

# Origen's Use of Platonic Texts: A Study on the Reception of Platonic Texts about the "Unspeakable"

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1. Introductory Remarks; 2. Phaedrus; 3. Theaetetus; 4. Philebus; 5. Timaeus; 6. Epistle II; 7. Epistle VII; 8. A Closing Remark about the Epistles II and VII; 9. Conclusions.

## 1. Introductory Remarks

Since the publication of the groundbreaking monograph by Giovanni Reale *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone alla luce delle "dottrine non scritte"* in the '80s of the last century<sup>1</sup> and the huge amount of contributions of the so called "Milan-Tübingen school"

- 1 Giovanni Reale, *Per una nuova interpretazione di Platone alla luce delle "dottrine non scritte"* (Il Pensiero Occidentale), Milan, 2003<sup>22</sup>. See also: Id., *I tre paradigmi storici nell'interpretazione di Platone e i fondamenti del nuovo paradigma*, Naples, 1991 (now in: *Verso una nuova immagine di Platone* [ed. Giovanni Reale; Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico 38], Milan, 1994, 3-41); Id., *Ruolo delle dottrine non scritte di Platone "intorno al Bene" nella «Repubblica» e nel «Filebo»*, Naples, 1991 (now in: *Verso una nuova immagine di Platone* [ed. Reale], 295-322); Id., "Precisazioni metodologiche sulle implicanze e sulle dimensioni storiche del nuovo paradigma ermeneutico nell'interpretazione di Platone," in *Rivista di Filosofia Neoscolastica* 84 (1992), 219-248; Id., *Autotestimonianze e rimandi dei dialoghi di Platone alle "dottrine non scritte"* (Il Pensiero Occidentale), Milan, 2008.
- 2 The main representative of the "Tübingen school" is H.J. Krämer. See his: *Platone e i fondamenti della metafisica. Saggio sulla teoria dei principi e sulle dottrine non scritte di Platone* (Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico 1), Milan, 1982. See also: Konrad Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre. Studien zur syste-*

the metaphysical theory of the first principles, namely, the One/Dyad and the ideal-mathematical entities, has been assumed as key to the understanding of Plato's *Dialogues*. This theory, that the first principles are neither to be spoken nor written, expressly referred to by Plato in *phaedr.* 174b.6-278e.3 and *ep. VII* 340b.1-345c.3 and later reported by Aristotle in *phys.* 209b.13-15 and *metaph.* A 987b, is supported by many testimonies in Plato's writings, fixed by G. Reale to 40.<sup>3</sup> However, the increase of interest in the "unwritten doctrines" has proved that the discourse around the unspeakable, or, more generally, the suprasensible, is the core teaching of Plato's thought. Though the *Dialogues* were very known to the early Christians, an inquiry about the reception of the "unwritten doctrines" in Christian literature in the early empire is discouraged by the almost complete lack of the aforesaid 40 testimonies in the early Christian writings. A case in point is Origen of Alexandria who is acquainted with the *Dialogues*, as it results from his 55 quotations *ad litteram* from Plato,<sup>4</sup> but he proves to use only a very few number of the 40 testimonies. Nevertheless, a large portion of the quotations from Plato in Origen orbits around the theory of the

*matischen und geschichtlichen Begründung der Wissenschaften in der Platonischen Schule*, Stuttgart, 1963; Thomas Alexander Szlezák, *Platon und die Schriftlichkeit der Philosophie. Interpretationen zu den frühen und mittleren Dialogen*, Berlin – New York, 1985. A detailed *resumé* of the research contributions of the "Milan school" is in: Reale, *Autotestimonianze e rimandi*, 245-259.

- 3 They are collected in: Reale, *Autotestimonianze e rimandi*, 323-515. The mentions of *phaedr.* 174b.6-278e.3 and *ep. VII* 340b.1-345c.3 are respectively at 265-293 and at 297-321.
- 4 A whole of the quotations from philosophical sources in Origen is in: Gilles Dorival, "L'apport d'Origène pour la connaissance de la philosophie grecque", in *Origeniana Quinta. Papers of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Origen Congress (Boston College, August 14<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup>, 1989)* (ed. Robert J. Daly; Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 105), Leuven, 1992, 189-216; Id., *s.v.* "Origène d'Alexandrie", in *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques. IV: De Labeo à Ovidius* (ed. Richard Goulet), Paris, 2005, 830-835. See also: Chiara Barilli, "Elementi di filosofia nei commenti di Origene ai *Salmi*", in *Adamantius* 20 (2014), 147-159.

unspeakable, that is, the suprasensible. The chief aim of this study is thus to study Origen's explicit quotations of the *Dialogues* concerning the unspeakable/suprasensible. In this regard, some remarks about the direct and indirect transmission of the philosophical texts, including Plato, in the early imperial era contemporary to the early Christianity are requested.

In the period from the I century BC to the III century AD the first-hand knowledge of the classical philosophical texts is urged by the spread of the exegetical activity around the founders of the main philosophical schools, Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus,<sup>5</sup> and the extensive circulation of the continuous commentaries to their works.<sup>6</sup> The extant textual documentation about the exegetical activity in the school of Aristotle, from Andronicus of Rhodes to Alexander of Aphrodisias, is the broadest,<sup>7</sup> whereas the earliest continuous commentar-

- 5 For a general overview: Gábor Betegh, "The Transmission of Ancient Wisdom: Texts, Doxographies, Libraries", in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*. I (ed. Lloyd Gerson), Cambridge, 2010, 26-27. On the exegetical activity in the school of Epicurus: Michael Erler, "Philologia Medicans. Wie die Epikureer die Texte ihres Meisters lasen", in *Vermittlung und Tradierung von Wissen in der griechischen Kultur* (eds. Wolfgang Kullmann – Jochen Althoff; ScriptOralia 61), Tübingen, 1993, 281-303.
- 6 About the continuous commentaries from the early empire to the late antiquity see: Ilsetraut Hadot, "Le commentaire philosophique continue dans l'antiquité", in *Antiquité tardive* 5 (1997), 169-176.
- 7 On the exegetical activity of Andronicus: Paul Moraux, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias*. I: *Die Renaissance des Aristotelismus im I Jh. v. Chr.* (Peripatoi 5), Berlin – New York, 1973, 97-141. On the early commentators on Aristotle: Hans Gottschalk, "Aristotelian Philosophy in the Roman World from the Time of Cicero to the End of the Second Century AD", in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. II 36/2 (ed. Wolfgang Haase), Berlin, 1987, 1079-1174. On the exegetical activity of Alexander of Aphrodisias: Pierluigi Donini, "Alessandro di Afrodisia e i metodi dell'esegesi filosofica", in *Esegesi, parafrasi, compilazione in età tardoantica. Atti del Terzo Congresso dell'Associazione di Studi Tardoantichi* (ed. Claudio Moreschini),

ies to the *Dialogues* originate only with the Neoplatonists – except for the anonymous commentary to the *Theaetetus* –, although they imply an intense exegetical activity in the school of Plato in the early empire, about which we are informed especially by Porphyry.<sup>8</sup> In particular, the fragmentary data concerning the exegesis of the *Timaeus*<sup>9</sup> in the commentary tradition displays the hermeneutical tools and contents of the school of Plato in the early empire, e.g. the habit of reading Plato in light of Plato (that is, *Platonem ex Platone*),<sup>10</sup> the harmonizing of contradictory statements in Platonic corpus,<sup>11</sup> the strategy of emending the text as a defense against the accusation of inconsistency (ἄσυμφωνία) of Plato,<sup>12</sup> the application of an aporetic method based

Naples, 1995, 107-129 (now in: Id., *Commentary and Tradition. Aristotelianism, Platonism, and Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, [ed. Mauro Bonazzi; Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca et Byzantina 4], Berlin – New York, 2011, 87-106).

- 8 On the exegetical activity in the school of Plato in the early empire: Pierluigi Donini, “Testi e commenti, manuali e insegnamento: la forma sistematica e i metodi della filosofia postellenistica”, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. II 36/7 (ed. Wolfgang Haase), Berlin, 1994, 5056-5082 (now in: Id., *Commentary and Tradition* [ed. Bonazzi], 241-269); David Sedley, “Plato’s *Auctoritas* and the Rebirth of the Commentary Tradition”, in *Philosophia Togata. II: Plato and Aristotle at Rome* (eds. Jonathan Barnes – Miriam Griffin), Oxford, 1997, 110-129. About Porphyry as witness to the exegetical activity in the school of Plato in the early empire: *Der Platonismus in der Antike*. III (eds. Heinrich Dörrie – Matthias Baltes), Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt, 1993, 171.
- 9 On this: Franco Ferrari, “Struttura e funzione dell’esegesi testuale nel medioplatonismo: il caso del *Timeo*”, in *Athenaeum. Studi di Letteratura e Storia dell’Antichità* 89/2 (2001), 525-574.
- 10 For instance: Procl., in *Plat. theol.* I 2 (10 Saffrey/Westerink).
- 11 Two examples are: Plut., *de anim. procreat.* 8-9 (198-208 Cherniss); Severus ap. Eus., *PE* XIII 17, 1-6 (SC 307, 424-426).
- 12 This strategy has been very extensively studied; see: John Whittaker, “*Timaeus* 27d 5 ff”, in *Phoenix* 23/2 (1969), 181-185; Id., “Textual Comments on *Timaeus* 27c-d”, in *Phoenix* 27/4 (1973), 387-391; Ferrari, “Struttura e funzione dell’esegesi testuale”, 540-549. For the occurrence of the *variatio* in Middle Platonism: John Whittaker, “The Value of Indirect Tradition in the Establishment of Greek Phi-

on the scheme “problem/solution” (πρόβλημα καὶ λύσις).<sup>13</sup>

The indirect transmission of the classical texts also plays a significant role in the reception of ancient philosophy in the early Christianity.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the doxographical sources allow the early Christians easier access to ancient philosophy, since they give an overview of the most important doctrines put forward by philosophers, either in the form of a small portrait of a philosopher's main ideas, e.g. Diogenes Laërtius, or as a series of opinions held by more than one thinker on a single topic, e.g. Aëtius. An exemplary case of the influence of the doxographical tradition on the early Christians is the account of ancient philosophers in the book I of Ps.-Hippolytus' *Elenchos*, which passes down to us both the same materials as Aëtius' and additional materials from another doxographical source, maybe Eudorus of Alexandria.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the influence of the doxographical tradition on the early Christians and the occurrence of doxographical data in the authors of the so called “school of Alexandria”, Philo and Clement,<sup>16</sup>

losophical Texts or the Art of Misquotation”, in *Editing Greek and Latin Texts. Papers Given at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference on Editorial Problems (University of Toronto, November 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>, 1987)* (ed. John Grant), New York, 1989, 63-95; Adriano Gioè, “Aspetti dell'esegesi medioplatonica: la manipolazione e l'adattamento delle citazioni”, in *Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche* 7/2 (1996), 287-309. For the occurrence of this strategy among the Peripateticians: Donini, “Testi e commenti, manuali e insegnamento”, 5045-5056 (now in: Id., *Commentary and Tradition* [ed. Bonazzi], 230-241).

13 As it has been stressed by: Ferrari, “Struttura e funzione dell'esegesi testuale”, 552-558.

14 For a general overview see, once again, Betegh, “The Transmission of Ancient Wisdom”, 33-38.

15 As it has been pointed out by: Jaap Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context. Hippolytus' Elenchos as a Source for Greek Philosophy* (Philosophia Antiqua 56), Leiden – New York – Köln, 1992, 243-316 and 278. See also: Donini, “Testi e commento, manuali e insegnamento”, 5070 (now in: Id., *Commentary and Tradition* [ed. Bonazzi], 266-267).

16 On this: Jaap Mansfeld, “Heraclitus, Empedokles, and Others in a Middle

suggest that Origen's knowledge of the ancient philosophy also depends upon second-hand sources.

Given that Origen's access to the classical philosophical texts is first- and second-hand, this study aims at focusing on his use of Plato's texts about the unspeakable/suprasensible. Furthermore, Origen's use of Plato's texts will be explored in light of the use of them in the philosophical debates in the early empire. In particular, the texts about the unspeakable from the *Dialogues* quoted by Origen are the following: 4 from *Phaedrus*, 1 from *Theaetetus*, 3 from *Philebus*, 1 from *Timaeus*, 1 from the *Epistle II* and 5 from the *Epistle VII*.

## 2. Phaedrus

As regards *Phaedrus*, among the *Dialogues* it is the most quoted in Origen's writings, since it occurs 15 times. We shall focus on only 4 of them. The first is in *c.Cels.* VI 19 (1), in which the Alexandrine refers to *phaedr.* 247c.3-8, that is the following:

Platonist Cento in Philo of Alexandria", in *Vigiliae Christianae* 39/2 (1985), 131-156; Id., *Heresiography in Context*, 312-315. About the notion of the "school of Alexandria" see: Annewies van den Hoek, "The Catechetical School of Early Christian Alexandria and Its Philonic Heritage", in *Harvard Theological Review* 90/1 (1997), 59-87.

Τὸν δὲ ὑπερουράνιον τόπον οὔτε τις ὕμνησέπω τῶν τῆδε ποιητῆς οὔτε ποτὲ ὑμνήσει κατ'ἀξίαν. Ἔχει δὲ ὧδε – τολμητέον γὰρ οὖν τό γε ἀληθὲς εἰπεῖν, ἄλλως τε καὶ περὶ ἀληθείας λέγοντα – ἡ γὰρ ἀχρώματός τε καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀναφῆς οὐσία ὄντως οὐσα, ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῇ νῶ, περὶ ἣν τὸ τῆς ἀληθοῦς ἐπιστήμης γένος.

But the superheavenly region was never worthily sung by any earthly poet, nor will it ever be. It is, however, as I shall tell; for I must dare to speak the truth, especially as truth is my theme. For the colorless, formless, and intangible truly existing substance, with which all true knowledge is concerned, holds this region and is visible to the mind, the pilot of the soul.

As Claudio Moreschini has already argued,<sup>17</sup> although no continuous commentaries on this dialogue in the early empire have been passed down to us,<sup>18</sup> the Middle Platonists very frequently use this text with reference to the suprasensible substance, or to the transcendent godhead: for instance, in refusing the Aristotelian theory of an intermediate substance between the sensible and the suprasensible, Atticus recovers the Platonic distinction between the suprasensible, described by *phaedr.* 247c.3-8, and the sensible;<sup>19</sup> Alcinous' *Handbook* and Apuleius attribute to the highest god the predicates which Pla-

17 Claudio Moreschini, "L'esegesi del *Fedro* e il medioplatonismo", in *KOINΩNIA* 14/1 (1990), 29-39. With respect to the use of this dialogue in Middle Platonism, especially in Plutarch and Apuleius see: Id., "Elementi dell'esegesi del *Fedro* nella tarda antichità", in *Understanding the "Phaedrus": Proceedings of the Second Symposium Platonicum*. I (ed. Livio Rossetti), Sankt Augustin, 1992, 191-205.

18 In the early empire the *Phaedrus* was accused of immorality; see: Ps.-Heracl., *alleg. hom.* 77-78 (102-104 Oelmann). A similar case was the *Symposium*; see: Phil., *de vit. contempl.* 57; 59-63 (120; 120-122 Daumas/Miquel); Gell., *noct. att.* I 9, 9 (60 Hosius).

19 Att. *ap. Eus.*, *PE XV* 7, 6 (SC 338, 276) = Att., fr. 5 (57 des Places).

to attributes to the superheavenly region.<sup>20</sup> With respect to this text, Origen uses *phaedr.* 247c.3-8 in contrast with Celsus, who accuses the Christians of misunderstanding Plato,<sup>21</sup> for they assume the existence of a superheavenly region in addition to the heaven of the Jews: the Alexandrine responds that what Plato expresses in *phaedr.* 247c.3-8 is anticipated by the Old Testament, e.g. *Ps.* 148(149):4-5, upon which not only Plato himself depends, but also Paul, in particular *2Cor.* 4:17-18 about the distinction between what «is seen and temporal», namely, the sensible, and what «is unseen and eternal», namely, the suprasensible.<sup>22</sup> This text is worth two observations: firstly, Origen emends, or quotes an emended version of *phaedr.* 247c.8, that is,  $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \acute{\omicron}\nu$  instead of  $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \eta\nu$ ,<sup>23</sup> so that the true knowledge is concerned with the mind, not with the suprasensible substance; secondly, the overlap of *2Cor.* 4:17-18 and *phaedr.* 247c.3-8 implies that Origen converts the Platonic difference of intelligible and sensible into the Peripatetic difference of suprasensible and sensible,<sup>24</sup> as well as in Atticus.

This identification of the suprasensible with what Plato calls the «superheavenly region» (*phaedr.* 247c.3) furthermore occurs in three cases (2, 3, 4). In the first case (2), in reply to Celsus who assumes the Christian doctrines of the blessed life and the communion with God as vain hopes, Origen considers them as originated from the doctrine of Pythagoras and Plato regarding the soul, that it is its nature to ascend to the vault of heaven and in the superheavenly region to behold the sights which are seen by the blessed spectators above: here

20 Alc., *didask.* X 165,5 (23 Whittaker); Apul., *apol.* 64 (72 Helm).

21 Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 19 (SC 147, 224-228).

22 Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 20 (SC 147, 228).

23 Carl Andresen (*Logos und Nomos. Die Polemik des Kelsos wider das Christentum* [Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte 30], Berlin, 1955, 157-158) argues that this emendation is to be attributed to Celsus, whereas Claudio Moreschini ("L'esegesi del Fedro", 34 and fn. 12) conjectures that it might be attributed to Origen.

24 See also: Orig., *Cct.* III 13, 9-15 (SC 376, 628-632).



Origen conflates *phaedr.* 247a.8-b.1 (ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπουράνιον ἀψίδα) with *phaedr.* 247c.3 and *phaed.* 111a.3 (θέαμα εὐδαιμόνων θεατῶν).<sup>25</sup> In the second case (3), in *c.Cels.* V 4 the angels are presented as bearing the supplications of men to the purest of the heavenly regions in the universe (ἐν τοῖς καθαρωτάτοις τοῦ κόσμου χωρίοις ἐπουρανίοις), or even to the superheavenly regions purer still (τοῖς τούτων καθαρωτέροις ὑπερουρανίοις), which reminds us of *phaedr.* 247c.3.<sup>26</sup> Finally (4), in order to explain which is the region out of the world to which the creation is destined Origen recovers the lemma «superheavenly region» (ἐπὶ τὸν ὑπερουράνιον [...] τόπον) from *phaedr.* 247c.3.<sup>27</sup> In sum, in light of these texts Origen derives from *phaedr.* 247a.8-c.8 not only the conception of the “supraheavenly region”, but also the distinction of it and the so called “heaven of the Jews”, or “vault of heaven” (*phaedr.* 247a.8-b.1), or “the purest of the heavenly regions”.<sup>28</sup> As André Méhat has already proved,<sup>29</sup> this distinction of the “superheavenly region” and the “vault of heaven” occurs in Gnostic literature,<sup>30</sup> especially in

25 Orig., *c.Cels.* III 80 (SC 136, 178).

26 Orig., *c.Cels.* V 4 (SC 147, 20). About the angels as bearing the supplications of men to God see: Orig., *c.Cels.* VIII 34 (SC 150, 248-250); *HLC.* XIII 5-6 (SC 87, 210-212).

27 Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 59 (SC 147, 326).

28 This formula also occurs in: Orig., *c.Cels.* I 20 (SC 132, 126); V 2 (SC 147, 18); VII 44 (SC 150, 118).

29 André Méhat, “Le «lieu supracéleste» de saint Justin à Origène”, in *Forma Futuri. Studi in onore del Cardinale Michele Pellegrino*, Turin, 1975, 282-294. This hypothesis has been recently shared by: Christoph Marksches, “Gott und Mensch nach Origenes. Einige wenige Beobachtungen zu einem großen Thema”, in *Weg und Weite. Festschrift für Karl Lehmann* (ed. Albert Raffelt), Freiburg, 2001, 98, fn. 8 (now in: Christoph Marksches, *Origenes und sein Erbe. Gesammelte Studien* [Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 160], Berlin, 2008, 92, fn. 8).

30 On this: Iren., *AH I* 15, 2 (SC 264, 238); I 21, 3 (SC 264, 300); III 10, 4 (SC 211, 126).

the texts from the Valentinian school:<sup>31</sup> the former means the Pleroma, or the perfect Ogdoad; the latter the Demiurge, or the Hebdomad.<sup>32</sup> This distinction moreover occurs in Justin and Clement,<sup>33</sup> who regard the “superheavenly region” as standing for either the Father or the Son-Logos.<sup>34</sup> Given that, with respect to *Gen.* 1:6 («And God said: “Let there be a vault between the waters etc.”») Origen interprets the “vault” as the suprasensible substance,<sup>35</sup> then the distinction between the superheavenly region and the vault of heaven implies the distinction between the Father and the Son, on the one hand, and the suprasensible substance, on the other.

### 3. Theaetetus

The *Theaetetus* is quoted twice by Origen. We shall focus on the quotation in *c.Cels.* IV 62 (5).<sup>36</sup> In response to Celsus’ statement that the generation of evils in the world is always the same, for the nature of all things is the same, Origen paraphrases it with *theaet.* 176a (ἀλλ’οὐτ’ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν [...] οὐτ’ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρῦσθαι,

31 See: Iren., *AHI* 5, 4 (SC 264, 84); II 17, 9 (SC 294, 170); II 28, 9 (SC 294, 292).

32 This distinction might have occurred also in the so called *Heavenly Dialogue*, mentioned by Celsus; see: Celsus *ap.* Orig., *c.Cels.* VIII 15 (SC 150, 206). On this see: Méhat, “Le «lieu supracéleste»”, 290.

33 Iustin., *dial. cum Tryph.* 56, 1 (161 Marcovich); Clem. Alex., *protr.* IV 56, 4 (SC 2, 120) – on the use of the *Phaedrus* in Clement’s *Protrepticus* see: George William Butterworth, “Clement of Alexandria’s *Protrepticus* and the *Phaedrus* of Plato”, in *The Classical Quarterly* 10/4 (1916), 198-205. See also: Clem. Alex., *strom.* V 3, 16, 3-4 (SC 278, 48-50).

34 Evidence of this is: Clem. Alex., *strom.* V 3, 16, 3-4 (SC 278, 48-50). On this: Méhat, “Le «lieu supracéleste»”, 291-292.

35 Orig., *HGen.* I 2: *ante omnia caelum dicitur factum id est omnis spiritalis substantia, super quam velut in throno quodam et sede Deus requiescit* (GCS n.F. XVII, 4.11-12 = Orig. VI).

36 Orig., *c.Cels.* IV 62 (SC 136, 338-340). The other occurrence of the *Theaetetus* is: Orig., *prin.* III 6, 1 (SC 268, 236).

τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης), that he does not quote *ad litteram*: ἀλλ'οὔτε τὰ κακὰ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀπολέσθαι δυνατόν οὔτε παρὰ θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἰδρῦσθαι. On closer inspection, Origen aims at underlying that Celsus claims a firm difference between god and men. Furthermore, though the Alexandrine quotes only a part of *theaet.* 176, in particular a.5-8, he proves to be acquainted with the complete text (καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς). The text in *theaet.* 176b.1-3 is one of the key-texts of the theory of the so called “assimilation to god” (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ) in Middle Platonism.<sup>37</sup> In fact, in *theaet.* 176b.1-3 the difference between god and men, based on the human participation at the evils, is reduced by the human chance to access the god through the virtues, especially justice, holiness, and wisdom.<sup>38</sup> This text is used, for instance, by Alcinous' *Handbook*, that associates it with other texts of Plato in support of the theory of the “assimilation to god”, as *resp.* 613a.7-b.1, *phaed.* 82a.10-b.2, *leg.* 715e.7-716a.1, and *phaedr.* 248a.1-2,<sup>39</sup> and highlights that this theory is related to the heavenly god, not to the superheavenly god, which is beyond the virtues, and by Apuleius, who considers the “assimilation to god”, expressed by *theaet.* 176b.1-3, as the human contemplation of god on basis of the primitive likeness of man to god.<sup>40</sup> The above data shed light on the use of *theaet.* 176 in the early empire: first of all, *theaet.* 176b.1-3 is used as basis for the theory of the “assimilation to god”, namely, in order to reduce the difference of god and men, as it results from Alcinous and Apulei-

37 An overview of this topic is: Claudio Moreschini, “La posizione di Apuleio e della scuola di Gaio nell'ambito del medioplatonismo”, in *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Lettere, Storia e Filosofia* 33/1-2 (1964), 25-28.

38 Plat., *theaet.* 176b.1-3. For a detailed analysis of this text in Plato: Salvatore Lavecchia, *Una via che conduce al divino. La «homoiosis theo» nella filosofia di Platone* (Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico; Studi e testi 101), Milan, 2006.

39 Alc., *didask.* XXVIII 181.19-41 (56-57 Whittaker).

40 Apul., *de Plat. et eius dog.* II 252-253 (136 Moreschini).

us; furthermore, the similarities between the aforementioned views of Alcinous and Apuleius and the compendium of Arius Didymus attest the use of *theaet.* 176 in the philosophical debates before the I century AD.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, such a use of *theaet.* 176 is attested in Aristotelian tradition in the early empire, e.g. Aspasius and Alexander of Aphrodisias.<sup>42</sup> The hitherto exploration of the use of *theaet.* 176 in the early empire allows to better understand Origen's use of it: as aforesaid, Origen paraphrases Celsus' view with *theaet.* 176a.5-8 and underscores that he supports the difference between god and men; then, he accuses Celsus of misunderstanding Plato's text, since *theaet.* 176a.5-8 is usually associated with 176b.1-3, in which the theory of the "assimilation to god" reduces the difference between god and men. In conclusion, Origen proves to use *theaet.* 176 in accordance with the hermeneutical habit of the Middle Platonists: 176a.5-8 is assumed to mean the difference of god and men, while 176b.1-3 supports the theory of the "assimilation to god".<sup>43</sup>

41 For the similarities between Arius Didymus and the above text of Alcinous – see *supra*, fn. 39 – see: Arius Didym. *ap. Stob., anth.* II 7, 3 (50 Wachsmuth). See also: Alc., *didask.* XXVIII 181.20 (56 Whittaker). The view quoted by Arius Didymus is ascribed to Antiochus of Ascalon by: Willy Theiler, *Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus*, Berlin, 1930, 53; this hypothesis is shared by: Moreschini, "La posizione di Apuleio e della scuola di Gaio", 25, fn. 24. For the similarities between Arius Didymus and the above text of Apuleius – see *supra*, fn. 40 – see: Arius Didym. *ap. Stob., anth.* II 7, 3 (45; 49 Wachsmuth); on this see: Moreschini, "La posizione di Apuleio e della scuola di Gaio", 27.

42 Aspas., *in eth. nic.* 1120a.34 (CAG XIX/1, 99.1-7); Alex. Aphr., *in anal. prior.* (*proem.*) (CAG II/1, 6.1-4).

43 About the theory of the "assimilation to god" in Origen: Hubert Merki, *Ὁμοίωσις θεῷ. Von der platonischen Angleichung an Gott zu Gottähnlichkeit bei Gregor von Nyssa*, Freiburg in der Schweiz, 1952, 60-64. See also: Katharina Comoth, "»Homoiosis« bei Platon und Origenes", in *Origeniana Septima. Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts. Beiträge des 7. Internationalen Origenes-Kolloquiums (August 25<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>, 1997, Hofgeismar und Marburg)* (eds. Wolfgang Bienert – Uwe Kühneweg; Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theolo-

#### 4. Philebus

Origen quotes two passages from this dialogue. *Phileb.* 12c.1-2: «My awe, Protarchus, in respect to the names of the gods is always beyond the greatest human fear» (τὸ δ'ἐμὸν δέος, ὃ Πρώταρχε, αἰεὶ πρὸς τὰ τῶν θεῶν ὀνόματα οὐκ ἔστι κατ'ἄνθρωπον) is quoted twice, in *c.Cels.* I 25: «My awe, Protarchus, about the names of the gods is no small one» (τὸ δ'ἐμὸν δέος, ὃ Πρώταρχε, περὶ τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν θεῶν οὐκ ὀλίγον) (6)<sup>44</sup> and in IV 48: «Indeed, my awe, Protarchus, about the names of the gods is so great» (τὸ γὰρ ἐμὸν δέος, ὃ Πρώταρχε, περὶ τὰ τῶν θεῶν ὀνόματα τοιόνδε ἐστίν) (7).<sup>45</sup> This text occurs in the discussion about the power of the divine names, in particular against Celsus' criticisms that the power of the formulae used by Jesus and the Christians originates from the demons<sup>46</sup> and no name can express the essence of God, that is beyond every name.<sup>47</sup> In this regard, Origen puts forward a long discussion about the nature of names, and summarizes the main philosophical views on it, *e.g.*, for Aristotle, they exist by convention (θέσει); for the Stoics and Epicurus, they exist by nature (φύσει).<sup>48</sup>

gicarum Lovaniensium 137), Leuven, 1999, 69-74. About the use of this text in the polemic against Celsus see: Johannes Arnold, *Der "Wahre Logos" des Kelsos. Eine Strukturanalyse* (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum; Ergänzungsband 39), Münster, 2016, 537-540.

44 Orig., *c.Cels.* I 25 (SC 132, 144).

45 Orig., *c.Cels.* IV 48 (SC 136, 308).

46 Orig., *c.Cels.* I 6 (SC 132, 90-92); I 28 (SC 132, 150-152). As Miroslav Šedina has already proved, this criticism derives from: Plat., *resp.* 364b-c; see: Miroslav Šedina, "Magical Power of Names in Origen's Polemic against Celsus", in *Listy filologické* 136/1-2 (2013), 8.

47 Orig., *c.Cels.* I 24 (SC 132, 134-136). On this see also: Phil., *vit. Moys.* I 75 (60 Arnaldez *et al.*); *de Abrah.* 51 (44 Gorez); Ioseph., *c. Ap.* II 167 (87 Reinach); Clem. Alex., *strom.* V 12, 82, 1 (SC 278, 160).

48 About Aristotelian view: Aristot., *de interpret.* 16a.19; 16a.27; on this: Orig., *EM* 46 (GCS II, 42.4-28 = Orig. I). About Stoic view: Diogenianus *ap. Eus.*, *PE* VI 8, 8 (SC 266, 186); Cicer., *de nat. deor.* III 24 (142-143 Ax). About Epi-

In contrast with Celsus, Origen responds that the names express the essence of things,<sup>49</sup> in particular the divine names are provided with such a power (*δύναμις*) that it is actualized in so far as they are uttered in a specific situation.<sup>50</sup> The Alexandrine thus uses *phileb.* 12c.1-2, in which Philebus insists on defining the pleasure “god”, as basis for his thesis that the names express the essence of things and the divine names are provided with a suprasensible power.<sup>51</sup> Since this conception of names as expression of the essence of things is attested in later Neoplatonists, e.g. Julianus, Proclus, and Damascius;<sup>52</sup> John Dillon has conjectured that Origen’s view on names is the conflation of Stoic and Platonic elements.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, the influence of Platonism on Origen’s theory of names has been recently underestimated by Miroslav Šedina who invokes some texts from Plato, as *crat.* 428e; 396a and *ep. VII* 343b, in which the names are said not to express the essence of things and argues that Origen’s conception of the names as expression of the essence does not originate with Plato.<sup>54</sup> Concerning the texts 6 and 7, three are the main conclusions: 1) Celsus’ claim, that the names

curus’ view: Epicur., fr. 335 (226 Usener).

49 See also: Orig., *Orat.* 24, 2 (GCS III, 353.22-354.17 = Orig. II).

50 See: Orig., *c.Cels.* I 24-25 (SC 132, 136-144).

51 See also: Orig., *Hlos.* XX, 1-2 *ap. Philoc.* XII, 1-2 (SC 302, 388-392).

52 Iulian., *or.* VII, 24 (87 Rochefort); Procl., *in crat.* 384d (11 Pasquali); *in crat.* 389b-c (25 Pasquali); Damasc., *in phileb.* 12c.1-2 (9 van Riel). On the doctrine of names in Neoplatonism: Maurus Hirschle, *Sprachphilosophie und Namensmagie im Neuplatonismus. Mit einem Exkurs zu ›Demokrit‹ B 142* (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 96), Meisenheim, 1979, 57-58.

53 John Dillon, “The Magical Power of Names in Origen and Later Platonism”, in *Origeniana Tertia. The Third International Colloque for Origen Studies (University of Manchester, September 7<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, 1981)* (eds. Richard Hanson – Henri Cruzel), Rome, 1985, 207-208.

54 Šedina, “Magical Power of Names”, 13-14, fn. 21. The influence of Jewish tradition on Origen’s theory of names has been stressed by: Naomi Janowitz, “Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius”, in *History of Religions* 30/4 (1991), 364-365.

do not express the essence of things, especially in case of the divine names, is in accordance with Plato's view; 2) Origen uses *phileb.* 12c.1-2 in an "essentialistic" fashion and he quotes it by memory, as it is confirmed by the variants (6 and 7); 3) the occurrence of this text in Neoplatonism implies that it is used in the debate about the nature of the names in the late empire, but it does not exclude that it is used also at the time of Origen.<sup>55</sup>

In *c.Cels.* VII 44 Origen recovers the formula «vestibule of the Good» (τὰ πρόθυρα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ) from *phileb.* 64c.1 (8), in which it means the suprasensible world.<sup>56</sup> First of all, the Alexandrine summarizes Celsus' theory of knowledge with this formula. In accordance with Middle Platonism,<sup>57</sup> Celsus considers God as the first principle, transcending the human language and thought.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, as it results also from Alcinous' *Handbook*,<sup>59</sup> the transcendence of God/first principle implies both that it is beyond any form of knowledge and that various forms of knowledge can access it. In particular,

- 55 Some references in Origen to the nature of names support this hypothesis: Orig., *HNum.* XXV 3, 1-2 (SC 461, 196-198); XXVII 5, 1 (SC 461, 290-292); XXVII 13, 1 (SC 461, 342-344); *Hlos.* XIII 2 (SC 71, 306-308); XIII 4 (SC 71, 310-312).
- 56 Orig., *c.Cels.* VII 44 (SC 150, 116). See also: Plat., *phileb.* 64b.7. On this: Maurizio Migliori, *L'uomo fra piacere, intelligenza e Bene. Commentario storico-filosofico al «Filebo» di Platone* (Temi metafisici e problemi del pensiero antico 28), Milan, 1993, 306-307.
- 57 Alc., *didask.* X 165.5-7 (23 Whittaker); Apul., *de Plat. et eius dog.* I 190 (92 Moreschini); Phil., *somn.* I 67 (50 Savinel); Max. Tyr., *diss.* II 10 (21 Trapp). On this see: Aldo Magris, "Platonismo e cristianesimo alla luce del *Contro Celso*", in *Discorsi di verità. Paganesimo, giudaismo e cristianesimo a confronto nel "Contro Celso"*. *Atti del II Convegno del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina* (ed. Lorenzo Perrone; *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 61), Rome, 1998, 54-55.
- 58 Celsus *ap.* Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 66 (SC 147, 344); VI 69 (SC 147, 350). On this see also: Moreschini, "La posizione di Apuleio e della scuola di Gaio", 43.
- 59 Alc., *didask.* X 165.16-34 (24-25 Whittaker).

Celsus lists four forms of knowledge: synthesis (σύνθεσις), analysis (ἀνάλυσις), analogy (ἀναλογία) and, finally, an ecstatic intuition, based on an «unspeakable power» (ἀρρήτω τινὶ δυνάμει).<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Origen's use of *phileb.* 64c.1 is associated with Celsus' theory of knowledge: in fact, the Alexandrine paraphrases Celsus' theory, that God/first principle is beyond any form of knowledge and, at the same time, the aforesaid forms of knowledge can get close to it, with the formula that we can access only the «vestibule of the Good».

### 5. Timaeus

Though this dialogue is quoted 7 times by Origen and 3 by Celsus, we shall now focus on the sole quotation in *c.Cels.* VII 42 (9).<sup>61</sup> In support of the thesis that God/first principle is «unnameable» (ἀκατανόμαστος), as aforesaid (8), Celsus quotes *tim.* 28c.3-5: «Now to discover the Maker and Father of this universe is a task indeed; and having discovered him, to declare him unto all men is a thing impossible» (τὸν μὲν οὖν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντὸς εὐρεῖν τε ἔργον καὶ εὐρόντα εἰς πάντας ἀδύνατον λέγειν). As Carl Andresen and Jean Daniélou have already proved,<sup>62</sup> this text is very frequently used

60 Celsus *ap.* Orig., *c.Cels.* VII 42 (SC 150, 110-112); VII 45 (SC 150, 122). On Celsus' notion of the «ecstatic intuition» see: Heinrich Dörrie, *Platonica minora*, München, 1976, 253; Moreschini, «La posizione di Apuleio e della scuola di Gaio», 45. Aldo Magris («Platonismo e cristianesimo», 56, fn. 25) highlights the similarities between Celsus and Plotinus with regard to the theory of knowledge; see: Plot., *enn.* V 3, 14; 17 (324-325; 329-331 Henry/Schwyzler).

61 Celsus *ap.* Orig., *c.Cels.* VII 42 (SC 150, 110). See also: VII 43 (SC 150, 114).

62 Andresen, *Logos und Nomos*, 132; Jean Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique aux II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Bibliothèque de théologie; Histoire des doctrines chrétiennes avant Nicée 2), Paris, 1961, 107-111. On this see also: Arthur Darby Nock, «The Exegesis of *Timaeus* 28c», in *Vigiliae Christianae* 16/2 (1962), 79-86.



by the Middle Platonists, e.g. Alcinous, Apuleius, and Atticus.<sup>63</sup> The Middle Platonists quote a variant of *tim.* 28c.3-5, which also occurs in Justin,<sup>64</sup> so that Carl Andresen has assumed the quotation of Justin as derived either from Alcinous or from a common doxographical source.<sup>65</sup> According to Jean Daniélou, the conjecture of a common doxographical source is supported by Athenagoras, who declares to derive *tim.* 28c.3-5 from a doxographical source, and by the occurrence of it in Stobaeus.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, it is worth to single out that Justin and Alcinous quote a variant of *tim.* 28c.3-5,<sup>67</sup> whereas Athenagoras and Stobaeus pass down to us the original version of *tim.* 28c.3-5. In light of the above data we can acknowledge two versions of *tim.* 28c.3-5 in the early empire: the original version, which is also transmitted by a doxographical source, as it results from Athenagoras and Stobaeus;<sup>68</sup> a variant of it, which is attested, for example, in Alcinous and Justin. Celsus quotes the original version of *tim.* 28c.3-5: this puts forward evidence concerning his acquaintance with Platonic dialogues.<sup>69</sup> Two

63 See respectively: Alc., *didask.* XXVII 179.35-37 (52-53 Whittaker); Apul., *de Plat. et eius dog.* I 190 (92 Moreschini); Att. *ap. Procl., in tim.* 28c (305 Diehl) = Att., fr. 12 (70-71 des Places). On basis of *tim.* 28c.3-5 Plato distinguishes the One/Good from the Demiurge, whereas Alcinous and Apuleius identify them; on the contrary see: Num. *ap. Eus., PE XI* 18, 1-2 (SC 292, 136-138) = Num., fr. 11 (53 des Places).

64 Justin., *apol.* II 10, 6 (SC 507, 350).

65 Carl Andresen, "Justin und der mittlere Platonismus", in *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 44/1 (1953), at 167-168. See also: Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique*, 109.

66 Athenag., *suppl.* 6, 2 (SC 379, 89); Stob., *anth.* II 1, 15 (6 Wachsmuth). On this: Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique*, 110.

67 This variant is also attested in: Ioseph., *c.Ap.* II 224 (98 Reinach).

68 The original version of *tim.* 28c-3-5 is also attested in: Clem. Alex., *protr.* VI 68, 1 (SC 2, 133); *strom.* V 12, 78, 1 (SC 278, 152). About the occurrence of ἐξειπεῖν instead of λέγειν: John Whittaker, "A Hellenistic Context for *John* 10,29", in *Vigiliae Christianae* 24/4 (1970), 253, fn. 44.

69 About the Middle Platonism of Celsus: Heinrich Dörrie, *Die platonische Theo-*

are the arguments of Origen in contrast with Celsus: firstly, in *tim.* 28c.3-5 Plato means that God is not to be understood by everyone, whereas Celsus misinterprets it in the sense that God is «unspeakable» (ἄρητος) and «unnameable» (ἀκατανόμαστος); secondly, Celsus considers God both «unspeakable» and «unnameable» and accessible through some forms of knowledge (8), whereas for the Christians the Father is «unspeakable» and «unnameable», as it clear from *2Cor.* 12:4 and *Mt.* 11:15, though he is accessible through the Son (*Col.* 1:15; *Io.* 14:8.9).<sup>70</sup> In addition, Origen combines the adjectives «unspeakable» and «unnameable»; in the early empire this combination originates with the combination of *tim.* 28c.3-5 and *ep.* VII 341c.5 (11 and 12).<sup>71</sup>

## 6. Epistle II

From the excerpts of the *True Discourse* Origen results to quote the *Epistle II* once (10).<sup>72</sup> In particular, Celsus accuses the Christians of misinterpreting *ep.* II 312e.1-313a.2 («Related to the King of all are all things, and for his sake they are, and of all things fair he is the

*logie des Kelsos in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit der christlichen Theologie*, Göttingen, 1967; Micheal Frede, “Celsus Philosophus Platonicus”, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt.* II 36/7 (ed. Wolfgang Haase), Berlin – New York, 1994, 5183-5213. See also the recently published contributions: Horacio E. Lona, *Die “Wahre Lehre” des Kelsos* (Kommentar zu frühchristlichen Apologeten 1), Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 2005, 45-48; Arnold, *Der “Wahre Logos” des Kelsos*, 5-20.

<sup>70</sup> Orig., *c.Cels.* VII 43 (SC 150, 114).

<sup>71</sup> Apul., *de Plat. et eius dog.* I 190 (92 Moreschini); Procl., *in tim.* 28c (312 Diehl); Basilides *ap.* Ps.-Hipp., *ref.* VII 26, 1 (GCS XXVI, 204.4 = Hipp. III); see also: Ps.-Hipp., *ref.* V 9, 1 (GCS XXVI, 98.2 = Hipp. III). See also: Phil., *somm.* I 67 (50 Savinel), as it has been noted by: Dörrie, *Die platonische Theologie des Kelsos*, 36. For an overview: John Whittaker, “Ἀρητος καὶ ἀκατανόμαστος”, in *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für H. Dörrie* (eds. Horst-Dieter Blume – Friedhelm Mann), Münster, 1983, 303-306.

<sup>72</sup> Celsus *ap.* Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 18 (SC 147, 222-224).

cause. And related to the Second are the second things and related to the Third the third») as referred to the superheavenly God. As it has already proved by Jean Daniélou,<sup>73</sup> three are the main uses of *ep. II 312e.1-313a.2* in the early empire: the first use focuses on the notion of “King of all”, conflating *ep. II 312e.1-2* and *tim. 28c*, as it occurs in text 10, in Clement, and Origen;<sup>74</sup> the second use understands Plato's text as referred to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, as it is attested in Justin, Athenagoras, and Clement;<sup>75</sup> the third use occurs in the Middle Platonists, who intend *ep. II 312e.1-313a.2* as related to the procession of gods, as in Numenius and Valentinus.<sup>76</sup> Jean Daniélou conjectures that the above three uses of *ep. II 312e.1-313a.2* originate from three different sources.<sup>77</sup> On closer inspection, this conjecture implies that the three uses are not to be overlapped. Some data – the use of the formula “First God”, the difference of God and the Demiurge, the governing principle of the universe –<sup>78</sup> persuade us that Celsus assumes

73 Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique*, 105-107. See also: Christoph Marksches, “Platons König oder Vater Jesu Christi? Drei Beispiele für die Rezeption eines griechischen Gottes-epithetons bei den Christen in den ersten Jahrhunderten und deren Vorgeschichte”, in *Königsherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult in Judentum, Urchristentum und in der hellenistischen Welt* (eds. Martin Hengel – Anna Maria Schwemer; Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 55), Tübingen, 1991, 386-439.

74 Clem. Alex., *protr.* VI 69, 1 (SC 2, 134); Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 19 (SC 147, 226).

75 Justin., *apol.* I 13, 3-4 (SC 507, 160-162); I 60, 6-7 (SC 507, 286); Athenag., *suppl.* 23, 7 (SC 379, 158); Clem. Alex., *strom.* V 14, 103, 1 (SC 278, 196).

76 Num. *ap. Eus.*, *PE XI* 18, 20-21 (SC 292, 144) = Num., fr. 15 (56 des Places); Ps.-Hipp., *ref.* VI 37, 6-7 (GCS XXVI, 167.9-14 = Hipp. III). About this use in Valentinus: Mansfeld, *Heresiography in Context*, 204-207. See also: Clem. Alex., *strom.* VII 2, 9, 3 (SC 428, 60). This use of Plato's *Epistle II* is also attested in: Plot., *enn.* I 8, 3 (107-108 Henry/Schwyzler); V 1, 8 (280 Henry/Schwyzler); VI 7, 42 (269-270 Henry/Schwyzler).

77 Daniélou, *Message évangélique et culture hellénistique*, 104-110.

78 On the formula “First God”: Celsus *ap. Orig.*, *c.Cels.* VI 60 (SC 147, 326); VI 61 (SC 147, 330); on the difference of God and the Demiurge: Celsus *ap. Orig.*,

the existence of many gods and he may understand *ep. II* 312e.1-313a.2 in light of this assumption. Celsus therefore may use Plato's text with reference both to the "King of all" and to the procession of gods. In conclusion, we are led to postulate that the Middle Platonists, e.g. Celsus, use *ep. II* 312e.1-313a.2 with reference to the procession of gods; the Christians, who are also acquainted with the Middle Platonic use of the text, intend it as denoting the Trinity.

### 7. Epistle VII

The *Epistle VII* is quoted 5 times by Celsus: the passage in *ep. VII* 341c.5-d.1 in which Plato says that the knowledge of the unspeakable One/Good derives from the continued application to the subject and communion therewith is quoted twice (11 and 12);<sup>79</sup> the declaration in *ep. VII* 341d.5-e.5 that the discourse around the Good is not to be written is quoted twice (13 and 14);<sup>80</sup> finally, Celsus also quotes *ep. VII* 342a.1-b.3 in which Plato states that the being (τὸ ὄν) is beyond the name, the definition, the image, and the knowledge (15).<sup>81</sup> The Alexandrine responds to each of Celsus' uses of Plato's *Epistle VII*: in contrast with the unspeakable nature of the One/Good (11 and 12), Origen says that men can access the unspeakable Father through the Son, as Paul declares (*Rm.* 1:18-23);<sup>82</sup> in contrast with the claim that the truth is not to be written (13 and 14), he reclaims the role of the Holy Scriptures as witnesses to the divine Word;<sup>83</sup> finally, with respect

*c.Cels.* V 52 (SC 147, 146); V 54 (SC 147, 152); on the governing principle of the universe: Celsus *ap. Orig.*, *c.Cels.* V 24 (SC 147, 72-74); VII 70 (SC 150, 336-338). For this see: Frede, "Celsus Philosophus Platonicus", at 5207-5208.

79 Celsus *ap. Orig.*, *c.Cels.* VI 3 (SC 147, 182-184); VI 10 (SC 147, 200).

80 Celsus *ap. Orig.*, *c.Cels.* VI 6 (SC 147, 190); VI 8 (SC 147, 194-196).

81 Celsus *ap. Orig.*, *c.Cels.* VI 9 (SC 147, 198-200).

82 Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 3-4 (SC 147, 184-188).

83 Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 7 (SC 147, 194).

to the content of *ep. VII* 342a.1-b.3 (15), he understands the “name” as John the Baptist (*Mt.* 3:3), the “definition” as the Logos (*Io.* 1:14), the “image” as Christ (*Col.* 1:15-16), and the “knowledge” as that which is among the mature (*1Cor.* 2:6).<sup>84</sup>

With respect to the above quotations of the *Epistle VII*, three are the main remarks that they are worth: firstly, they all converge on the conception of the One/Good (341d.5-e.5) or the being (342a.1-b.3) as unspeakable; secondly, they all belong to the so called “philosophical digression” (340a-345d), about which we shall return to in a while; finally, Celsus proves to ascribe this “philosophical digression” to Plato.<sup>85</sup> By the way, the content of this “philosophical digression” is the reason why scholars question the authenticity of the *Epistle VII*.<sup>86</sup> Without dealing with this controversial topic, we just underline that, though the corpus of Plato, that is, both the *Dialogues* and the *Epistles*, are known to the Middle Platonists in the early empire, the earliest authors who quote the *Epistle VII* are Numenius and Celsus, in the II century AD, as it has already been proved by Harrold Tarrant.<sup>87</sup> In sum, Celsus is persuaded to ascribe *ep. VII* 340a-345d to Plato,

84 Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 9 (SC 147, 200). On this see: Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 79 (SC 147, 378-380); *Clo.* VI 6, 31 (SC 157, 152). For this see also: Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la «connaissance mystique»* (Museum Lessianum; Section théologique 56), Bruges-Paris, 1961, 213-215; Id., *Origène et la philosophie* (Théologie 52), Paris, 1962, 56.

85 See: Celsus *ap.* Orig., *c.Cels.* VI 3 (SC 147, 182).

86 About this see: Ludwig Edelstein, *Plato's Seventh Letter* (Philosophia Antiqua 14), Leiden, 1966, 2. See also: Margherita Isnardi Parente, “Per l'interpretazione dell'*excursus* filosofico della *VII Epistola* platonica”, in *La Parola del Passato* 19 (1964), 241-290 (now in: Ead., *Filosofia e politica nelle “Lettere” di Platone*, Naples, 1970, 47-90), and: Ead., “La *VII Epistola* e Platone esoterico”, in *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 24 (1969), 416-431 (now in: Ead., *Filosofia e politica*, 149-167).

87 Harrold Tarrant, “Middle Platonism and the *Seventh Epistle*”, in *Phronesis* 28/1 (1983), 75-77. See: Num. *ap.* Eus., *PE* XI 18, 15-19 (SC 292, 142) = Num., fr. 14 (55-56 des Places).

since he does not see any contradiction between the doctrine of the unspeakable principle occurring in the “philosophical digression” and the other teachings of Plato, *e.g.* that of the unnameable Father/Maker (9).<sup>88</sup>

#### 8. A Closing Remark about the *Epistles II* and *VII*

The above overview of the quotations from the *Epistles II* and *VII* sheds light on the use of them in the early empire: in fact, the conflation of *ep. II* 312d.3-314c.7 (10) and of *ep. VII* 340a-345d (11, 12, 13, 14 and 15), both quoted by Celsus, is attested in the early imperial literature.<sup>89</sup> As Harrold Tarrant has pointed out, this conflation is based on some similarities between the aforementioned texts, in particular the polemic against writing (*ep. II* 312d-e, 314b-d; *ep. VII* 341b-c, 344c-d), the distinction of *ποῖόν τι*, “what”, and *τί*, “that” of the being (*ep. II* 312e-313a; *ep. VII* 342e-343c), the relationship between the teacher and the pupil (*ep. II* 313a-c; *ep. VII* 341b, 344d-345b), the occurrence of some common rhetorical features (*ep. II* 312e.1, 313a.3; *ep. VII* 342a.7, 343a.5). Therefore, Celsus’ use of the *Epistles II* and *VII* is consistent with the widespread use of them in the early empire literature.

#### 9. Conclusions

The hitherto investigation of Origen’s explicit quotations from the *Dialogues* concerning the “unspeakable” has concentrated both on

88 For the in-depth acquaintance of Celsus with the “philosophical digression”: Celsus *ap. Orig., c. Cels.* VII 45 (SC 150, 120-122) – on this: Frede, “Celsus Philosophus Platonicus”, 5204.

89 Iustin., *apol.* I 60, 7 (SC 507, 286); Clem. Alex., *strom.* V 14, 103, 1 (SC 278, 196). On this see: Tarrant, “Middle Platonism”, 89; John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism. 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, London, 1977, 313 (on Apuleius) and 367 (on Numenius).

the Alexandrine's uses of them in the polemic against Celsus and on the reception of them in the early imperial philosophical background. Without presuming to recall the above outcomes, we shall draw three short conclusions about Origen's access to Plato's texts:

1. given that Celsus' philosophical training is apparently Middle Platonic and he is extensively acquainted with the *Dialogues*, Origen implements the strategy to reject his criticisms against the Judeo-Christian Scriptures by denying the contradiction between Plato and the Scriptures (1, 2, 3 and 4);
2. Origen responds to Celsus' accusations against the Christians, based on the reference to texts from Plato, by pointing out that he misunderstands them and he recovers them in a sense which betrays the original meaning of Plato (5 and 9);
3. finally, the Alexandrine is so aware about Celsus' acquaintance with Plato's teachings and texts that he summarizes his view by quoting statements from the *Dialogues* (6, 7 and 8).



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