

## Music of the soul and music of the body in Origen's *Homilies on the Psalms*<sup>1</sup>

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1. Music in Origen; 2. The literal meaning of Scriptural texts relating to the psalms;
3. The non-literal meaning of Scriptural texts relating to the psalms

The discovery (2012) and publication (2015) of the Greek text of Origen's *Homilies on the Psalms* are notable events of the last years in patristic studies. These new texts deserve attention especially as they shed new light on various aspects of the Alexandrian master's oeuvre. Although Origen devoted special energies for interpreting the Psalms, the musical aspects of these psalms remained an issue of secondary importance for him. The cause of this fact may be the close relation of the musical tradition with pagan Greek culture. Thus, all musical topics are interpreted allegorically in the homilies. The exegetical questions of some texts of the Psalms 67 and 80 made indispensable for Origen to explain the meanings of the vocal and instrumental musical pieces. He connected the former to the theoretical life of the soul and the latter to the practice via body, and he aimed to show how the different steps of the Christian life correspond to the musical instruments mentioned in the Scripture.

- 1 I thank very much Joseph Trigg for allowing me to use freely the draft version of his English translation of Origen's *Homilies on the Psalms*. Project NKFI 128321 sponsored my research and participation in the conference.

## 1. Music in Origen

The discovery (2012) and publication (2015)<sup>2</sup> of the Greek text of Origen's *Homilies on the Psalms* are notable events of the last years in patristic studies. These new texts deserve attention especially as they shed new light on various aspects of the Alexandrian master's oeuvre. Although Origen devoted special energies to find the correct reading of the texts of the psalms and to interpret them in a variety of genres, the musical aspects of these psalms remained an issue of secondary importance for him<sup>3</sup>. If we compare the volume of the Origenian texts relating to music with that of Clement of Alexandria's, we find that Clement wrote much more on this topic. In the text-book entitled *Music in Early Christian Literature* made by James McKinnon, among the 398 items only 6 pieces are counted as Origenian proveniences, while 25 items belong to Clement of Alexandria<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, the *Homilies on the Psalms* remarkably complete the list of the important patristic musical texts delivered by McKinnon.

The cause of the Origenian indifference to the music may be the fact of the close relation of the musical tradition with pagan Greek culture. In *De principiis* and in the preface of the *Commentary on the Song of songs* "music" is mentioned as an issue of wisdom of this

- 2 *Origenes Werke XIII. Die neue Psalmenhomilien. Eine kritische Edition des Codex monacensis Graecus 314* (eds. Lorenzo Perrone – Marina Molin Pradel – Emanuela Prinzivalli – Antonio Cacciari), GCS Neue Folge 19, Berlin, München, Boston, 2015.
- 3 On the musical aspects see the recent study of Franz Xaver Risch, „Zur musikalischen *Hermeneia* den Psalmen nach Origenes und Eusebius" as Anhang to the all-important volume *Die Prologtexte zu den Psalmen von Origenes und Eusebius. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur Band 183* (eds. Cordula Bandt – Franz Xaver Risch – Barbara Villani, De Gruyter), Berlin – Boston, 2019.
- 4 Cambridge University Press, 1987. On Clement see Charles H. Cosgrove, "Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music," in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14/3 (2006), 255-82.

world<sup>5</sup>. Although the psalmist David possessed the art of the music, due to the connection between the words of μουσικός and Μούσαι, Origen does not want to call him simply as a “musician”.

The narrative says that he was a musician<sup>6</sup>, but why the word does not fit in with David? Perhaps the translators were being cautious because the word sounds like “Muses”, but the object of thought clearly is that David had received this skill and ability. I will speak in a more ordinary way without being cautious, since we perceive what music is. But David is often a model of our Saviour, and he made for himself an instrument of ten strings or of as many strings as the structure had, but the great musician David – the one “capable with the hand”, for this is how his name is translated, moving on from “David” to the one “capable with the hand”, concerning whom the prophets prophesied that he would rule the people<sup>7</sup> – went into life and constructed for himself a great many-stringed instrument for himself, the church. (*Hom. Ps 67,2,3 [206,5-15]*)

When Origen is trying to explain the higher meanings of the biblical texts relating to music, he notoriously connects their literal meanings to the pagan Greek education. In the *First Homily on Psalm 80* he responds to the criticism he has for the allegorical method used by him:

“Do not interpret figuratively and do not allegorize they say but keep to the wording!” Shall we actually to prepare a drum, such as they have

5 “This wisdom [sc. of this world] ... possesses in itself nothing by which it is able to perceive anything of divinity, or of the cause of the world, or of any higher matters whatsoever, or of the principles of the good and blessed life, but is such, for example, that it is wholly concerned with the arts of poetry or grammar or rhetoric or geometry or music, whit which medicine perhaps should also be counted.” *Princ III,3,2*. (Translated by John Behr, OECT, Oxford, 2017, 403) In *Comm. Cant (praef. 2, GCS 8, 72,23)* „occupation needful only for this present life” (Richard P. Lawson’s translation, ACW 26, 1957, 36 [*per studia praesenti vitae solum necessaria*]).

6 See 1Rg 16,17-23.

7 See 1Rg 9,17.

who are strangers to the faith? But how can we human beings, unless we have been taught either to play the cithara or to pluck on a harp, pluck on this instrument as those do who have been taught to do this since childhood, so that we may make ready a pleasant harp with cithara, since this is what the word says according to them? (*Hom. Ps* 80,1,4 [485,11-7])

Naturally, the target of this rejection is not the simple singing, audible earthly song or the psalms themselves but the musical art, the τέχνη μουσική with its technical subtleties produced by trained specialists and its profane or Greek mythological contents. Origen adopts and mentions the rhythmical singing praise of the God in *De oratione*<sup>8</sup>, and in *Contra Celsum* he testifies the right practice of singing hymns in the Christian community.

Celsus then says that we appear to worship the great God much more if we sing praise to Helios and Athena. We know that the reverse is the case. We address our hymns of praise to the supreme God alone and to His only-begotten Son, the divine Logos. And we sing praise to God and his only-begotten Son, as also do the sun, moon, and stars, and all the heavenly host. For all these form a divine choir and with just men sing the praise of the supreme God and His only-begotten Son<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, Origen does not use the word “music” in Christian context but he interprets the Scriptural terms ψαλμός, ψάλλειν, ὕμνος, ὕμνεῖν, ᾠδῆ, ᾄσμα which, according to the contexts, need positive

- 8 *Orat* 2,4. But this is also a higher meaning of the hymn: “For neither can our mind pray unless previously the Spirit prays, hearkening as it were to it, nor likewise can it sing and hymn the Father in Christ with rhythm, melody, measure and harmony, unless the *Spirit reaches everything, even the depths of the God* (1Cor 2,10), first praise and hymn him, whose *depths* he has searched, and so far as he is able, apprehended.” (Chadwick’s translation slightly modified, *Alexandrian Christianity. Selected Translation of Clement and Origen* (Eds. Henry Chadwick – J.E.L. Oulton), Louisville, Kentucky, 1954/2006, 242).
- 9 *Cels* 8,67, translated by Henry Chadwick (*Contra Celsum*, Cambridge, 1965<sup>2</sup>, 503).

or sometimes negative valuation<sup>10</sup>. In broader sense, all these terms mean singing hymns to the God<sup>11</sup>, and in narrow sense the words of ψαλμός, ψάλλειν, which are used exclusively in Jewish or Christian context, mean singing with instrumental accompaniment of the harp. In Origen's parlance there is no synchronous singing and instrumental music<sup>12</sup>.

Among the musical instruments ψαλτήριον has a certain priority. In the preface to the lost *Commentary on the Psalm 150* Origen sees a certain analogy between the facts, that David is the only prophet using musical instrument and that the shape of the harp is right in opposition of the curved form of the cithara. The resonance of the harp sounds from above while that of the cithara sounds from below<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. The literal meaning of Scriptural texts relating to the psalms

It seems that the Origenian homiletical interpretations of the texts relating to music are sometimes extemporizations because these explanations do not provide a coherent picture. Nevertheless, there is a certain homogeneity and coherence in these explanations because first Origen collects the main Scriptural texts relating to singing and psalmodizing, and on the basis of this collection he tries to give an interpretation of these texts. There are several unambiguous imperative in the Scripture for singing, and the most instructive items of them are the Psalm 80,2: *Take a psalm and give a drum and pleasant harp with cithara* (λάβετε ψαλμὸν καὶ δότε τύμπανον, ψαλτήριον

<sup>10</sup> On the use and context of these terms in old Christian tradition see A.A.R. Bastiaensen, „*Psalmi, hymni and cantica* in early Jewish-Christian tradition,” in *Studia Patristica XXI* (1989), 15-26.

<sup>11</sup> In *Hom. Ps36. 1,1* (117,6) the girls are singing psalms to David for his victory.

<sup>12</sup> Risch, „Zur musikalischen *Hermeneia* der Psalmen”, 303-304.

<sup>13</sup> Joannes Baptista Pitra, *Analecta sacra Spicilegio Solesmensi parata*, Tusculum, 1884, II, 432-433.

τερπνὸν μετὰ κιθάρας) and Paul's Letter to Ephesians 5,19: *be filled with the spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and psalmodizing in your hearts to the God* (πληροῦσθε ἐν πνεύματι, λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς ἐν ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικοῖς, ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν τῷ θεῷ). Interpreting these imperatives Origen also uses other texts, such as Col 3,16, 1Cor 14,15, Rev 8,7-8.

According to Origen, in its literal meaning, the function of the music, is recreation, ἀνεσις. As he says: "We know indeed that we all as human beings need relaxation and it does not do for our governing faculty (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν) to be constantly tense, nor that we should become fervent continually". (*Hom. Ps 67,2,2 [201,14-202,2]*) In his view, music is recommended by the Scripture primarily for the simple believers<sup>14</sup>, but Origen immediately mentions the figurative meaning of the instruction "sing to God":

The beginning of today's reading was a command. The text said as follows: *Sing to God, psalmodize to his name*<sup>15</sup>... I seek therefore whether it was the God of the Universe who commanded this, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit, because nothing else may be understood in *sing to God* than a modulation of the voice, which among us is done, rather, by musicians and those who have made it their business to train their voices both in projection and quality through some sort of voice exercise and voice training. I therefore seek to discover whether the word intends something only like that or intends this commandment first for the simpler as something useful to them (διὰ τοὺς ἀπλουστέρους χρησίμως αὐτοῖς) by some word, as we shall establish shortly and also, no less, a second meaning having a greatness worthy of the one commanding, which can be seen in *sing to God, psalmodize to his name*. (*Hom. Ps 67,2,2 [201,1-12]*)

14 Interpreting Psalm 102,1, Origen highlights the beneficial power of the praises included in the Scripture also in such cases when the mind is not able to understand them. *Hom. Josh 20,1*.

15 Ps 67,5.

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Music is produced by sound, which, according to Origen's wording, "in itself, as long as it comes through flesh, spirit and blood, is an impact of air", (αὕτη ἡ φωνὴ πληγὴ ἐστὶν ἀέρος) (*Hom. Ps* 67,2,3 [205,5-6]).

This special form of impact of air is the music of the body, but Origen already in this first level contrasts the pagan and Christian way of singing, in the similar way as in the case of the "love" here in this chapter, or in the preface of his *Commentary on the Song of songs*<sup>16</sup>. According to him, pagans' songs are connected to pagan superstition and bad passions:

Those outside the faith seek relaxation in disorderly pastimes and pouring themselves out in jollity and in bawdy songs and they take their own mental disturbances as themes in their songs. Sometimes they sing love songs, at other times paeans and hymns to the gods that accord with their own superstition, and yet again they take their own pain for themes, so that they sing dirges in accord with their melancholy; at other times they take marriages as their theme, from which come wedding songs. (*Hom. Ps* 67,2,2 [202,2-8])

Contrary to the pagan paeans, hymns and wedding songs, Christians' songs are directed to the God:

But in our case, the word wanted to divert the soul of believers from gentile songs toward better, godly ones, so that by the substitution of things seemingly of the same genre, but better, he might withdraw the soul from desires expressed in those things. And the word says, Do you want to sing and employ a song with an erotic theme? Learn that there is also a truly divine heavenly love in the Song of Songs. You want to sing wedding songs? Learn about that the divine marriage according to the gospel of the son of the king, a marriage to which you were invited<sup>17</sup>. Understand the bridegroom, identify the bride and do not just sing a song, but a special one; just as something can be a holy of holies, so sing

<sup>16</sup> *Comm. Cant (praef.* 2, GCS 8, 62-72).

<sup>17</sup> See Mt 22,2.

the Song of Songs. But does he want you to lament, with the odes and laments suitable to you when you were a gentile? Learn that now there is for you a blessedness of those who mourn<sup>18</sup>. Perceive, then, what you must lament, look at your Jerusalem, seek your own return there, say, lamenting, *how did the city sit alone, she that was full of peoples, ruling in the country districts, was subject to tribute. Weeping she wept in the night and her tears were on her cheeks*<sup>19</sup>; and so on, lamenting your own arrival in Babylon, saying, *on the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept*<sup>20</sup> and what follows. And see how your lamentation may be helpful to you, teaching you to seek the same fatherland and to comprehend the secrets concerning it and to lament until you return to the city constructed with precious stones, not inanimate ones, for you are to be *living stones constructed, a spiritual house, into a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*<sup>21</sup>. If then you will lament your exile from Jerusalem and perceive that being present in the body you are absent from the Lord<sup>22</sup>, having been made one by God you will be a crystal stone, a stone of the enclosure, a selected stone, a sapphire stone and whatever other precious stones are mentioned, of the ones that constitute the Jerusalem in heaven<sup>23</sup>, Turning around toward God and saying, *as our fathers created false idols*<sup>24</sup>, take up the hymns to the God of the Universe; transform the style of your singing and psalmodizing a stringed instrument toward something more reverent, more discrete, more helpful. (*Hom. Ps 67,2,2 [202,9-204,4]*)

18 See Lk 6,21.

19 Lam 1,1-2.

20 Ps 136,1.

21 1Pt 2,5.

22 2Cor 5,8.

23 See Is 54,11-2; Rev 21,19-20.

24 Jer 16,19.



3. The non-literal meaning of Scriptural texts relating to the psalms

Origen highlights the importance of the allegorical interpretation not only on the ground of the profane character of the music. The letter to Ephesians 5,19 speaks about singing and psalmodizing in the heart. According to Origen we cannot say what “singing in the heart” is according to the literal meaning. For this reason he introduces the concept of “mental voice” (νοητὴ φωνή).

If one relies on the wording in these passages, I do not know if it can be established how the heart sings in a way that would be distinct from just speaking... There is in us another voice besides the sensible voice, a mental one (ἕτερα φωνὴ παρὰ τὴν αἰσθητὴν φωνὴν νοητὴ), and knowing that this one is heard only by God, the word says: *The spirit shouting in our hearts*<sup>25</sup>. But perhaps if it is said, *with my voice I have shouted to God*<sup>26</sup>, the word is not speaking about the sensible voice... we have another voice and, so that I shall name it for what it is and persuade the hearer, I shall say that this is the voice of a pure mind (φωνὴ νοῦ καθαροῦ). I need, then, mental music bringing into rhythm the voice of the mind; I need spiritual, not sensible, voice practice. (*Hom. Ps 67,2,3 [204,13-206,4]*)

In this context, David is the prefiguration of the Saviour, who “went into life and constructed for himself a great many-stringed instrument for himself, the church. When for each of us this Word is bringing the mind into rhythm and applying order to the movements of the mind and to the voices of the mind as if it were music, we can keep the commandment that says *sing to the Lord*”. (*Hom. Ps 67,2,3 [206,14-8]*) Singing with mental voice obtains its final form in the perfect end with the holy angels. Origen connects this topic to the Book of Revelation. He says:

<sup>25</sup> Gal 4,6.

<sup>26</sup> Ps 3,5.

I think, because the whole purpose of the Revelation is spiritual, in which was written, *the one having ears, hear what the spirit says to the churches*<sup>27</sup> and the things concerning the song and psalms to clarify in a spiritual way, for all of us must sing to God, learning the spiritual music and wishing to sing to him. As now we hymn *in part* we sing *in part* when the complete comes, as we shall no longer *prophesy in part* and we shall no longer *know in part but know completely*<sup>28</sup>, so, with the holy angels, archangels, thrones, and lordships we shall hymn God. And this will be our work in the coming age, to sing with the heart, to see God with a pure heart and to do anything else of similar character. (*Hom. Ps* 67,2,3 [207,7-17])

Due to the allegorical meaning, the difference between body and soul, pagan and Christian music also appears at a higher level. According to Origen there is a difference between instrumental music and vocal music. The occasion of introducing this difference may be the idiosyncratic analysis of the line Ps 67,5 ἄσατε τῷ θεῷ, ψάλατε τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.

It is good to sing to God and this takes first place, but the second good thing is psalmodizing to his name, in which “God” differs from “his name,” where “singing” differs from “psalmodizing.” Therefore Scripture applies the greater expression, singing, to him, and the lesser expression, psalmodizing, not to “him” but to “his name.” And it does not say “sing to the name of the Lord” but “to God” and “psalmodize” not “to the Lord,” but “to his name.” But so that the difference between singing and psalmodizing may be understood, I come back to the sensible, for sensible things become the step for understanding greater things. Therefore the whole Scripture speaks in sensible terms, so that we may step up on them to spiritual things... Accordingly, singing requires the voice alone, but psalmodizing also requires an instrument. There is a certain instrument harp and there is a clearer singing, and the harp as an instrument is not able to return the clarity of the human voice, but

27 Rev 2,7.

28 1Cor 13,10.

the instrument, as it were, imitates to the extent that it can the clarity of the human voice. When in fact you want to arrive at understanding the difference between singing and psalmodizing, look at yourself, insofar as you are distinct from the body, and you perceive “singing.” Perceive also your body – for you know its rising up – and see “psalmodizing.” If in respect to our present subject matter, you were to request a different perspective on the distinction between singing and psalmodizing, we would say that, on the one hand, in those things you perceive correctly about God and in those things you discourse on God well, you sing to him, but in those things that you have to perform through the movements of the instrument, what is for you a spiritual harp – the body, I say – you psalmodize to God. (*Hom. Ps 67,2,4* [208,1-209,6])

Origen uses here the idea of the relation and hierarchy between theory and practice, which has an important role in his exegetical strategy. In relation of the level of the audible music and that of the spiritual music a Platonic view appears, according to which the paradigm possesses more value than the copy. In Origen's interpretation vocal music is the paradigm and instrumental music is a defective imitation of the singer's voice. Similarly, the difference between instrumental music and vocal music also echoes the Origenian different valuation of the figures of David and Solomon. There are several aspects of the figure of David: psalmist, prophet, wise but he is the king, man of practice, man of blood, he is “capable with the hand,” as his name is translated, and because of his sins he could not build the temple for God. He is the musician who plucks the harp. The peaceful Solomon, man of peace, the author of the songs, especially of the Song of songs, could achieve the construction of the temple for the God in Jerusalem which was initiated by David<sup>29</sup>.

29 *Comm. Jo VI,4-5*. According to Origen, David committed several sinful acts; despite the God's decision, he wanted to count the people (*Hom. Num 15,3*), he sinned against Urias for getting his wife (*Hom. Lev 15,3; Comm. Mt frg. 147; Philoc I,29*).

Therefore, the instrumental music, which was considered by the Christian tradition as representing a lower level in relation to the vocal music, is for Origen an act performed by the body and the form of life or the stage of life which presupposes duties, communities and sensible activities. In the following parts of the homily, Origen uses the two meanings of the word ὄργανον (“instrument” and “part of the body”) referring to the harmonious movement of the foot, hand, eye and mouth. The Christian theologian emphasises that psalmodizing to the name of the God is the world of the acts.

Until now, the Origenian distinction between vocal and instrumental music as difference of theory and practice has been known only via the catena-tradition. A longer piece of text from the preface of the *Commentary on the Psalm 150* found by Pitra speaks about this distinction. With performing fine acts as plucking the harp we do arrive to good practice without theory, and with singing songs we become able to contemplate the mystery of the truth<sup>30</sup>.

Fragment 69<sup>th</sup> of the *Commentary on Ephesians* (Eph 5,19) identifies spiritual hymns with theology, spiritual psalms with practice and spiritual songs with physics. Therefore, in this text hymns has a certain priority to the songs. These are the three books of Salomon containing the three parts of the true philosophy in the preface of the *Commentary on the Song of songs*.

The hymns proclaim the power and divinity of the God and the words *speaking in spiritual hymns* may refer to who knows how to theologize. Perhaps the words *speaking in spiritual psalms* refer to who understands

30 Εἰκος δὲ ἔχειν ἀναλογίαν, καὶ τὸ μόνον προφητῶν τὸν Δαυὶδ σὺν ὀργάνῳ πεπροφητεσκεῖναι, τῷ παρὰ μὲν Ἑλλεσι καλουμένῳ ψαλτηρίῳ, παρὰ δὲ Ἑβραίοις νάβλα. Ὅπερ μόνον τῶν ὀργάνων μουσικῶν ὀρθότατον εἶναι, οὐδὲν ἔχον ἐπικαμπές· καὶ μὴν οὐδὲ συνεργεῖται εἰς ἦχον ἐκ τῶν κάτω μερῶν, ὡς συμβαίνει ἐπὶ κιθάρας καὶ ἄλλων τινῶν, ἀλλ' ἄνωθεν· τῇ κιθάρῃ μὲν γὰρ καὶ τῇ λύρᾳ κάτωθεν ὁ χάλκος ὑπὸ χειρὸς πρὸς τὸ πληκτρον· τὸ ψαλτήριον δὲ τοῦτο τῶν ἀρμονικῶν ῥυθμῶν ἄνωθεν ἔχει τὰς ἀφορμὰς, ἵνα καὶ ἡμεῖς τὰ ἄνω ζητεῖν μελετῶμεν, καὶ μὴ τῇ ἡδονῇ τοῦ μέλους ἐπὶ τὰ τῆς σαρκὸς πάθη καταφερώμεθα. Pitra, *Analecta* II, 434.

the issues of the practice and knows how should act with our bodily organs as a harp. Otherwise, the words *speaking in spiritual songs* refer to who is able to discuss nature, the order of the world and the other creatures<sup>31</sup>.

Several musical metaphors have already been known for earlier writers but the early history of this idea of the identification of the relation between vocal music and instrumental music with theory and practice, is very obscure. It seems that Alexander Aphrodisias, Seneca and Plotinus allude to the difference of theoretical and practical mind with the musician who uses or not instrument rather vaguely<sup>32</sup>, but among them only the last section of the Plotinian treatise on the happiness shows a closer connection to Origen's idea. While the concept of hierarchy lacks in the texts of Seneca and Alexander Aphrodisias<sup>33</sup>, Plotinus uses the metaphor of instrumental music and vocal music for illustrating the difference between life cooperating with the body and the life according to the final goal.<sup>34</sup>

31 *Opere di Origene. Egesesi paolina. I testi frammentari* (ed. Francesco Pieri), Roma, 2009, 338.

32 Seneca, *Epist.* 87,14, Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De anima* 113,1; Plotinus, *Enn.* I,4,16.

33 Alexander deals here with the question of Aristotle's active, divine mind and potential mind without using the metaphor of musician and musical instrument. The point of his argument is, that both the divine and potential minds are necessary for human thinking. Seneca wants to show the difference between the artist who is able to do its work and the factual practice and performance of the artist with the simile of musician and the real performance using musical instrument. This is the difference of capacity and activity. There is no word of singing.

34 "So that some of his activities will contribute to *eudaimonia*, but others will not be for the sake of the end ... but for what is attached to him, which he will care for and put up with, while he is able, like a musician with a lyre, while he is able to use it, but if he is not able to use it he will exchange it for another, or he will abandon using the lyre, and he will give up the activity directed to it, having another task now not requiring a lyre, and he will ignore it lying nearby

The above Origenian interpretation is specified and modified in the *First homily on psalm 80*. The third line of the verse sounds in the following way: *Take a psalm and give a drum and pleasant harp with cithara* (λάβετε ψαλμὸν καὶ δότε τύμπανον, ψαλτήριον τερπνὸν μετὰ κιθάρας).

God delivers the psalm that is the capacity of the speech, knowledge and glorification of God. This is the “theology” (θεολογεῖν):

When, therefore, God’s grace gives me the ability to discourse about God, so as to be able from the discourse about God to understand God and to know him and to exalt his name and magnify him, it gives me a psalm. And it is a gift of Christ – who said: *No one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the son reveals him*<sup>35</sup> – and giving a psalm about our God is to reveal the Father. (*Hom. Ps 80,1,4* [485,18-486,2])

How can we requite this grace of God? With the theology<sup>36</sup> itself can we do this in a special form of the trichotomic anthropology. Origen says:

You are composed of three things – a spirit, a soul and a body – and the word asks of you complete consecration, so that you may be sanctified completely in spirit, soul and body according to what was said by the Apostle in Thessalonians<sup>37</sup>. Perhaps then you should understand *drum* to refer to the body, *harp* to refer to the spirit and *cithara* to refer to the soul. (*Hom. Ps 80,1,4* [486,5-9])

singing now without an instrument.” Translated by Kieran McGroarty. *Plotinus on eudaimonia. A Commentary on Ennead I.4.*, Oxford, 2006, 37. In his commentary McGroarty thinks that Plotinus has in mind Alexander’s quoted idea (p. 200), but this opinion seems to me implausible.

<sup>35</sup> Mt 11,27.

<sup>36</sup> On the Origenian use of the word “theology” and its special form of “singing” in the Homilies on the Psalms, see Lorenzo Perrone, *Dire Dieu chez Origène: La démarche théologique et ses présupposés spirituels*, in *Dire Dieu. Principes méthodologiques de l’écriture sur Dieu en patristique* (eds. Bernard Puderon – Anna Usacheva), *Théologie historique* 124, Beauchesne, 2017, 129-159, esp. 144-155.

<sup>37</sup> See 1Thess 5,23.

The sanctification of the body is the impassibility. Although Origen does not use here the word *apatheia*, the specification of the verse 1Thess 5,23 with the aid of Col 3,5, *puts to death the constituent parts on earth* means exactly this. In Origen's explanation the words of πάθος and ἐπιθυμία κακή are clearly connected to the imperative of the eradication of them.

Why is the body a drum? For this reason: a drum is wood covered by skin<sup>38</sup> that has been put to death and you also must, on the cross, put to death *your constituent parts upon earth*<sup>39</sup>. And in the Psalm 150 we are taught to praise God in various manners and it is said there: *Praise him, in the drum and dance*<sup>40</sup>. The person who puts to death the constituent parts on earth, praises God in the drum. Hear, if you like, the names of the constituent parts: “sexual misconduct, uncleanness, passion, bad desire and avarice. Whenever these things are put to death in you, they have been put death through the cross of Christ and your flesh is put to death, so that you arrive at the ability to say, *if we have died with him we shall also live with him*.”<sup>41</sup> When you do these things, you have made a drum. For to the extent that your flesh and the mind-set of your flesh are alive<sup>42</sup>, your flesh has not been put to death and you cannot hymn God. (*Hom. Ps* 80,1,4. [486,10-487,8])

Therefore, in the close meaning of this passage, putting to death the flesh and earthly members does not involve cessation of bodily activities but extinguishing of bad bodily passions belonging to the body and earthly life. Similarly, the harp-πνεῦμα does not refer to the divine spirit but the human spirit in the meaning of individual consciousness as Origen also highlights with these words: “But if I speak of spirit, I am speaking of the human spirit about which Paul says: *No*

38 See Gen 3,21 and *Hom. Lev* 6,2 on the “garments of skin”.

39 See Col 3,5.

40 Ps 150,4.

41 2Tim 2,11.

42 See Rom 8,6-7.

*one knows the things of a human being, if not the human spirit that is within*<sup>43</sup>. Finally, the *cithara* represents the mind (νοῦς), the highest part of the soul. Therefore, Christ demands us the harmony of the soul and mind. As Origen continues:

I consider that the order is well stated here: *give a drum* first then *a pleasant harp with a cithara*. For first we must concentrate on putting to death the parts of the body on earth, and to kill the sin in us, so that we may no longer be activated by sin. Then when sin is defeated and put to death and we have been empowered to give the drum, then we shall be empowered to make harmony of spirit with soul or, in the words of the Apostle, spirit with mind, so that I can say that *I will make music with the spirit, but I will also make music with the mind*<sup>44</sup>. On the one hand, I give the spirit, a harp, and, on the other, the soul or mind, a cithara. But I give both, *a pleasant harp with a cithara* to be joined with the drum. (*Hom. Ps 80,1,4 [487,9-19]*)

In the following passage Origen speaks about the trumpets. First, he connects the trumpets to the anthropological context but later abandons the world of human beings and ascends to the angelic form of life.

The wording resumes. He has given a psalm, he requests from me *a drum and a pleasant harp with a cithara*. After these things he commands me to sound a trumpet and to take up a great sound. For it is said that of all the sounds made by human beings for other human beings – sounds made by any instruments whatsoever – the greatest is the trumpet. And servants of music say that there is no resonance in music greater than that of the trumpet. Therefore it is employed in awakening the fierceness of those who make war and to prepare for their best efforts those who struggle over cities. The law of Moses employs trumpets in two manners: to mobilize Israel's armies so that they employ them for war and in the feasts of the Lord, as it is written in Numbers<sup>45</sup>. (*Hom. Ps 80,1,5 [488,2-11]*)

43 1Cor 2,11.

44 1Cor 14,15.

45 See Num 10,2-10.



Treating the topic of the trumpets in the feasts of the Lord, Origen deals with the questions of the mental music and the eschatological and angelic condition.

Do you want to see how great this spiritual trumpet is, even if the lovers of the letter do not want to? The angels also use a trumpet: *The trumpet will sound and the dead shall be made to arise incorruptible in Christ*<sup>46</sup>, and *the Lord himself in the word of command, in the voice of an archangel and in God's trumpet will descend from heaven*<sup>47</sup>. Actually, when we hear these things, do we suppose that there is a brass section in heaven or some trumpets on supply for the angels, so that the blessed angels may sound a trumpet and the dead may arise through the sound of the trumpet? Or are great and divine teachings and eloquence betokened by the sound of the trumpet. (*Hom. Ps 80,1,5 [489,1-9]*)

This interpretation of the trumpets seems to weaken the logical coherence of the Origenian account, according to which instrumental music is inferior to vocal music. It is difficult to think that the trumpeting of angels has less value than the song of the pure mind. But it should keep in mind that in the course of the allegorical explanations the analogy of human body and musical instrument is not a static identification. Origen varies and improvises according to the occasions.

The *Second homily on Psalm 80* shows again another aspect of the Origenian musical imagination., Here the human being itself is the instrument, lyre, cithara or harp which when it is well tuned shows the good condition of the human being, but if it is out of tune, this means the badness of the man. Unlike the previous interpretations, here the God is the musician, who accepts the tuned instrument and rejects the bad one.

<sup>46</sup> 1Cor 15,52.

<sup>47</sup> 1Thess 4,16.

Some musical instruments are tuned. Some are out of tune. A trained and skilled musical performer selects the lyre, the cithara or harp that is in tune, and, having chosen it, makes a powerful display of his musical skill. But he absolutely runs away head over heels, if the cithara, lyre or harp is out of tune, because such an instrument will embarrass him, giving the impression that the performing artist is lacking in skill. Why then mention this, if not because all human beings are, as it were, citharas, harps and lyres? And God, as an performing artist, seeks a lyre musically in tune, a cithara well tuned, a harp on which the strings have been tightened as they need to be, and God, after distinguishing where he can find such instruments, performs heavenly music. But if God lacks instruments to use, not by his own fault, but on account of a lack of such instruments, he is silent. (*Hom. Ps* 80,2,1 [496,1-13])

Tuned instruments are especially the prophets and the psalmist Asaph himself. Similarly, the connection between divine inspiration and prophecy is described by Plutarch<sup>48</sup>, Philo of Alexandria<sup>49</sup>, Pseudo-Justinus<sup>50</sup>, Athenagoras<sup>51</sup> and Clement of Alexandria<sup>52</sup> with the simile of musician and musical instrument. In his interpretation Origen emphasises the substantial role of the divine inspiration:

48 “The fact is that we do not make the prophetic art godless or irrational when we assign to it as its material the soul of a human being, and assign the spirit of inspiration and the exhalation as an instrument or plectrum for playing on it.” *De defectu oraculorum* 436F (translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, *Moralia* vol. V., LCL, 1936, 493).

49 “For a prophet has no utterance of his own, but all his utterance come from elsewhere. The wicked may never be the interpreter of God, so that no worthless person is inspired in the proper sense. This name only befits the wise, since he alone is the musical instrument of God, smitten and played by his invisible hand.” *Quis rerum divinarum heres* 259 (translated by F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, *Philo’s Work IV*, LCL, 1985, 417).

50 *Cohortatio ad graecos* 8,2 (PTS 32, Marcovich 33,9-15).

51 *Legatio pro christianis* 7,3 (PTS 31, Marcovich 35,15-20).

52 *Stromata* VI,9,88 (GCS II, 475-476).

*Music of the soul and music of the body in Origen's Homilies on the Psalms*

The blessed prophets became God's instruments. Just as someone hearing a lyre's tone and resonance, does not hear it, but the musician playing music on an instrument ready for his use, so someone hearing a prophet does not reckon that he is hearing a human being, but God, who has found a ready instrument and is making use of him as needed. (*Hom. Ps* 80,2,1 [496,14-18])

However, the prophet characterized as musical instrument is not a passive tool. Being well tuned depends on the human being. He is who makes himself ordered and harmonious instrument. But in sum, much more depends on the God. As Origen says:

I congratulate the instrument, because he has ordered himself and made himself ready for the approval of God, who is playing his own instruments. It is even possible for God to use the tongue of a just person as his own tongue and for God to use the mouth of a holy person, so *the mouth of the Lord has spoken these things*<sup>53</sup>.

With the aid of the motif of the "mouth", Origen sets together again the concepts of the musical instrument and the sense organ. Using the different meanings of the word ὄργανον – „musical instrument", "sense organ" and "tool", he finishes his explanation with the conclusion that we should dissolve in Christ:

And blessed is that person, who entirely becomes, in all the parts of the body, through the entire faculty of sensation, an instrument of Christ, an instrument of God's Word in such a way as to say: *I no longer live, but Christ lives in me*<sup>54</sup>.

Καὶ μακάριος ἐκεῖνος, ὅς ὅλος γίνεται κατὰ πάντα τὰ μέλη τοῦ σώματος, καθ' ὅλα τὰ αἰσθητήρια ὄργανον Χριστοῦ, ὄργανον τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θεοῦ ὥστε εἰπεῖν· ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός<sup>55</sup>.

53 See Is 40,5. *Hom. Ps* 80,2,1 (497,1-4).

54 Gal 2,20.

55 *Hom. Ps* 80,2,1 (497,15-17).