁶⁷ Porphry makes a number of other references to Numenius including *Vita Plot.* 3.44, 17.5, 13, 18; 18.3; 20.74; *De antro* 10, 21, 34; *Ad Gaurum* 2.2 (34,26 Kalbfleisch). Cf. P.P. Fuentes González *DPhA* 4:724-40.

⁶⁸ His other references to Cronius include: *Vita Plot.* 20.74, *De antro* 2, 3, 21; frag. 372, 433 Smith. Cf. J. Whittaker *DPhA* 2:527-528.

⁶⁹ See *Vita Plot.* 14.11-12, 21.7; frag. 444 Smith.

⁷⁰ *De antro* 21.

⁷¹ *De antro* 34.

⁷² *Vita Pyth.* 59. Cf. also *Vita Pyth.* 20 B. Centrone and G. Freudenthal *DPhA* 4:686-94.

⁷³ See *Vita Plot.* 14.19,20; 17.11; 19.1; 20.9,14; cp. *In Platonis Timaeum comm.* Book I, 8; I, 21, II, F. 43 (5,9; 13,7; 27,19 Sodano). Cf. also the many references that can be found in the index to Smith (1990) s.v. “Longinus”; L. Brisson *DPhA* 4:116-125.

⁷⁴ Porphry *In Aristotelis categorias expositio per interr. et resp.* (CAG, 4.1; 86,23 Busse); P.P. Fuentes González *DPhA* 2:460-473. Most of the references in Simplicius to Cornutus may

Origen refers to Numenius several times in the *C. Cels.*⁷⁵ Numenius gives the prophets an allegorical interpretation (τροπολογῆσαι) according to Origen.⁷⁶ In another text, Origen maintains that Numenius gave Moses and the prophets allegorical interpretations. Numenius did the same for a story about Jesus.⁷⁷ Origen discusses Chaeremon's views of comets as occasional harbingers of good events, but does not refer to his tropological interpretations.⁷⁸ He often refers to Plato.⁷⁹ Jerome writes that in his lost *Stromateis* Origen "compares the thoughts of the Christians and the philosophers and confirms the dogmas of our religion from Plato and Aristotle, Numenius and Cornutus."⁸⁰

Origen as Hellene

The debate over whether Porphyry conceives of Origen to have originally been a pagan or not can be illuminated by the structure of the passage. That structure, which depends on the fact that Ammonius was first a Christian and then later became "law abiding" (a Greek), clearly shows that Porphyry thinks Origen was "law abiding" originally, since he accuses him of adopting a lawless way of life (Christianity).⁸¹ The open contradiction or opposition which he sees between Ammonius' former way of life and his change of life has an exact parallel in Origen's change from being a Greek to being a Christian.⁸² This can be illustrated by a figure similar to the logicians' square of contradictions.⁸³

derive from Porphyry's *Ad Gidalium* (Simpl. *In Arist. Cat.* [CAG 8; 18,28; 62,27; 129,1 = frag. 64 Smith; 187,31; 351,23; 359,1 Kalbfleisch]). On Simplicius' use of Porphyry see Porphyry test. 45 Smith (= Simpl. *In Arist. Cat.* [2,5-13 Kalbfleisch]).

⁷⁵ Origen *C. Cels.* 1.15, 4.51, 5.38, 5.57 (18,10; 268,16, 354,10, 368,23 Marcovich).

⁷⁶ Origen *C. Cels.* 1.15 (18,12-4 Marcovich).

⁷⁷ Origen *C. Cels.* 4.51 (268,16-23 Marcovich).

⁷⁸ Origen *C. Cels.* 1.59 (60,7 Marcovich).

⁷⁹ In Origen's Greek works Plato only appears in the *C. Cels.* and the *Philocalia* (where all the excerpts mentioning Plato are from the *C. Cels.*).

⁸⁰ Cf. Jerome, *Ep. ad Magnum* 70.4 (CSEL, 54; 705,19-706,3 Hilberg). I am indebted to Richard Goulet for this reference.

⁸¹ Cf. R. Goulet *DPhA* 2:165-168.

⁸² Cp. Goulet (2001) 392.

⁸³ On the chiastic square and Porphyry's use of it with regard to Aristotle's categories see P. Hadot (1954) 277-282.

Figure 1. Chiastic Square

A (Ammonius' Christian life) contradicts not A (a life in conformity with the laws). B (Origen as a Hellene) contradicts not B (his life as a Christian).

This reading of the text can be supported by a number of external arguments. First, Eusebius quite clearly reads Porphyry's "Hellene" to mean "non-Christian."⁸⁴ Eusebius was one of the most powerful interpreters of Porphyry, and his argument cannot be ignored—given the fact that he devoted twenty-five volumes to the critique of the *C. Chr.* Universal usage of "Roman" or "Greek" among the pagan critics of Christianity implies "non-Christian." For Celsus "Romans" are non-Christians and non-Jews: "You will certainly not say that if the Romans were persuaded (πεισθέντες) by you, were to neglect their customary practices towards gods and people, and should call on your Highest or whomever you wish, he would descend and fight for them, and there would be no necessity for any other force."⁸⁵ Eusebius' anonymous Hellene asks of Christians: "Of what kind of pardon

⁸⁴ See Eusebius' remark quoted above (*H.E.* 6.19.9) denying that Origen converted from Hellenic doctrines (or from the Hellenes): ἐξ Ἑλλήνων μετατεθεῖσθαι.

⁸⁵ Origen *C. Cels.* 8.69 (585,19-586,1 Marcovich).

would they be worthy who turn away from those considered gods from of old among all Hellenes and barbarians...?”⁸⁶ Clearly the pagan critic does not believe that Christians are either Hellenes or Jews.⁸⁷ Julian understands “Hellenes” to mean non-Christians when he accuses the Eden narrative of being similar to myths invented by the Greeks.⁸⁸ This is not to deny that there were uses of “Hellenism” in antiquity for “Greek culture” that did not specifically exclude Christianity.⁸⁹

The Relationship to other Texts from the *Contra Christianos*

The fragment in Eusebius should be compared with others associated with Porphyry’s book against the Christians, which treat the issue of immoral texts and the problem of clarity, enigma and allegory. His remark that the Jewish scriptures are “depraved” is difficult to illustrate since most of the surviving fragments of the *C. Chr.* are from his work on Daniel—comments designed to show that Daniel is a forgery from the Maccabean era.⁹⁰ But a comment of Severian of Gabala shows that Porphyry could attack the morality of Septuagint narratives:

Many say, and particularly those who follow the God-hated Porphyry who wrote *Against the Christians* and who drew many away from the divine dogma. They say accordingly: Why did God forbid the knowledge of good and evil? Let it be the case that he forbade the evil. Why then also the good? For when

⁸⁶) Porphyry frag. 1 Harnack = 15 Ramos Jurado.

⁸⁷) This is a position Eusebius himself defends in *D.E.* 1.2.10 (GCS Eusebius Werke 7; 8,33-34 Heikel) when he writes that “Christianity is not Hellenism or Judaism” (ὁ χριστιανισμός, οὔτε ἑλληνισμός τις ὃν οὔτε ἰουδαϊσμός). It is actually something between the two (μεταξὺ τούτων). Cf. *D.E.* 1.2.10 (8,34 Heikel). This of course is a common patristic position. Cf. *Ep. ad Diog.* 1 for an early example and further Schäfer (1979) 633-639.

⁸⁸) Julian *C. Gal.* 86a (103,2-4 Masaracchia). Cp. his remarks about Greek myths in *C. Gal.* 44a-b (89,2-90,9 Masaracchia). Abraham used to sacrifice as the Hellenes do. See *C. Gal.* 356c-357a (182,1-183,1 Masaracchia).

⁸⁹) For Gregory of Nazianzus “to Hellenize” [Hellenism] (τοῦ ἑλληνίζειν) can refer to “the Greek nation and language or “religion” in *Or.* 4.103 (SC 309; 252,1-10 Bernardi). Cp. G.W. Bowersock (1990) 1-14.

⁹⁰) Cook (2004) 197-246.

he said, "From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" he says that he keeps him from the knowledge of evil; why then also the good?⁹¹

Julian also attacked the story from the same perspective by asking what could be more foolish than a being unable to distinguish between good and evil.⁹² Porphyry does not accuse the Genesis narrative of blatant immorality, but the implication is there that something is quite seriously wrong with a God who refuses his creation the knowledge of good. Julian thinks it is strange of God to refuse this wisdom to human beings.

A text from Macarius of Magnesia (IV C.E.) (that may be closely based on Porphyry) discusses Jesus' parables in Mt 13:31, 33, 45. The anonymous philosopher quotes Mt 11:25 and Deut 29:28 and then continues:

Therefore the things that are written for the babes and the ignorant ought to be very clear (σαφέστερα)⁹³ and without enigma (αὐνιγματώδη). For if the mysteries (μυστήρια) have been hidden from the wise, and unreasonably poured out to babes and those that give suck, it is better to be desirous of irrationality and ignorance, and this is the great achievement of the wisdom of Him who came to earth, to hide the ray of knowledge from the wise (σοφῶν), and to reveal it to fools and babes.⁹⁴

Although one can no longer claim that the excerpts from Macarius are Porphyry's own words, Porphyry was probably one of the primary sources that Macarius used. The saying in Mt 11:25 holds that common people should be able to understand. But Deut 29:28 seems to hold out the same hope for all people, including the wise in the pagan's eyes. The pagan's critique has certain linguistic parallels with Eusebius' fragment of Porphyry. The "clearly spoken sayings of Moses that the Christians boast to be enigmas"⁹⁵ correspond to the pagan's view that statements for the unwise

⁹¹) Porphyry frag. 42 Harnack = 110 Ramos Jurado, = Sev. *De mundi creatione orat.* 6 (PG 56.487). On the text see G. Rinaldi (1982) 106 and Cook (2004) 170-172.

⁹²) Julian C. *Gal.* 89a-b (94,2-12 Masaracchia) = G. Rinaldi (1998) § 49.

⁹³) Cp. Porphyry's reference to clarity (τὸ σαφές) in verbal expression in Heath (2002) frag. 17.

⁹⁴) Macarius *Monog.* 4.8/9.5-6 (2, 250,18-22 Goulet) = frag. 52 Harnack = 95 Ramos Jurado. See Goulet's commentary in (2003) 2.411-13.

⁹⁵) See Eus. *H.E.* 6.19 above.

should be “very clear and without enigma.” The Christians view Moses’ statements as “oracles full of hidden mysteries.” This statement corresponds to the pagan’s view that Jesus dispenses his mysteries to babes. There is a difference in context since Porphyry is attacking those who view Mosaic texts to be susceptible to allegory. The pagan is actually attacking Jesus’ use of parables with their “crude” comparisons.⁹⁶ They should be comprehensible to anyone attempting to understand them.⁹⁷ Despite the different context, Porphyry knows Christians understand Mosaic texts allegorically, and the pagan of Macarius knows that Jesus’ parables contain hidden mysteries that are hidden from the wise.

Didymus the Blind responds to one of Porphyry’s critiques of Christian allegory in a rather obscure fragment found among the Tura papyri.⁹⁸ The text is difficult to interpret since there are lacunae. Part of the Greek text is as follows:⁹⁹

Πορφύριος γοῦν θέλων ε....[.....]τοῖς ἀναπλάττοντες ἀναγωγὰς καὶ ἀλλ[η]γ[ο]ρίας ἐν]θα ὁ Ἀχιλλεύς καὶ Ἑκτωρ μνημονεύεται, ἡλληγόρησεν φήσας πρὸς τὸν Χ(ριστὸ)ν καὶ τὸν διάβολον· καὶ ἃ ἐλέγομεν ἡμεῖς περὶ τοῦ διαβόλου, αὐτὸς περὶ τοῦ Ἑκτορος, καὶ ἃ περὶ τοῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ, αὐτὸς περὶ Ἀχιλλέως·

Porphyry, then wanting... those who manufacture anagogical and allegorical meanings... where Achilles and Hector are mentioned he allegorized speaking of Christ and the devil. And the things we often say about the devil he says about Hector, and what we say about Christ, he says about Achilles.

⁹⁶ Macarius *Monog.* 4.8/9.1-4 (2, 250,1-13 Goulet) = frag. 54 Harnack = 94 Ramos Jurado.

⁹⁷ Porphyry’s writes in *De Antro* 3 (4,1-3 Seminar Classics 609; their ET) that Cronius believes the laity (and not just the wise) are able to understand the allegory intended by Homer’s narrative about the cave of the nymphs: “After these preliminaries Cronius goes on to say that it is evident to the learned (τοῖς σοφοῖς) and laity (τοῖς ἰδιώταις) alike that the poet is speaking allegorically and hinting at something in these verses.” Pépin takes this to mean that Porphyry believed allegory should be available to the common person and not just the highly educated ([1965] 261-262). Cp. Goulet (2003) 2.412.

⁹⁸ Didymus (1979); G. Binder (1968) 81-95. On this text and its various reconstructions see Goulet (2003) 1.145-147; 2.412; P. Sellev (1989) 79-100; P.F. Beatrice (1995) 579-590.

⁹⁹ Didymus *Comm. in Eccl.* 9:10, 281,16-20 (38 Gronewald).

Porphyry goes on to describe Hector's strutting, while thinking he was more powerful than all (before Achilles' victory). Hector did this in order to deceive (διαβαλεῖν).¹⁰⁰ Porphyry is attacking Christian allegory by showing that one could even allegorize Homer using the Christian opposition of Christ and the devil. Possibly he knows that Christians such as Origen allegorized Septuagint texts such as Job 3:8 to mean Christ's struggle against the devil.¹⁰¹ One can read Didymus' fragment using Porphyry's protest against Christian exegesis in Eusebius' fragment in which he summarizes Origen's approach as "absurd."¹⁰² "Absurdity" was a frequent charge the pagans used against the Christians—with regard to OT texts and Christian doctrine.¹⁰³ For Hellenes it was also a textual marker for material that demanded allegory. Sallustius mentions "apparent strangeness" (τῆς φαινομένης ἀτοπίας) as a sign that something mysterious is in the text.¹⁰⁴ Julian mentions "incongruity of thought" (κατὰ μὲν τὴν διάνοιαν ἀπεμφαίνοντες) as another sign.¹⁰⁵ Celsus used the same term to denigrate Christian allegory in general.¹⁰⁶ Origen (and Philo) did not tend to deny the historical reality of the biblical texts, unlike the Hellenistic philosophers

¹⁰⁰ Didymus *Comm. in Eccl.* 9:10, 281,20-22 (38 Gronewald). Examples are Homer *Il.* 12.462-67, 9.237-39 (Binder [1968] 93—both texts only mention Hector). Goulet (2003) 1.146 finds a curious parallel in *Il.* 3.82-3 which actually speaks of Hector and the Achaeans. What is curious is that it is found in Macarius *Monog.* 4.19.1 (2, 306,16-7 Goulet) in the words of the Christian (not the pagan). Goulet wonders if Macarius did not perhaps find the text in Porphyry.

¹⁰¹ Origen *De prin.* 4.1.5 (684,11-14 Görgemanns/Karp) clearly relates the one who overcomes the great sea-beast to Christ and his disciples who overcome all the power of the Enemy. Origen using the language of Job 3:8 speaks of the dragon, the "great beast," that the Lord overcame (*In Joann.* 1.17.96 [GCS Origenes Werke 4; 21,10-12 Preuschen]). In *Περὶ εὐχῆς* 13.4; 16.3 (GCS Origenes Werke 2; 328,25-26; 338,2-4 Koetschau) Christ overcomes the beast (the latter text includes a reference to Jonah).

¹⁰² Eus. *H.E.* 6.19.5 (558,23 Schwartz): ὁ δὲ τρόπος τῆς ἀτοπίας (this manner of absurdity). Pépin ([1965] 258 and cp. 251-258) argues that Porphyry sees Origen to be the source of this method among Christian scholars (a view adopted by Perelli [1988] 251). However, Porphyry seems to be attacking Origen's (and other Christians') allegory in general and is not specifically mentioning a technical term.

¹⁰³ Cf. Cook (2004) 397 s.v.

¹⁰⁴ Sallustius *De diis* 3 (4,17-18 Nock).

¹⁰⁵ Julian *Or.* 7.17, 222c (CUFr 2.1; 68 Rochefort).

¹⁰⁶ Origen *C. Cels.* 4.51 (268,6-10 Marcovich).

who explained myths they found to be absurd (and consequently “unhistorical”).¹⁰⁷ Porphyry would probably have known that.

Other readings of Didymus are certainly possible, but it seems fairly clear that Porphyry is objecting strenuously to Christian allegory of Septuagint texts. Binder, in a truly ironic find, notes that Constantine in Eusebius’ *Oration to the Assembly of the Saints* interprets the new “Achilles” prophesied in Virgil *Eclogues* 4.31-36 to be Christ who will overcome the devil:¹⁰⁸ “He characterizes Achilles as the savior who rushes into battle with Troy, Troy being the entire world. He fought therefore against the opposing evil power.” Porphyry’s arguments were strong, if ignored by the Christian interpreters (such as Eusebius’ Constantine) who followed.

Structure of the Argument against Allegory

The argument can be formulated in this way:

1. Moses’ writings (or the Septuagint) are clear.
2. They are not enigmas full of hidden mysteries.
3. Christian allegories of them are “solutions” that are incoherent and inharmonious with what is written.
4. The Christian allegorists enchant reason through these nonsensical interpretations.
5. Origen hid Hellenic traditions under Septuagint myths—traditions he learned from legitimate philosophers.
6. To do this he used the metaleptic style of the mysteries, which he attributed to the Septuagint.

Therefore Christian allegory is invalid.

Consequently, the Christians should give up their depraved scriptures (the Septuagint) and should return to a “lawful” life as Ammonius did. (Admittedly Porphyry does not say all Christians should return to a lawful,

¹⁰⁷ See G. Dahan and R. Goulet (2005) 5-8.

¹⁰⁸ Binder (1968) 93-94 with reference to Eusebius *Constantini imperatoris oratio ad coetum sanctorum* 20.9 (GCS Eusebius Werke 1; 185,19-22 Heikel). Cp. Eus. *Const.* Kephalaia 20 (152,28-30 Heikel) where the text notes that Virgil through enigmas (αἰνιγματῶν) made known the mystery (μυστήριον)—which is Christ.

Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.19

(2) τί δεῖ ταῦτα λέγειν, ὅτε καὶ ὁ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἐν Σικελίᾳ καταστάς Πορφύριος συγγράμματα καθ' ἡμῶν ἐνστησάμενος καὶ δι' αὐτῶν τὰς θείας γραφὰς διαβάλλειν πεπειραμένος τῶν τε εἰς αὐτὰς ἐξηγησαμένων μνημονεύσας, μηδὲν μηδαμῶς φαῦλον ἔγκλημα τοῖς δόγμασιν ἐπικαλεῖν δυνηθείς, ἀπορία λόγων ἐπὶ τὸ λοιδορεῖν τρέπεται καὶ τοὺς ἐξηγητὰς ἐνδιαβάλλειν, ὧν μάλιστα τὸν Ὁριγένην· (3) ὃν κατὰ τὴν νέαν ἡλικίαν ἐγνωκέναι φήσας, διαβάλλειν μὲν πειράται, συνιστῶν δὲ ἄρα τὸν ἄνδρα ἐλάνθανεν,¹⁰⁹ τὰ μὲν ἐπαληθεύων, ἐν οἷς οὐδ' ἐτέρως αὐτῷ λέγειν ἦν δυνατόν, τὰ δὲ καὶ ψευδομένους, ἐν οἷς λήσεσθαι ἐνόμιζεν, καὶ τότε μὲν ὡς Χριστιανοῦ κατηγορῶν, τότε δὲ τὴν περὶ τὰ φιλόσοφα μαθήματα ἐπίδοσιν αὐτοῦ διαγράφων.

(4) ἄκουε δ' οὖν ἃ φησιν κατὰ λέξιν.

τῆς δὴ μοχθηρίας τῶν Ἰουδαϊκῶν γραφῶν οὐκ ἀπόστασιν, λύσιν δὲ τινες εὐρεῖν προθυμηθέντες, ἐπ' ἐξηγήσεις ἐτράποντο ἀσυγκλῶστους καὶ ἀναρμόστους τοῖς γεγραμμένοις, οὐκ ἀπολογίαν μᾶλλον ὑπὲρ τῶν ὀθνείων, παραδοχὴν δὲ καὶ ἔπαινον τοῖς οἰκείοις φερούσας. αἰνίγματα γὰρ τὰ φανερώς παρὰ Μωυσεὶ λεγόμενα εἶναι κομπάσαντες καὶ ἐπιθειάσαντες ὡς θεσπίσματα πλήρη κρυφίων μυστηρίων διὰ τε τοῦ τύπου τὸ κριτικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς καταγοητεύσαντες, ἐπάγουσιν ἐξηγήσεις.

(5) εἴτα μεθ' ἑτερά φησιν·

ὁ δὲ τρόπος τῆς ἀτοπίας ἐξ ἀνδρὸς ᾧ καγὼ κοιμῆ νέος ὢν ἔτι ἐντετύχηκα, σφόδρα εὐδοκίμησαντος καὶ ἔτι δι' ὧν καταλέλοιπεν συγγραμμάτων εὐδοκιμοῦντος, παρελήφθω, Ὁριγένους, οὗ κλέος παρὰ τοῖς διδασκάλοις τούτων τῶν λόγων μέγα διαδέδοται. (6) ἄκρατης γὰρ οὗτος Ἀμμωνίου τοῦ πλείστην ἐν τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς χρόνοις ἐπίδοσιν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἐσχηκότος γεγονώς, εἰς μὲν τὴν τῶν λόγων ἐμπειρίαν πολλὴν παρὰ τοῦ διδασκάλου τὴν ὠφέλειαν ἐκτήσατο, εἰς δὲ τὴν ὀρθὴν τοῦ βίου προαίρεσιν τὴν ἐναντίαν ἐκείνῳ πορείαν ἐποιήσατο. (7) Ἀμμώνιος μὲν γὰρ Χριστιανὸς ἐν Χριστιανοῖς ἀνατραφεὶς τοῖς γονεῦσιν, ὅτε τοῦ φρονεῖν καὶ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἦπατο, εὐθύς πρὸς τὴν κατὰ νόμους πολιτείαν μετεβάλετο, Ὁριγένης δὲ Ἕλληγ ἐν Ἕλλησιν παιδευθεὶς λόγοις, πρὸς τὸ βάρβαρον ἐξώκειλεν τόλμημα· ᾧ δὴ φέρων αὐτόν τε καὶ τὴν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἕξιν ἐκαπήλευσεν, κατὰ μὲν τὸν βίον Χριστιανῶς ζῶν καὶ παρανόμως, κατὰ δὲ τὰς περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξας ἑλληνίζων τε καὶ τὰ Ἑλλήνων τοῖς ὀθνείοις ὑποβαλλόμενος μύθοις. (8) συνῆν τε γὰρ αἰεὶ τῷ Πλάτῳ, τοῖς τε Νουμηνίου καὶ Κρονίου Ἀπολλοφάνους τε καὶ Λογγίνου καὶ Μοδεράτου Νικομάχου τε καὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς Πυθαγορείοις ἐλλογίμων ἀνδρῶν ὁμίλει συγγράμμασιν, ἐχρήτο δὲ καὶ Χαίρημονος τοῦ Σταϊκοῦ Κορνοῦτου τε ταῖς βίβλοις, παρ' ὧν τὸν μεταληπτικὸν τῶν παρ' Ἑλλήσιν μυστηρίων γνῶνς τρόπον ταῖς Ἰουδαϊκαῖς προσήψεν γραφαῖς.

(9) ταῦτα τῷ Πορφυρίῳ κατὰ τὸ τρίτον σύγγραμμα τῶν γραφέντων αὐτῷ κατὰ Χριστιανῶν εἴρηται, ἐπαληθεύσαντι μὲν περὶ τῆς τάνδρὸς ἀσκήσεως καὶ πολυμαθείας, ψευσαμένῳ δὲ σαφῶς (τί γὰρ οὐκ ἔμελλεν ὁ κατὰ Χριστιανῶν;), ἐν οἷς αὐτὸν μὲν φησιν ἐξ Ἑλλήνων μετατεθεῖσθαι, τὸν δ' Ἀμμώνιον ἐκ βίου τοῦ κατὰ θεοσεβείαν ἐπὶ τὸν ἐθνικὸν τρόπον ἐκπεσεῖν.

Figure 2. Porphyry C. *Chr.* frag. 39 Harnack

¹⁰⁹) διαβάλλειν—ἐλάνθανεν ABDMΣ^{arm}; ἐν ταῦτῳ (sic) δὲ διαβάλλειν δοκῶν μᾶλλον αὐτὸν συνίστησιν TER (A = Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1430; B = Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1431; D = Paris, Bibl. Nat. 1433; M = Venice, Marciana 338; Σ^{arm} = Armenian trans. of the Syriac; T = Florence, Laurentiana 70,7; E = Florence, Laurentiana 70,20; R = Moscow, Holy Synod Libr. 50)

Hellenic life, but his admiration of Ammonius' conversion to paganism and his critique of Origen's alleged conversion to Christianity almost certainly imply this position.)

Conclusion

Porphry's critique of the Bible and its Christian interpreters had an aporetic goal: the renunciation of the Christian faith. The critique existed in the socio-political context of the persecutions, so one should probably read the fragments in that light. For Porphyry Septuagint texts were simply not full of the mysteries—mysteries he could find in Homer and the images of the gods and goddesses. Porphyry's critique of Origen and the other Christian exegetes was significant, because the practice of allegory continued unabated for over a thousand years. His argument against allegory was quite powerful, and parts of it ultimately convinced first the Protestant Reformers and later modern biblical scholars.

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