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ORIGENIANA DUODECIMA

ORIGEN'S LEGACY IN THE HOLY LAND – A TALE OF THREE CITIES: JERUSALEM, CAESAREA AND BETHLEHEM

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EDITED BY

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“A PLACE TO WORSHIP THE LORD OUR GOD”

ORIGEN’S EXEGESIS OF THE HOLY LAND IN HIS HOMILIES ON THE PROPHETS

I. JERUSALEM AND JUDAH

Many recent studies have rightly pointed out how Origen usually interprets allegorically the biblical references to Jerusalem or to the Holy Land¹. On the one hand, this attitude is perfectly consistent with his desire to reveal the actual spiritual meaning lying beneath every word of Scripture. On the other hand, the spiritualization of place names is also an extremely refined technique to fight the ideas of those who expected a future reconstruction of the earthly Jerusalem: not only Montanists and Christians who believed in a millenarian eschatology, but also Jews influenced by rabbinic Judaism. In this respect, the same effort found in his doctrinal treatise *De principiis* and the apologetic *Contra Celsum*² can be detected also in his *Homilies on Jeremiah (HJer)* and *on Ezekiel (HEz)*³.

1. See L. PERRONE, *Origene e la ‘Terra Santa’*, in O. ANDREI (ed.), *Caesarea Maritima e la scuola origeniana: Multiculturalità, forme di competizione culturale e identità cristiana. Atti dell’XI Convegno del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina (22-23 settembre 2011)* (Supplementi di Adamantius, 3), Brescia, Morcelliana, 2013, 139-160, pp. 152-155; ID., “*Sacramentum Iudaeae*” (*Gerolamo, Ep. 46*): *Gerusalemme e la Terra Santa nel pensiero cristiano dei primi secoli. Continuità e trasformazioni*, in A. MELLONI – D. MENOZZI – G. RUGGIERI – M. TOSCHI (eds.), *Cristianesimo nella storia. Saggi in onore di Giuseppe Alberigo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1996, 445-478. For an account of the evolution of the idea of Holy Land, eventually conceived as a place of pilgrimage, see R.L. WILKEN, *Early Christian Chiliasm, Jewish Messianism, and the Idea of the Holy Land*, in *HTR* 79 (1986) 298-307; ID., *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1992; B. BITTON-ASHKELONY, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 38), Berkeley, CA – Los Angeles, CA – London, University of California Press, 2005, pp. 1-29.

2. *Prin* I,1,4 (GCS 22, 19,18–20,4 KOETSCHAU); II,11,2-3 (GCS 22, 184,5–186,21); IV,3,9-10 (GCS 22, 335,7–339,17); *CC* VII,28-30 (GCS 3, 178,19–181,25 KOETSCHAU).

3. See also the related and analogous interpretations of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in the fragments from Origen’s lost *Commentary on Lamentations*: according to the Greek edition of the text (Lam 1) the *Lamentations* were composed by Jeremiah, and therefore Origen perceived them as related to the prophetic book; see V. MARCHETTO, “*Una voce di notte*”: *Presenze angeliche nel Tempio di Gerusalemme dal Commento alle Lamentazioni di Origene*, in *Adamantius* 21 (2015) 244-268.

I will now observe the significant occurrences of the interpretations of Jerusalem and the Holy Land presented by the Alexandrian in his homilies on the prophets, so as to synthetically retrace the main lines of his exegesis with regard to this theme⁴. Firstly, the city is mentioned several times in the prophetic pericopes analyzed by Origen. He often reiterates to his audience the etymology of the name Jerusalem, which translates as “vision of peace”⁵: with this well-known explanation the preacher equates Jerusalem to the Church on the historical level, and to the soul on the psychological-anthropological level, on the basis of the etymology of the name Zion, translated as “observatory”⁶. Let us look at some texts to better understand the textual and exegetical justifications for this twofold gloss, in which the two main lines of thought are not

4. The aim is to deeply analyze how Origen deals with a certain theme as he interprets different biblical books belonging to the same group. However, occasional references will also be made to similar passages from the recently discovered *Homilies on the Psalms* (*Die neuen Psalmenhomilien: Eine kritische Edition des Codex Monacensis Graecus 314*, ed. L. PERRONE with M. MOLIN PRADEL – E. PRINZIVALLI – A. CACCIARI [GCS NF, 19; Origenes Werke, 13], Berlin, De Gruyter, 2015), so as to briefly point out how the same topic is dealt with in these new texts. It should be remembered, though, that Origen acknowledges a significant relationship between the prophetic books and the Psalter, given the fact that he often refers to the author of a Psalm as “the prophet”, to his activity as “prophesying”, and to his composition as a “prophecy” (see, among the numerous examples in *HPs*: *H36Ps* II,1 [GCS NF 19, 127,18]; II,6 [GCS NF 19, 135,9]; IV,3 [GCS NF 19, 166,24]; *H73Ps* I,1 [GCS NF 19, 225,9.11]). Even though he is still clearly aware of the difference between prophecies and psalms (see e.g. *H77Ps* I,2 [GCS NF 19, 353,25]), this significant correspondence is consistent with Origen’s charismatic conception of prophecy (see G. FILORAMO, *Lo statuto della profetia in Origene*, in *Ad contemplandam sapientiam: Studi di filologia letteratura storia in memoria di Sandro Leanza*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2004, 239-251; G. AF HÄLLSTRÖM, *Charismatic Succession: A Study on Origen’s Concept of Prophecy* [Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society, 42], Helsinki, Toimitus Anne-Marit Enroth, 1985).

5. See, with regards to the mentioned works only, *Hier* IX,2 (GCS 6, 65,19-23 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN); XIII,2 (GCS 6, 103,21-22); *HierL* I,2 (GCS 33, 309,9-10 BAEHRENS); II,1 (GCS 33, 291,8-9); *HEz* XII,2 (GCS 33, 435,17-19); but see also *Frler* 11 (GCS 6, 202,21-22). On the role of etymology in Origen as a fundamental exegetical tool and a characteristic feature of both Jewish and Alexandrian exegesis, see K. METZLER, *Namensetymologien zur Hebräischen Bibel bei Origenes*, in S. KACZMAREK – H. PIETRAS (eds.), *Origeniana Decima: Origen as Writer* (BETL, 244), Leuven, Peeters, 2011, 169-177; A. TZVETKOVA-GLASER, *Pentateuchauslegung bei Origenes und den frühen Rabbinen*, Frankfurt a.M., Lang, 2010, pp. 431-435; I.L.E. RAMELLI, *Philosophical Allegoresis of Scripture in Philo and Its Legacy in Gregory of Nyssa*, in *Studia Philonica Annual* 20 (2008) 55-99, pp. 77-82; A. VAN DEN HOEK, *Etymologizing in a Christian Context: The Techniques of Clement and Origen*, in *Studia Philonica Annual* 16 (2004) 122-168; R.P.C. HANSON, *Interpretations of Hebrew Names in Origen*, in *VigChr* 10 (1956) 103-123.

6. See, e.g., *Hier* V,16 (GCS 6, 46,3-5 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN); *H75Ps* 2 (GCS NF 19, 283,11–284,2 PERRONE); see PERRONE, *Origene e la ‘Terra Santa’* (n. 1), p. 154.

mutually exclusive and, at times, even complement one another. One of the clearest texts is from *Hler IX*⁷:

*Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to those who dwell in Jerusalem (Jer 11,2). We are the men of Judah due to Christ. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah (Heb 7,14) and the name Judah, if I present it according to the Scripture, refers to Christ. [...] This [i.e. Jerusalem] is the Church. For the city of God (cf. Rev 3,12), the Vision of Peace, is the Church, the peace which he brought to us (cf. Jn 14,27) is in her, and is completed and beheld if we are children of peace*⁸.

Here Origen explains the identification of the men of Judah with his fellow Christians as resting on Jesus’ descent from the tribe of Judah, as he has done twice already in two previous homilies on *Jeremiah* (using the same reference to *Hebrews*)⁹; then, he identifies the inhabitants of Jerusalem with the Church, which has received peace from God. But the fact that the prophetic text itself presents a difference between the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah is the strongest argument Origen has to link Judah and Jerusalem to the Christians of his time: in the fourth *Homily on Jeremiah*, the Alexandrian comments a passage in which God regrets that the kingdom of Judah has sinned more than Israel (which has been sent away), even though he had instructed the prophet to warn the people

7. The critical edition of *Hler* is *Jeremiahomilien, Klageliederkommentar, Erklärung der Samuel- und Königsbücher*, ed. E. KLOSTERMANN. 2. Bearbeitete Aufl. herausgegeben von P. NAUTIN (GCS, 6; Origenes Werke, 3), Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1901; Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 21983, pp. 1-194; for the two Latin homilies (*HlerL*) see *Homilien zu Samuel I, zum Hohelied und zu den Propheten. Kommentar zum Hohelied in Rufins und Hieronymus Übersetzungen*, ed. W.A. BAEHRENS (GCS, 33; Origenes Werke, 8), Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1925, pp. 290-317. The fundamental commentary on these sermons remains *Origène. Homélie sur Jérémie*. Tome I: *Homélie I-XI*; Tome II: *Homélie XII-XX et Homélie latines*, traduction par P. HUSSON – P. NAUTIN, édition, introduction et notes par P. NAUTIN (SC, 232.238), Paris, Cerf, 1976-1977. The translation of *Hler* is taken, with few adjustments, from *Origen. Homilies on Jeremiah. Homily on 1 King 28*, transl. J.C. SMITH (Fathers of the Church, 97), Washington, DC, Catholic University of America Press, 1998.

8. *Hler IX,1-2* (GCS 6, 64,26–65,23 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN; transl. SMITH [n. 7], pp. 86-87): *Ἀκούσατε τοὺς λόγους τῆς διαθήκης ταύτης, καὶ λαλήσατε πρὸς ἀνδρας Ἰούδα καὶ πρὸς τοὺς κατοικοῦντας Ἱερουσαλήμ (Jer 11,2). Ἄνδρες Ἰούδα ἡμεῖς ἐσμεν διὰ τὸν Χριστὸν· πρόδηλον γάρ ἐστι ἐξ Ἰούδα ἀνατέταλκεν ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν (Heb 7,14), καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἰούδα ἐν παρωστήσω κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν ἐπὶ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀναφερόμενον [...] Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐκκλησία· ἐστὶν γάρ “ἡ πόλις τοῦ θεοῦ” (cf. Rev 3,12) ἡ ἐκκλησία, ἡ Ὁρασις τῆς εἰρήνης, ἐν αὐτῇ ἐστὶν ἡ εἰρήνη ἣν ἤγαγεν ἡμῖν (cf. Jn 14,27), εἶγε ἐσμὲν τέκνα εἰρήνης, πληθύνεται καὶ ὁράται.*

9. Cf. *Hler IV,2* (GCS 6, 25,3-5 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN); V,15 (GCS 6, 45,18-20); he will also repeat the same interpretation and verse in *Hler XVI,10* (GCS 6, 141,23-25): *ἀλλ’ ἐν ἰδεῖς, ὡς πολλακίς ἐδείξαμεν, Ἰούδαν τροπικῶς λεγόμενον τὸν Χριστὸν, μήποτε ἁμαρτία Ἰούδα (Jer 17,1) ἡμῶν ἐστι τῶν πιστευόντων ἐπὶ τὸν Χριστὸν τὸν “ἐκ φυλῆς Ἰούδα” (Heb 7,14).*

of Judah not to make the same mistakes¹⁰. Origen then argues that Israel represents the Jews who have been abandoned and forsaken by God, while Judah represents the Christians coming from the pagan nations; however, they too ought to pay attention to the prophetic threats, which should be regarded as addressed to them:

If you comprehend these two peoples, one from Israel, the other from the pagan nations, look with me at the exile of Israel also with respect to the people of Israel. Note with me that it is written concerning that people: *I sent her away and I gave to her a bill of divorce* (Jer 3,8). [...] So, when he speaks first that “I sent away Israel due to her sins and I sent her into exile, but Judah did not turn back when she heard about what happened to Israel” (cf. Jer 3,7ff.), he speaks about our sins¹¹.

In this context, we can notice that the opposition between Israel and Judah justifies and strengthens Origen’s interpretation of the two nations, which he highlights as the fundamental elements in the salvation history, following Paul’s view¹². However, once the preacher recognizes a

10. Jer 3,8-11 (*Septuaginta. Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, ed. A. RAHLFS, I-II, Stuttgart, Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 91935): και εἶδον διότι περὶ πάντων ὧν κατελήμφθη ἐν οἷς ἐμοιχάτο ἡ κατοικία τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ ἐξαπέστειλα αὐτὴν καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ βιβλίον ἀποστασίου εἰς τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῆς· καὶ οὐκ ἐφοβήθη ἢ ἀσύνθετος Ἰουδα καὶ ἐπορεύθη καὶ ἐπόρνευσεν καὶ αὐτῇ. ⁹καὶ ἐγένετο εἰς οὐδὲν ἢ πορνεία αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐμοίχευσεν τὸ ξύλον καὶ τὸν λίθον. ¹⁰καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν τούτοις οὐκ ἐπεστράφη πρὸς με ἢ ἀσύνθετος Ἰουδα ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας αὐτῆς, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ ψεύδει. ¹¹καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς με Ἐδικαίωσεν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀσυνθέτου Ἰουδα.

11. *Hier* IV,2-4 (GCS 6, 24,17–26,9 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN; transl. SMITH [n. 7], pp. 33-35): Εἰ νοεῖς τοὺς δύο τούτους λαοὺς, τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ τὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἔθνῶν, ἴδε μοι τὴν μετοικίαν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ λαοῦ ἐκείνου τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ περὶ ἐκείνου νόει μοι γεγράφθαι· *Ἐξαπέσταλκα αὐτὴν καὶ ἔδωκα αὐτῇ βιβλίον ἀποστασίου* (Jer 3,8). [...] Ἐὰν οὖν λέγῃ ὡς πρῶτον ἐξαπέστειλα διὰ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα τὸν Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐξαπέστειλα εἰς μετοικίαν αὐτόν, ὁ δὲ Ἰούδας ἀκούων τὰ γενόμενα τῷ Ἰσραὴλ οὐκ ἐπέστρεψε, λέγει περὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἁμαρτημάτων.

12. The same distinction can also be found in *Hier* V,2 (GCS 6, 31,18-28 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN), while in *Hier* V,4 (GCS 6, 34,30–35,17) Origen mentions the remnant of Israel (cf. Rom 11,5) which will be saved after the pagan nations. On Origen’s interpretation of the role of Judaism in salvation history, see G. SGHERRI, *Chiesa e Sinagoga nell’opera di Origene* (Studia patristica mediolanensia, 13), Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1982; *Id., Giudaismo*, in A. MONACI CASTAGNO (ed.), *Origene. Dizionario: La cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, Roma, Città Nuova, 2000, 200-206. Significantly, a different interpretation of the relationship between Judah and Israel is given in *HPs*: the split of the kingdom of Israel from the kingdom of Judah is explained as a foretelling of the contemporary schismatic and heretical movements which departed from the main Church (symbolized by Jerusalem, as governed by the Davidic dynasty, David being a type of Christ); see *H77Ps* II,1-2 (GCS NF 19, 367,16–369,17 PERRONE); *H77Ps* IX,6 (GCS NF 19, 473,11-20); for a commentary on the “whole heresiological treatise” that Origen develops in *H77Ps* II, see L. PERRONE, *The Find of the Munich Codex: A Collection of 29 Homilies of Origen on the Psalms*, in

reference to the Church in the names Jerusalem and Judah¹³, it is both easy and useful for him to shift the interpretation from an ecclesiastical to a psychological-anthropological meaning: he does this by shifting from the image of the Church as a whole, to the single members who constitute it, laying the emphasis on personal responsibility, rather than on the role of the ecclesiastical community in history. In the sixth *Homily on Ezekiel* he says¹⁴: “Allegorically, this presents Jerusalem under the image of a newborn baby girl (cf. Ezekiel 16). But we should know that what is said about Jerusalem applies to all people in the Church. [...] For God calls all of us Jerusalem, we who at first were sinners”¹⁵. Thus, the message of the Scripture is addressed not only to the Church as a community, but also to every single member of it. More specifically, the Jerusalem so often admonished by God is the soul of every Christian:

History says that the name of that place had been Jebus, but afterwards the name changed and became *Jerusalem* (cf. Josh 18,28). The Children of the Hebrews say that Jebus is interpreted as “what has been trampled”. Jebus then, the soul which is trampled by hostile powers, has been changed, and has become *Jerusalem*, Vision of Peace¹⁶.

Thus, Jerusalem is considered in opposition not only with Israel and the Jews, but also with the countless evil forces of sin who strive to

A.-C. JACOBSEN (ed.), *Origeniana Undecima: Origen and Origenism in the History of Western Thought* (BETL, 279), Leuven, Peeters, 2016, 201-233, pp. 222-227.

13. One noteworthy exception seems to be in *Hier* XIII,3 (GCS 6, 104,22-24 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN; transl. SMITH [n. 7], p. 133), where he states: “And seeing that Jerusalem in Judea – by which, through synecdoche, it is possible to understand all of the Jews – turned away from Christ, because of this *you go back* (Jer 15,6)” (Καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἀπεστράφη ἡ Ἱερουσαλήμ ἢ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ τὸν Χριστόν, ἀφ’ ἧς συνεκδοχικῶς πάντα τοὺς Ἰουδαίους νοητέον, διὰ τοῦτο *ὀπίσω πορεύσῃ* [Jer 15,6]); however, in this case Origen is just highlighting and specifying the historical responsibility of the city for having rejected Christ, while God’s warnings are still valid for contemporary Christians.

14. The critical edition of *HEz* is GCS 33; Origenes Werke 8, ed. BAEHRENS (n. 7), pp. 318-454; see also the commented edition *Origène. Homélie sur Ézéchiël*, Introduction, traduction et notes par M. BORRET (SC, 352), Paris, Cerf, 1989. The translation of *HEz* is taken, with few adjustments, from *Origen. Homilies 1–14 on Ezekiel*, translation and introduction by T.P. SCHECK, New York – Mahwah, NJ, The Newman Press, 2010.

15. *HEz* VI,4 (GCS 33, 381,15-20 BAEHRENS; transl. SCHECK [n. 14], p. 89): *Allegorice inducit Hierusalem quasi puellam ab infantia genitam. Quae autem de Hierusalem dicuntur, sciamus ad omnes homines qui in Ecclesia sunt pertinere. Omnes enim, qui primum fuimus peccatores, Hierusalem vocamur a Deo.*

16. *Hier* XIII,2 (GCS 6, 103,18-22 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN; transl. SMITH [n. 7], p. 132): Ἡ ἱστορία λέγει, ὅτι τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου ἦν Ἰεβούς, δεύτερον δὲ μετέβαλε τὸ ὄνομα καὶ γέγονεν Ἱερουσαλήμ (cf. Josh 18,28). Ἰεβούς φασιν Ἑβραίων παῖδες ὅτι ἐρμηνεύεται Πεπατημένη. Ἰεβούς οὖν, ἡ Πεπατημένη ὑπὸ δυνάμεων ἀντικειμένων ψυχῇ, μεταβέβληται καὶ γέγονεν Ἱερουσαλήμ, Ὅρασις εἰρήνης. Another example can be found in *Hier* XIX,14 (GCS 6, 170,14–172,27 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN), along with the metaphor of the captivity.

conquer the city of the Christian's soul. Origen has plenty of room to play with the images of slavery and destruction in the prophetic books to depict the punishments which the sinners' soul will endure: "This [Ezek 14,21] indicates that we are Jerusalem, since we, when we sin, are indeed the Jerusalem that is being destroyed, but when we abide in the commands, we are called the Jerusalem that is being saved"¹⁷; and "Do not think that these things are said only to Jerusalem, and do not apply to each of us who are slaves to sins"¹⁸. Moreover, such an interpretation gives the Alexandrian room to play with the metaphor: when Origen depicts Jerusalem as the Church or as the Christian fighting against sin, he exploits the opposition between the inside (Jerusalem or Judah) and the outside (Babylon or Egypt). Here the land, rather than to represent the soul itself, represents the state which the soul either finds itself in, moves to, or escapes from: "Thus, as we began to say, the soul is always in some place with a name relatable to a land: just as the soul of the sinner is in *Babylon* (Jer 28[51],6), so conversely the soul of the just man is in *Judea*"¹⁹. Origen often develops this spatial metaphor when he wants to effectively explain to his public that moving to a specific place means proceeding on a correspondent spiritual path:

But if you sin, God's visitation will abandon you, and you will be handed over as a captive to Nebuchadnezzar, and having been handed over, you will be led to Babylon. For since your soul has been thrown into confusion by vice and disturbances, you will be led off into Babylon. For Babylon means "confusion" (cf. Gen 11,9). But if you again do penance and procure mercy from God through the conversion of a true heart, Ezra is sent to you, who leads you back and makes you build Jerusalem (cf. 1 Ezra 7,1-10)²⁰.

17. *HEz* V,3 (GCS 33, 374,7-11 BAEHRENS; transl. SCHECK [n. 14], p. 81): *Si autem et quattuor vindictas meas pessimas, romphaeam et famem et bestias pessimas et mortem immisero in Hierusalem (Ezek 14,21), nos indicans Hierusalem, quia peccantes quidem nos Hierusalem sumus quae destruitur, in praeceptis vero permanentes Hierusalem dicimur quae salvatur.*

18. *HEz* X,1 (GCS 33, 416,14-16 BAEHRENS; transl. SCHECK [n. 14], p. 128): *Neque putes ad Hierusalem tantum haec esse dicta et non ad singulos nostrum qui delictis tenemur obnoxii.*

19. *HierL* II,1 (GCS 33, 291,11-13 BAEHRENS; transl. SMITH [n. 7], p. 261): *Igitur, ut dicere coeperamus, semper anima in aliquo conuincupativo terrae loco est; et sicut peccatoris in Babylone (Jer 28 [51],6), sic econtrario iusti in Iudaea.* In this passage from *Jeremiah* (28[51],6; ed. RAHLFS) God urges his people to escape from Babylon in order to avoid the imminent destruction of the city: φεύγετε ἐκ μέσου Βαβυλῶνος καὶ ἀνασφύζετε ἕκαστος τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, καὶ μὴ ἀπορριφῆτε ἐν τῇ ἀδικίᾳ αὐτῆς, ὅτι καιρὸς ἐκδικήσεως αὐτῆς ἐστὶν παρὰ κυρίου, ἀνταπόδομα αὐτὸς ἀνταποδίδωσιν αὐτῇ.

20. *HEz* I,3 (GCS 33, 325,18-24 BAEHRENS; transl. SCHECK [n. 14], p. 31): *si autem peccaveris, derelinquet te visitatio Dei et traderis captivus Nabuchodonosor et traditus duceris in Babylonem. Cum enim confusa fuerit anima tua a vitiis et perturbationibus, abduceris in Babylonem, quoniam Babylon confusio interpretatur* (cf. Gen 11,9). *Et si*

This frequent remark is another significant element in Origen’s preaching, as it asserts his stance on free will in the ever-present potential for Christians to change, either by behaving or by misbehaving²¹.

II. THE HOLY LAND

The terms *ἀγία γῆ* and *terra sancta* rarely appear in the two collections here analyzed: it would be an anachronism to find them refer to a physical land considered worthy of pilgrimage, as already stated. In the few instances where the terms do appear, the explanations given for them are extremely interesting for our analysis. In the fourth *Homily on Jeremiah*, in a comment on the fact that the calling of the pagan nations has begun after Israel’s transgression, Origen asks: “Yet how does it happen that I who arose outside as a stranger to the so-called Holy Land now discourse concerning the *promises* (cf. Eph 2,12) of God, and believe in the God of the patriarchs Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and receive, by the grace of God, Jesus Christ who was foretold by the Prophets?”²². In naming the promised land the “so-called Holy Land”, Origen stresses the difference between the physical region God promised to give to Abraham and his descendants, and the spiritual realm which that promise actually symbolized²³.

rursum paenitentiam egeris et per conversionem veri cordis misericordiam a Deo impe-traveris, mittitur tibi Esdras qui te reducat et aedificare faciat Hierusalem (cf. 1 Ezra 7,1-10).

21. Other examples of moving or being led to a symbolic place as a consequence of one’s own behavior can be found in *Hier* XIX,14 (GCS 6, 171,19-27 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN); *HierL* I,2 (GCS 33, 309,9-13 BAEHRENS); *HEz* XII,2 (GCS 33, 434,14-435,19); *H77Ps* IV,2 (GCS NF 19, 391,14-15 PERRONE).

22. *Hier* IV,2 (GCS 6, 24,13-17 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN; transl. SMITH [n. 7], p. 33): πόθεν γὰρ ἐμοὶ τῷ ὄπουποτοῦν γενομένῳ ξένῳ τῆς λεγομένης ἁγίας γῆς, νῦν περὶ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν (cf. Eph 2,12) διαλέγεσθαι τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ πιστεύειν εἰς τὸν θεὸν τῶν πατριάρχων Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ, καὶ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν προκεκη-ρυγμένον ὑπὸ τῶν προφητῶν χάριτι θεοῦ παραδέχεσθαι;

23. See also *H75Ps* 1 (GCS NF 19, 280,1-9 PERRONE), where Origen refutes the Jews’ claim that, since they had inherited the land of Judea, the cult and worship of God only belonged to them: the absurdity of this allegation is proved by the very fact that even when Israel’s population was in exile from the Holy Land, they still managed to find a way to return to God (“Ὅτι μὲν γνωστὸς ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ὁ θεὸς [Ps 75,2a] γέγραπται, δῆλόν ἐστι· καὶ ὅτι Ἰουδαῖοι τὸν τόπον διηγούνται διὰ τὸ κεκληρῶσθαι αὐτοὺς τὴν χώραν ταύτην καὶ οἶεσθαι παρ’ αὐτοῖς μόνοις εἶναι τὴν θεοσέβειαν, φανερόν ἐστι. [...] Τί δὲ ὁπότε ἐξεληλύθησαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἁγίας γῆς καὶ ὄντες ἐν αἰχμαλωσίᾳ ἐπέστρεφον πρὸς θεόν, οὐκ ἦν ἄρα γνωστὸς αὐτοῖς ὁ θεός [Ps 75,2a];).

However, the terms for “Holy Land” occur often in *HEz XI* and *Hier VII*. Commenting the allegory of two eagles from *Ezekiel*²⁴, Origen observes:

“*And he gave it for a fertile field; he established it to be cared for near much water, and it sprang up and became a weak vine*” (Ezek 17,5-6). The people of God were truly weak in Babylon. That is why they were unable to sing the Lord’s song, saying: “*How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?*” (Ps 136,4). In fact, what had been planted in Babylon could not fail to be weak. How could that which had begun to be a Babylonian vine preserve its original strength? For it had produced no fruit in the Holy Land, and therefore when it was transferred by the eagle and came to the land of Canaan, it became a weak vine and small in stature. As long as it was in the Holy Land, it was a huge vine; but when it was transferred to the boundaries of sinners, it became small and weak. And you, therefore, the vine who is listening to me, if you want to be great, do not leave the boundaries of the Church, remain in the Holy Land, Jerusalem²⁵.

Origen later clarifies that God sometimes uses the devil, symbolized by Nebuchadnezzar, to punish sinners by transferring them to the land of the sinners²⁶: again, we have the metaphor of movement to a symbolic negative place as a consequence of committing sin. Ps 136,4, which stresses how difficult it is to overcome sin and praise God to obtain salvation, illustrates this dreadful situation both here and in *HierL II*: “It [our soul] is in *Babylon* (Jer 28 [51],6) when it is confounded, when it is disturbed, when devoid of peace it endures the war of the passions, when an uproar of malice rages around it [...]. For as long as anyone is in *Babylon* he cannot be saved. Even if he has *remembered* (cf. Ps 136,1) Jerusalem there, he mourns and says, *How will we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land?* (Ps 136,4)”²⁷.

24. See Ezekiel 17.

25. *HEz XI,4* (GCS 33, 430,8-20 BAEHRENS; transl. SCHECK [n. 14], p. 144): Et dedit illud in campum frondiferum, super aquam multam respiciendum constituit illud; et exortum est et factum est in vitem infirmam (Ezek 17,5-6). *Infirmatus est vere populus Dei in Babylone et ideo neque canticum Domini cantare poterat dicens: Quomodo cantabimus canticum Domini in terra aliena?* (Ps 136,4) *Revera non poterat infirma non esse quae plantata fuerat in Babylone. Quo pacto vires pristinas reservaret quae vitis Babylonia esse coepisset? Quae quia in sancta terra fructus non fecerat, ideo translata ab aquila et posita in terra Chanaan facta est in vitem infirmam et in pusillam statura. Quamdiu in sancta terra fuit, ingens vitis erat; quando vero translata est in fines peccatorum, et infirma et parva effecta est. Et tu igitur vitis quae me audis, si vis esse magna, noli exire de Ecclesiae finibus, permane in terra sancta Hierusalem.*

26. *HEz XI,5* (GCS 33, 431,4-5 BAEHRENS): *Iusserat enim Deus ut Istrahelitarum populus sub Nabuchodonosor iugum colla submitteret.*

27. *HierL II,1* (GCS 33, 290,14–291,2 BAEHRENS; transl. SMITH [n. 7], p. 260): *In Babylone (Jer 28[51],6) est, quando confunditur, quando turbatur, quando pace deserta bella sustinet passionum, quando tumultus malitiae circa eam fremit [...]. Donec enim*

The only other quote of Ps 136,4 in Origen’s works is, in fact, in *Hier* VII. Here Origen explains God’s words, “As you have forsaken me and served other gods in your land, you shall serve in a land not your own”²⁸, warning his public not to commit idolatry. After hinting at the fact that the passage may also refer to something deeper, namely, his doctrine of the souls’ fall, he wonders whether for us it is possible to worship God, who is stranger to sin, in our strange land:

And yet when we wish to worship the god stranger to the things of evil in this land of affliction, let us see what we do. We do not say, *How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?* (Ps 136,4) but, *How do we sing the Lord’s song not being in a land strange to him?* (Ps 136,4) We seek a place to sing the Lord’s song, a place to worship the Lord our God in a strange land. What then is this place? I have *found* this (cf. Bar 3,15). He came to this land bearing the body which saved, adopting *the body of sin* (Rom 6,6) *in the likeness of the flesh of sin* (Rom 8,3), so that in this place, through Christ Jesus who sojourned and *nullified* (cf. 1 Cor 11,24) *the ruler of this age* (cf. Jn 12,31) and nullified the sin, I can worship God here, and after this I will worship him in the Holy Land. For anyone who has worshipped idols in the Holy Land went to a strange land, anyone who has worshipped God in a strange land will go to the Holy Land in Christ Jesus, *to whom is the glory and the power for the ages. Amen* (1 Pet 4,11)²⁹.

quis in Babylone est, salvari non potest. Qui etsiamsi ibi recordatus fuerit (cf. Ps 136,1) *Hierusalem, ingemiscit et dicit: Quomodo cantabimus canticum Domini in terra aliena?* (Ps 136,4).

28. Jer 5,19 (ed. RAHLFS): Ἐν Ἀβυρρῶν ἐδουλεύσατε θεοῖς ἀλλοτριῶν ἐν τῇ γῆ ὑμῶν, οὕτως δουλεύσατε ἀλλοτριῶν ἐν γῆ οὐκ ὑμῶν.

29. *Hier* VII,3 (GCS 6, 54,20-35 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN; transl. SMITH [n. 7], p. 73): Καίτοιγε καὶ θέλοντες τὸν ἀλλότριον τῶν τῆς ἁμαρτίας πραγμάτων προσκυνεῖν θεὸν ἐν τῇ γῆ ταύτῃ τῆς κακώσεως, τί ποιοῦμεν ἴδωμεν. Οὐ λέγομεν· Πῶς ἄσωμεν τὴν ᾠδὴν κυρίου ἐπὶ γῆς ἀλλοτρίας; (Ps 136,4) ἀλλὰ· πῶς ἄσωμεν τὴν ᾠδὴν κυρίου οὐκ ἐπὶ γῆς ἀλλοτρίας τούτου; (Ps 136,4) Τόπον ζητοῦμεν τοῦ ἕδδεν τὴν ᾠδὴν κυρίου, τόπον τοῦ προσκυνεῖν κύριον τὸν θεὸν ἡμῶν ἐπὶ γῆς ἀλλοτρίας. Τίς οὖν ὁ τόπος; Εὗρον τοῦτον (cf. Bar 3,15)· ἦλθεν ἐπὶ ταύτην φορέσας σῶμα τὸ σώσαν, ἀναλαβὼν τὸ σῶμα τὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας (Rom 6,6) ἐν ὁμοιώματι σαρκὸς ἁμαρτίας (Rom 8,3), ἵν’ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ τόπῳ διὰ τὸν ἐπιδημήσαντα Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ καταργήσαντα (cf. 1 Cor 11,24) τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (cf. Jn 12,31) καὶ καταργήσαντα τὴν ἁμαρτίαν, δυναθῶ προσκυνῆσαι τὸν θεὸν ἐνθάδε καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο προσκυνήσω ἐν τῇ γῆ τῇ ἁγίᾳ. Εἰ γὰρ προσκυνήσας τις τὰ εἰδῶλα ἐν τῇ γῆ τῇ ἁγίᾳ ἀπελήλυθεν εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν ἀλλοτρίαν, προσκυνήσας τις τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῇ γῆ τῇ ἀλλοτρίᾳ ἀπελεύσεται ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν ἁγίαν ἐν γῆ τῇ ἀλλοτρίᾳ ἀπελεύσεται ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν ἁγίαν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ᾧ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν (1 Pet 4,11). I accept here the punctuation suggested by O. MUNNICH, *Le rôle de la citation dans l’écriture d’Origène. Étude des Homélies sur Jérémie*, in KACZMAREK – PIETRAS (eds.), *Origeniana Decima* (n. 5), 507-538, p. 535: ἐπὶ γῆς ἀλλοτρίας τούτου; Τόπον ζητοῦμεν, instead of ἐπὶ γῆς ἀλλοτρίας; Τούτου τόπον ζητοῦμεν (published in GCS 6, 54 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN and SC 232, 350 NAUTIN).

Olivier Munnich has thoroughly examined the refined technique used to propose this interpretation³⁰. Leveraging on the double meaning of πῶς (from Ps 136,4), both “how” and “where”, Origen harmonizes the scriptural quotes and finds a way to let Christians worship God even in a place hostile to their inner spiritual nature. The image of Christ as a “place” to be planted in can be found in other homilies³¹, but the image evoked here is slightly different and more elaborate: even though Origen does not say that Christ is the Holy Land, he states that Jesus with his incarnation has actually defied sin and is thus the only way for mankind to escape from it. In this sense, the Alexandrian probably still has in mind the condition of the fallen souls, and his talk of finally reaching the Holy Land could be a reference to the theory of *apokatastasis*; but to those of his audience who did not understand such allusions, he still gave a valid and accessible exegesis able to strengthen faith and offer even sinners a solution³².

III. CONCLUSIONS: ECHOES AND VARIATIONS

In addition to the passages here analyzed, worthy of note are two different but equally meaningful echoes of the peculiar image of Christ as the Holy Land, both in the *Homilies on the Psalms*. In *H73Ps* I, Origen argues that the destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent exile are punishments inflicted because of the sins the Jews committed; and that, in particular, the current dreary state of the abandoned city is the punishment for their rejection of Christ³³. He then, rather originally, links this

30. MUNNICH, *Le rôle de la citation* (n. 29), pp. 531-536.

31. Cf. *Hler* XVIII,5 (GCS 6, 157,5-7 KLOSTERMANN – NAUTIN); *HEz* III,8 (GCS 33, 358,7-10 BAEHRENS).

32. The fact that this distancing from God refers to the fall of the souls after their sin may be hinted at also in a passage from *H67Ps* II,2 (GCS NF 19, 203,3-14 PERRONE): Origen quotes Ps 136,1 to urge his audience to lament the “exile to Babylon” and their “being far from Jerusalem”, so as to comprehend that “while living in the body you are in exile from God” (θρηνηῶν δὲ σεαυτοῦ καὶ τὴν εἰς Βαβυλῶνα ἄφιξιν λέγων· ἐπὶ τῶν ποταμῶν Βαβυλῶνος, ἐκεῖ ἐκαθίσταμεν καὶ ἐκλάσσαμεν [Ps 136,1] καὶ τὰ λοιπά. [...] Ἐὰν οὖν θρηνηήσῃς σου τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἀποδημίαν καὶ νοήσῃς ὅτι ἐνδημῶν τῷ σώματι ἐκδημεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου (cf. 2 Cor 5,8), [καὶ] ποιῶθεις κατὰ θεὸν ἔση λίθος κρύσταλλος, λίθος τῶν περιβόλων, λίθος ἐκλεκτός, λίθος σάπφειρος καὶ ὅσοι ἄλλοι λίθοι τίμιοι εἶναι λέγονται, ἐξ ὧν συνέστηκεν ἡ ἐν οὐρανῷ Ἱερουσαλήμ [cf. Isa 54,11-12; Rev 21,19]).

33. *H73Ps* I,2 (GCS NF 19, 226,9-14 PERRONE): Ὁ δὲ ἦδη τι κἄν ἐπὶ ποσὸν βαθύτερον ὀρῶν ἐρεῖ αἴτιον τοῦ ἀποσθῆναι τὸν λαὸν τὸ τὸν Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀνηρῆσθαι ὑπ’ αὐτῶν. Καὶ γὰρ ἀληθῶς ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἀπώσατο ὁ θεὸς τὸν λαὸν μετὰ τὴν Χριστοῦ ἐπιδημίαν καὶ τὰ τετολημμένα κατ’ αὐτοῦ. Πότε γὰρ τοσούτῳ χρόνῳ πεπόνθασι;

theme to Adam’s transgression and states that “*as in Adam we all die and in Christ we are all made alive* (1 Cor 15,22), so in Adam we all were cast out and in Christ God embraces us all”³⁴. In this case, Christ is not explicitly presented metaphorically as a land to go back to or live in; rather, the image of God embracing mankind in his Son is developed in opposition to the two emblematic exiles of biblical history.

Conversely, commenting on Ps 75,3 (“and his place was made in peace and his dwelling place in Zion”)³⁵, Origen ironically invites the Jews to look for God’s place among the ruins of the earthly Jerusalem, while “we are instead seeking a place for the Lord, worthy of the Lord, a place regarding which has been written: *and his place was made in peace* (Ps 75,3)”³⁶. He resolves the *quaestio* with a quote from Ps 131,4-5: “I say that the holy man does not doze and does not give sleep to his eyes, until he finds in himself a place for the Lord (cf. Ps 131,4-5). Since, as the sinner gives a place to the devil, so the beautiful and good man gives a place to God who seek to dwell in us, and gives a place to Christ. [...] Therefore, we seek a place for the Lord in the hegemonic part of our soul”³⁷. The insistence on the terms τόπον ζητεῖν in this passage is reminiscent of *Hier* VII and the problem of how to worship God even

Πότε οὕτως ἠρημώθη Ἱερουσαλήμ; Πότε τοσοῦτω χρόνω τὸ θυσιαστήριον ἤρηψε, τῆς θυσίας καὶ τῶν λατρειῶν οὐκέτι προσφερομένων ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ;

34. *H73Ps* 1,2 (GCS NF 19, 226,15–227,1 PERRONE): Ἄλλος δὲ τις ἐρεῖ, νοήσας τὰ περὶ τὸν Ἀδάμ, ὅτι τὸν Ἀδάμ ἀπόσαστο διὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ ἀπόλουσιν καὶ ὥσπερ ἐν τῷ Ἀδάμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκομεν καὶ <ἐν> τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωοποιούμεθα (1 Cor 15,22), οὕτως ἐν τῷ Ἀδάμ πάντες ἀφκίσθημεν καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντας ἡμᾶς συλλαμβάνεται ὁ θεός. I have suggested my own translation for the passages from *HPs* here quoted; nonetheless, I want to thank professor Lorenzo Perrone for letting me consult his provisional Italian translation prepared for the publication of the work in Origen’s *Opera Omnia* series by Città Nuova Editrice.

35. Ps 75,3 (ed. RAHLFS): καὶ ἐγενήθη ἐν εἰρήνῃ ὁ τόπος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ κατοικητήριον αὐτοῦ ἐν Σιων.

36. *H75Ps* 2 (GCS NF 19, 281,14-17 PERRONE): Ἰουδαῖοι μὲν τόπον ζητεῖωσαν τοῦ θεοῦ, τὴν πεπτωκυῖαν, τὴν κάτω Ἱερουσαλήμ, περὶ ἧς εἶρηκεν· ἰδοὺ ἀφίεται ὑμῖν ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν (Mt 23,38). Ἡμεῖς δὲ ζητοῦμεν τόπον τῷ κυρίῳ, ἄξιον τοῦ κυρίου, περὶ οὗ γέγραπται· καὶ ἐγενήθη ἐν εἰρήνῃ ὁ τόπος αὐτοῦ (Ps 75,3).

37. *H75Ps* 2 (GCS NF 19, 282,2–283,1 PERRONE): Καὶ φημι ὅτι ὁ ἅγιος οὐ νυστάζει, οὐ δὲ δώσει ὕπνον τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς αὐτοῦ, ἕως οὐ εὔρη τόπον ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ κυρίῳ. Ὡς γὰρ ὁ ἁμαρτωλὸς δίδωσι τόπον τῷ διαβόλῳ, οὕτως ὁ καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθὸς δίδωσι τόπον τῷ θεῷ ζητοῦντι ἐνοικῆσαι ἡμῖν καὶ δίδωσι τόπον τῷ Χριστῷ. [...] Οὐκοῦν ἡμεῖς τόπον ζητοῦμεν τῷ κυρίῳ ἐν τῷ ἡγεμονικῷ ἡμῶν. Origen also quotes Lev 26,12; Isa 1,2; Rom 8,9; Jn 14,23 in order to prove that God dwells in the righteous and just man’s soul. He also resorts to the etymology of Zion as “observatory” (see *supra*, n. 6). See also *HEz* XII,2 (GCS 33, 435,17-19 BAEHRENS), where Origen says that the “vision of peace” symbolized by Jerusalem dwells in the highest part of the soul (*principali cordis*) of those who are not confounded by sin: *Si vero principali cordis tranquillitas, serenitas, pax fructum fecerit, sciamus quia Hierusalem versetur in ea; visio quippe pacis intrinsecus est.*

among sinful behaviors: in this case, however, the place worthy of God is located in the Christian's soul which accepts God and Christ in itself. Thus, Origen offers a specular image to the image of Christ as a land where one can properly honor the Lord, claiming that the only place worthy of God is to be found in one's own soul. The two interpretations, far from being contradictory, complete each other and help to shed light on the main idea which nourishes these allegories: Christ is the Holy Land one can resort to when in need of a return to God, but the very place to accept God and Christ in one's life must be found within oneself³⁸.

These variations show that, although Origen consistently allegorizes names of places and the Holy Land through the *Homilies on Jeremiah* and *on Ezekiel*, nonetheless he does so in an original way, exploiting all the possibilities offered by the spatial metaphor. His exegesis offers a rich outline of the relationship between God and Christians, and provides his audience with effective explanations, both attentive to the believers' spiritual growth and founded on the preacher's deep knowledge and analysis of the Bible.

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38. With regard to the theme of man as a place for the divine inhabitation, see C.L. ROSSETTI, "*Sei diventato Tempio di Dio*": *Il mistero del Tempio e dell'abitazione divina negli scritti di Origene* (Tesi Gregoriana: Teologia, 43), Roma, Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1998. The acceptance of the Logos in the soul of the believers is presented as the necessary premise for their final deification in *H81Ps* 1 (GCS NF 19, 509,1–513,3 PERRONE); see L. PERRONE, "*Et l'homme tout entier devient dieu*": *La déification selon Origène à la lumière des nouvelles Homélie sur les Psaumes*, in *Teologia y Vida* 58 (2017) 187-220.