

II.
THE ALLEGORIC¹ USE OF *DANIEL* “TALES”

¹ About the use of this term in this work see *supra*, introduction, pp. 21-23.

7. THE “ALLEGORIC” APPROACH TO “TALES”

The “allegoric interpretation” of *Dn* “tales” represents a peripheral and limited district of the ancient reflection about the “book”, in comparison with the widespread outcomes ascribable to its typological assumption. A decisive element in this consistent disproportion is clearly represented by the fact that iconography performs – except for specific, possible exceptions² – an eminently typological vocation³, so that the allegoric interpretation can be substantially considered as a merely literary fact.

A preliminary overall view already reveals that under the definition of “allegoric reception” of “tales” it is possible to collect and gather different interpretative tendencies which deserve to be individually inspected⁴.

Moreover, except for peculiar cases⁵, the adoption of this method apparently characterizes a specific geographical and theological area of early Christianities, that is Alexandrian communities⁶. As it will be possible to notice, Clement seems to testify the very beginnings of this hermeneutical approach, that finds its fullest achievement in Origen’s work, on which the scarce outcomes coming from Eusebius substantially depend. In other words, the most interesting *data* concerning the allegoric fortune of “tales” can be derived from the study of Origen’s production, which will be assumed and analysed here in quality of “paradigmatic” example of this interpretative perspective.

² See *infra*, pp. 362-365.

³ For an overall view about the modality of iconographic interpretation see, in general, G. PELIZZARI 2013.

⁴ See also *supra*, introduction, pp. 21-23.

⁵ See *infra*, pp. 357-362.

⁶ About the characteristics of such Christian context see, in general, the recent study by A. LE BOULLUEC, *Alexandrie antique et chrétienne: Clément et Origène*, Paris 2012 (Collection des Études Augustiniennes. Séries Antiquité 178).

7.1. THE “PERIPHERAL USE” OF “TALES”: ORIGEN AS AN “INTERPRETATIVE PARADIGM”

The decisive importance of Origen in the definition of the guidelines of the “tales” allegoric reception can be easily explained in the light of this author’s role in early Christian hermeneutics. Lived in the first half of the 3rd century⁷, he is generally considered by critics as the “auteur emblématique de la lecture allégorisante”⁸ and as the great innovator who has the merit to have structured “la pensée théologique en un vaste système logique et coherent”⁹.

Before facing the specific aspect of Origen’s assumption of the “haggadic *Dn*”, it may be useful to introduce some coordinates concerning his method of biblical interpretation in a wide sense, with the objective to clarify, in a more conscious way, *where* the specificity of his approach should be concretely researched¹⁰.

It is first of all necessary to notice that Origen’s peculiarity does not have to be connected with the adoption of an interpretative perspective that can be defined as merely allegorical and not typological in the stricter sense: on the contrary, as A. LE BOULLUEC underlines, “la dimension temporelle et historique conférée à l’exégèse chrétienne de premiers siècles par la typologie paulinienne est

⁷ About the life of the author see P. HENNE, *Introduction à Origène: suivie d’une anthologie*, 2004 (Initiation aux Pères de l’Eglise), pp. 13-25. The study is recommended also for an introduction about Origen’s thought and works. The monographic works by J. DANIELOU, *Origène*, Paris 1941 and P. NAUTIN, *Origène. Sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris 1977, remain two valid references. About the author’s perspective on specific theological issues see G. DORIVAL-A. LE BOULLUEC (edd.) 1995; A. MONACI CASTAGNO, *Origene. Dizionario, la cultura il pensiero, le opere*, Roma 2000 and F. COCCHINI, *Origene. Teologo ed esegeta per una identità Cristiana*, 2006 (Primi secoli 1), with a final wide bibliography, pp. 311-324.

⁸ As A. LE BOULLUEC 2012, p. 445, underlines, “dans l’histoire de l’allégorie chrétienne, Paul et Origène ont l’un et l’autre un rôle fondateur; le premier, à l’aube du christianisme...introduit le terme en construisant une exégèse de la Bible qui prétend enraciner l’innovation dans la tradition sacrée; le second, dans la première moitié du 3^{ème} siècle...inaugure un système d’interprétation dans lequel l’allégorie a une fonction majeure, à tel point qu’il devient désormais l’auteur emblématique de la lecture allégorisante”. The work dedicates a section to the study of the relation between Paul and Origen, in which the character of the Alexandrian author’s exegesis emerges (pp. 445-465). See also A. LE BOULLUEC, *De Paul à Origène: continuité ou divergence?*, in G. DAHAN-R. GOULET (edd.) 2005, pp. 113-132 and F. COCCHINI 2006, p. 289-300, *Paolo lettore delle Scritture nell’interpretazione origeniana di 1Cor 15:25-28*.

⁹ P. HENNE 2004, p. 7.

¹⁰ K.J. TORJESEN, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis*, Berlin-New York 1986, p. 3, underlines, about the problematic approach to Origen’s exegesis, that “the characteristic problems raised in past centuries have not been satisfactorily resolved”. Even more so, in the present context the argument has to be faced in the most cautious way, so that only the useful elements to grasp the peculiarity of *Dn* reception in the author’s work will be outlined in their main traits.

constamment présent” in his work¹¹ and the author often “transforme l’ A.T. en Nouveau, à la lumière du Christ”¹². This consideration, valid for the entire production of the author, contextually stresses the specificity of his approach to the “tales”, since in this punctual context he does not seem to pursue such typological outcomes – at least not in the sense attributed to the term in the present research¹³ –, in favour of other interpretative processes.

The distinctive trait of Origen’s exegesis can be grasped in the better way considering the “intention” toward which his production tend and from which important elements concerning the hermeneutical method can be inferred and explained: the author actually approaches Scriptures with the objective to create “un système d’interprétation”¹⁴ capable to “dare fisionomia qualitativamente elevate alla nuova religione¹⁵, non risparmiandole alcun confronto, interno ed esterno”¹⁶. In other words, his final aim does not appear to be either exclusively or principally represented by the deep comprehension of Christian experience through the instrument of the Bible, but it rather coincides with a capillary and circumstantial operation of decoding of the same Scripture.

To reach his goal, the Alexandrian writer assumes First and New Testament in a systematic perspective “en étendant de façon homogène l’allégorie à l’ensemble du texte, à condition de bien «remettre à leur place» tous les détails”¹⁷. The theological presuppose of such operation – defined by Origen with the verb ἐξομαλίζειν¹⁸ – is represented by the idea, principally derived by rabbinic tradition, that “l’Écriture est parole de Dieu; tout y est donc digne de son auteur et utile à l’homme, même si certains passages doivent être interprétés allégoriquement”, which means that not a single word of the text has to be neglected nor underestimated¹⁹.

Exactly in order to assign a proper sense to every scriptural passage, Origen elaborates a system made of different interpretative levels, since “un mot, une phrase, un épisode peuvent souvent avoir

¹¹ A. LE BOULLUEC 2012, p. 457.

¹² I. RIGOLOT, *Le Mystère de l’unité des deux Testaments. Évangile unique et histoire en acte*, in G. DORIVAL-A. LE BOULLUEC (edd.) 1995, pp. 381-390.

¹³ See *supra*, introduction, pp. 21-23.

¹⁴ A. LE BOULLUEC 2012, p. 451. P. HENNE 2004, p. 8, defines it as a “véritable science”.

¹⁵ F. COCCHINI 2006, p. 6. Such necessity would spring from an historical context that “vede il coesistere di una pluralità di espressioni cristiane, di modalità di intendere e vivere la nuova fede, spesso in competizione fra loro ma anche volte in stretta relazione dialettica”.

¹⁶ According to the same F. COCCHINI 2006, p. 7, “il confronto interno è in prevalenza con gruppi gnostici...e poi con i «cristiani semplici», ovvero tradizionali, insofferenti dei faticosi discernimenti che di continuo proponeva loro per farli progredire nel cammino di fede e al tempo stesso individuale e di Chiesa. Il confronto esterno è con l’ambiente pagano...e con il giudaismo coevo, variegato in duplice tradizione alessandrina e palestinese, entrambe portatrici di comprensioni del divino e della sua rivelazione”.

¹⁷ A. LE BOULLUEC 2012, p. 253.

¹⁸ A. LE BOULLUEC 2012, p. 453.

¹⁹ P. HENNE 2004, pp. 46-47.

plusieurs significations”²⁰. The final outcome of such reflection resides in the definition of three approaches to the text: the “literal”, the “allegorical” and the “spiritual” one, which represent various phases in the same path of salvation history.

More than lingering on the specificity of this articulated system, which would be impossible to rebuild in this context, it seems fruitful to attract the attention on one of its principal implications, that emerges in the clearest way for the case of *Dn* “tales” reception: if in Latin-Western Christianities, the object of the interpretation is mainly represented by “biblical events”, assumed in their narrative and theological core and meaning, Origen focuses on each detail of the text without actually distinguishing between the “heart” of the narrations and other passages which are usually overlooked by early literature.

If in the definition of a typological link between Scriptures and Christian experiences a fundamental phase is represented by the operation of “selection” of certain passages to the detriment of others – and it especially happens in the iconographic elaboration of fixed “types” –, the process of ἐξομαλιζέειν seems to pursue an opposite direction, that one of the “systematic assumption”.

a) Origen and the “tales”: an overall view

After the short mention of some specific aspects of Origen’s exegesis, it becomes eventually possible to come to the real object of the present exposition, that is the circulation of *Dn* “tales” in the work of this author.

Concerning this field, two principal interpretative attitudes emerges as a sort of distinctive trait of the author:

- 1) a specific reception of *formulae* derived from the narrations;
- 2) an “allegoric-scriptural” use of the book, which is adopted to comment other biblical texts and passages;

Apart from these tendencies, Origen’s production develops also the most typical expression of the “tales” allegoric reading, which consists in assumption of the biblical protagonists as symbols and

²⁰ P. HENNE 2004, p. 64.

examples of Christian realities and virtues, though not in a perspective of “typological fulfilment”. In this field, the Alexandrian writer expresses an isolate voice in comparison with other authors: the former actually focuses on the protagonists of *Dn* as *figurae* of Christian wisdom in the context of speculations concerning the use of the Scriptures; the latter ones usually connect the characters from “tales” – and signally Susanna – with generic allusions to Christian virtues.

Before analysing each of the perspectives here mentioned, it seems important to preliminary stress the radical contraction of the space granted by the author to those biblical motifs which represent the core of the typological interpretation of “tales”.

An eloquent *datum* is the simple fact that among the 57 recurrences of the “tales”, the principal thematic core of *Dn* 3 – which means the story of the Hebrews’ exposition to flames – recurs only 6 times, 3 of which together with the allusion to the story of Daniel²¹ and the resting 3 times alone²². Half of these citations are specifically connected with the theme of the prayer in the furnace, in a work precisely devoted to prayer²³, and in only 2 cases the three Hebrews and Daniel are assumed as “martyrial themes”²⁴.

Moreover, the adoption of a typological interpretation comparable to that one attested in Latin context is eminently ascribable to the case of *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* 33, in which the prophet and his companions are introduced as types of the community members in time of persecution²⁵.

²¹ These texts are Origenes, *Exhortatio ad martyrium* 33, see *infra*, n. 25; *De Oratione*, ed. P. KOETSCHAU, GCS 3, pp. 325-329; pp. 337-338; 13:2-4; 16:3.

²² Origenes, *De Oratione*, ed. P. KOETSCHAU, GCS 3, pp. 331-332; 14:4; *Fragmenta e catenis in Proverbia*, ed. P. MIGNE, PG 17, pp. 196-197; 16; *Commentarii in Romanos*, ed. T. HEITHE, FC 2/2, pp. 284-287; 4:10. For an introduction about Origen’s reception of Paul see, among the others, F. COCCHINI, *Il Paolo di Origene. Contributo alla storia della ricezione delle epistole paoline nel III secolo*, Roma 1992 (Verba Seniorum 11), in part. pp. 78-81 about *Epistula ad Romanos*.

²³ Origenes, *De Oratione*, ed. P. KOETSCHAU, GCS 3, pp. 325-329; 331-332; 337-338; 13:2-4; 14:4; 16:3.

²⁴ It happens in *Commentarii in Romanos* 4:10 and *Exhortatio ad Martyrium* 33.

²⁵ Origenes, *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*, P. KOETSCHAU, GCS 2, pp. 28-29; 33. 33. Οὐ πάλαι μόνον ἴστη τὴν “χρυσὴ εἰκόνα” Ναβουχοδονόσορ οὐδὲ τότε μόνον ἠπειλεῖ τῷ Ἀνανία καὶ Ἀζαρία καὶ Μισαήλ, εἰ μὴ προσκυνήσαιεν, ἐμβαλεῖν αὐτοὺς “εἰς τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός”, ἀλλὰ καὶ νῦν ὁ Ναβουχοδονόσορ τὰ αὐτὰ λέγει ἡμῖν τοῖς περατικοῖς καὶ ἀληθινοῖς Ἑβραίοις. ἀλλ’ ἡμεῖς ἵνα δρόσου οὐρανοῦ περαθῶμεν σβεννουούσης πᾶν πῦρ ἀφ’ ἡμῶν καὶ καταφυχούσης ἡμῶν τὸ ἡγεμονικόν, τοὺς ἱεροὺς ἐκείνους μιμησώμεθα, μὴ ποτε καὶ νῦν ὁ Ἄμᾶν θέλῃ τοὺς Μαρδοχαίους ὑμᾶς προσκυνήσαι αὐτῷ, ἀλλ’ ὑμεῖς εἶπατε· οὐ θήσω “δόξαν ἀνθρώπων ὑπεράνω δόξης θεοῦ” Ἰσραήλ. τὸν Βήλ τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ θεοῦ καταστρέψωμεν καὶ τὸν δράκοντα μετὰ τοῦ Δανιὴλ ἀποκτείνωμεν, ἵνα στόμασι λεόντων πλησιάζοντες μηδὲν ἀπ’ αὐτῶν παθεῖν δυνηθῶμεν μόνων τῶν αἰτίων ἡμῖν τοῦ παρόντος ἀγώνος καταβρωθησομένων ὑπὸ τῶν ἡμᾶς μὴ δυναμένων καταπιεῖν λεόντων. κρατῶμεν ὅτι ἐν τοῖς ἀνδραγαθήμασι τοῦ Ἰώβ εἴρηται καὶ τό· “ἐπιθεις τὴν χεῖρά μου ἐπὶ στόματί μου ἐφίλησα, καὶ τοῦτό μοι ἄρα ἀνομία ἢ μεγίστη λογισθεῖ· εἰκὸς δὲ ὅτι ἐπιτάξουσιν ἡμῶν τὴν χεῖρα ἐπιθεῖναι τῷ στόματι καὶ φιλήσαι. About the relation between Origen and the theme of martyrdom see in part. M. RIZZI, *Origen on Martyrdom: Theology and Social Practices*, in G. HEIDL-R. SOMOS (edd.), *Origeniana nona. Origen and the Religious Practice of His Time. Papers of the 9th International Origen Congress. Pécs, Hungary, 29 August-2 September 2005*, Leuven-Paris-Walpole 2009, pp. 469-

These evidences allow, on one side, to ascertain the fact that Origen actually knew a typological interpretation of certain sections of “tales”, but actively chose and preferred other approaches to the text.

476. Another case of typological interpretation of the figure of Daniel, explicitly presented as a type of Christ together with Ezechiel, returns in *Fragmenta e Catenis in Ezechielem* A, ed. P. MIGNE, PG 13, p. 808; 408 (772A12). It is anyway necessary to underline that in this case the allusion to the prophet is absolutely generic and does not include a specific reference to “tales” (it rather deals with the figure of the Son of Man).

7.1.1. *Excursus*. The reception of *formulae*, from Origen to early Christianities

The well-attested reception of *formulae* derived from *Dn* attested in Origen's work cannot be properly included in the perimeter of the "allegoric" assumption of the "tales", since it does not envisage an outright interpretative operation: actually, in this cases, an isolated sentence is assumed in the text as a recurring "*formula*", whose biblical provenance is not necessarily mentioned nor even remembered.

The first recurring clause in Origen's production is the periphrasis indicating God's omniscience extracted from Susanna's "tale":

Dn^o 13:42. Ὁ θεὸς ὁ αἰώνιος ὁ τῶν κρυπτῶν γνώστης ὁ εἰδῶς τὰ πάντα πρὶν γενέσεως αὐτῶν²⁶.

The *formula*, principally returning as a crystallized parenthesis, is generally mentioned in a literal way. In certain cases it is not accompanied by any allusion to the scriptural context from which it is drawn, as it happens for instance in *Homiliae in Ieremiam*²⁷; in others, either the biblical source is mentioned (see *Commentarii in Genesim* 3:4²⁸) or the clause is actively manipulated and integrated in the elaboration (see *Homiliae in Genesim* 8:8²⁹).

Another expression is derived from *Dn* 3, and comes from the prayer of the three Hebrews in the furnace.

Dn 3:86. Εὐλογεῖτε, πνεύματα καὶ ψυχὰι δικαίων, τὸν κύριον.

²⁶ The expression cannot be found in *Dn*^{OG}.

²⁷ Origenes, *Homiliae in Ieremiam*, ed. P. HUSSON-P. NAUTIN, SC 232, pp. 420-421; 11:3. Ἰησοῦς ὁ εἰδῶς τὰ πάντα πρὶν γενέσεως αὐτῶν. See also *Homiliae in Ieremiam*, ed. P. HUSSON-P. NAUTIN, SC 238, pp. 156-159; 16:3; and pp. 200-203; 18:6 (some of the principal themes treated in this work are exposed by M. MARITANO-E. DAL COVOLO [curr.], *Omèlie sul Geremia. Lettura origeniana*, Roma 2001); *Commentarii in Romanos*, ed. T. HEITHER, FC 2/1, pp. 84-86; 1:3; *De Principiis*, ed. H. CROUZEL-M. SIMONETTI, SC 268, pp. 68-77; III 1:12 and pp. 100-101; III 1:17; *Commentarii in Iohannem*, ed. C. BLANC, SC 222, pp. 268-271; 28:34. For a general introduction about the commentary *In Iohannem* see, among the others, M. MARITANO-E. DAL COVOLO (curr.), *Commento a Giovanni. Lettura origeniana*, Roma 2006. For an overall view about the structure of this work and the biblical figures mentioned see E. PRINZIVALLI (cur.), *Il commento a Giovanni di Origene: il testo e i suoi contesti. Atti dell'VIII Convegno di Studi del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su "Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina"*, Roma 2005. A rich bibliography about the text can be found in H.G. THÜMMEL (ed.), *Origenes' Johanneskommentar Buch I-V*, Tübingen 2011.

²⁸ Origenes, *Commentarii in Genesim*, ed. E. JUNOD, SC 226, pp. 142-145; 3:4. καὶ κατὰ τὴν Σωσάνναν δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ γινώσκοντος τὰ πάντα πρὶν γενέσεως αὐτῶν, οὕτω λέγουσαν· "Ὁ θεὸς ὁ αἰώνιος ὁ τῶν κρυπτῶν γνώστης, ὁ εἰδῶς τὰ πάντα πρὶν γενέσεως αὐτῶν, σὺ ἐπίστασαι ὅτι ψευδῆ μου κατεμαρτύρησαν οὗτοι".

²⁹ Origenes, *Homiliae in Genesim*, ed. L. DOUTRLEAU, SC 7bis, pp. 226-227; 8:8. *Sciebat Deus et non eum latebat, quippe qui novit omnia antequam fiant*.

The *formula* returns in both *Dn*^{OG} and *Dn*^o, but the author declares to have extracted it from *Dn*^{OG}³⁰: Origen often mentions the biblical context from which it is assumed, as it happens in *Commentarii in Romanos* 1:10³¹. In other circumstances³², either the biblical “book” is not evoked, or the sentence is integrated in the exposition, rather than being presented as an explicit quotation³³. The expression circulates only in the commentaries *in Romanos* and *in Matthaëum*.

A third *formula* attests the highest degree of manipulation and integration of a biblical “crystallized” passage in the global discourse. The expression is once again derived from the “tale” of Susanna: it is the invective addressed by the prophet to the elders:

***Dn*^o 13:56.** Σπέρμα Χανααν καὶ οὐκ Ιουδα, τὸ κάλλος ἐξηπάτησέν σε, καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία διέστρεψεν τὴν καρδίαν σου³⁴.

As it paradigmatically happens in *Homiliae in Ezechielem* 6:3³⁵, the invective is always accompanied by the explicit mention of the text from which it is drawn, with the specific intention to enrich and sustain a commentary to a biblical passage.

³⁰ See *infra*, n. 31.

³¹ Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, ed. T. HEITHER, FC 2/1, pp. 114-117; 1:10. *Et Daniel dicit: “Laudate, Spiritus et animae iustorum Dominum”*. See also *Commentarii in Romanos*, ed. T. HEITHER, FC 2/4, pp. 362-363; 7:1. The case of *Commentarii in Matthaëum*, ed. E. BENZ, GCS 40/1, pp. 178-179; 13:2, is very interesting since Origen directly mentions the translation from which he is assuming the quotation: Καὶ τὸ “ἐλόγετε, πνεύματα καὶ δικαίων ψυχαί”, ἐν τῷ κατὰ τοὺς ἑβδομήκοντα Δανιὴλ φερόμενον. For a general overview about the commentary, with a reference to the philological approach and the method of Origen, see in part. G. BENDINELLI, *Il commentario a Matteo di Origene. L’ambito della metodologia scolastica dell’antichità*, Roma 1997 (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 60); T. PISCITELLI (ed.), *Il commento a Matteo di Origene. Atti del X Convegno di Studi del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su “Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina”*, Brescia 2011.

³² It happens in Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, ed. T. HEITHER, FC 2/1, pp. 230-233; 2:9. *Et ideo scriptum est: “Laudate Spiritus et animae iustorum Dominum”*. See also *Commentarii in Matthaëum, Series Latina*, ed. E. KLOSTERMANN, GCS 38, pp. 144; 62.

³³ It happens again in Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, ed. T. HEITHER, FC 2/4, pp. 276-279; 8:10. *Numquidnam tamquam servus bonus et fidelis, qui in paucis fuerat fidelis, sciebat se super multa constituendum et apostolum futurum etiam post exitum suum non solum gentium, sed et Israelitarum et aliorum fortassis invisibilium ibi, ubi benedicunt Spiritus et animae iustorum Dominum, hymnum dicunt et superexaltant eum in saecula?*

³⁴ The expression of *Dn*^{OG} is sensibly different: Δια τί διεστραμμένον τὸ σπέρμα σου, ὡς Σιδῶνος καὶ οὐκ ὡς Ιουδα; τὸ κάλλος σε ἠπάτησεν, ἡ μισθία ἐπιθυμία.

³⁵ Origenes, *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, ed. M. BORRET, SC 352, pp. 216-217; 6:3. *Magnus quidem et Daniel constantissime presbyterum peccatorem “semen Chanaan” appellans “et non Iuda”*. The same approach returns in *Homiliae in Iesu Nave*, ed. A. JAUBERT, SC 71, pp. 448-451; 22.6. *Observemus ergo, sicut et hic dicit Iesus, ut praevaleamus nos contra Chananaeos, ne si forte illi invaluerint super nos, de Istraeheliticis Chananaeos nos faciant, sicut et ille effectus est, quem superaverat carnis illecebra, cui dicitur a propheta: “Semen Chanaan et non Iuda, species seduxit te”*. See also *Commentarii in Romanos*, ed. T. HEITHER, FC 2/2, pp. 186-189; 4:2; *Commentarii in Iohannem*, ed. C. BLANC, SC 290, pp. 172-173; 20:33.

Due to the same nature of this circulation of *Dn*, it is clearly difficult to derive significant elements under an exegetical point of view. Two important considerations can be anyway expressed:

- 1) the first one concerns the biblical text adopted by Origen: though the same author often declares to depend on *Dn*^{OG36}, the use of these *formulae* testifies the massive importance of *Dn*^o, at least concerning the story of Susanna. Two out of three expressions (*Dn* 13:42 and 13:56) are clearly derived from *Dn*^o, and it must be noticed that the third one (*Dn* 3:86), which he explicitly states to have assumed from *Dn*^{OG}, actually returns in both translations³⁷.
- 2) In addition, it must be underlined that the use of this periphrasis does not represent a punctual characteristic of Origen's work, even though the most consistent attestations come from this author. *Dn* 13:42^o returns in both Clement of Alexandria³⁸ and Eusebius³⁹, while a single mention can be found outside of the boundaries of Alexandrian communities, in Irenaeus of Lyons⁴⁰. If *Dn* 3:86 is not quoted by other authors, *Dn* 13:56 is mentioned in Eusebius' *Demonstratio Evangelica* VII 2:24⁴¹. Such documentary evidences reveal that the reception of *formulae* derived from "tales" – and, even more so, from the story of Susanna – can be mainly considered as a peculiarity of the Alexandrian communities.

³⁶ See ad es. *supra*, n. 31.

³⁷ About Origen's use of the two translations of *Dn* see in part. G. DORIVAL, *La Bible d'Origen*, pp. 49-54, in L. PERRONE (ed.), *Origeniana octava. Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition. Origene e la tradizione d'Alessandria. Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress. Pisa 27-31 Agosto 2001*, Leuven 2003.

³⁸ Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata*, ed. A. LE BOULLUEC, SC 428, pp. 134-135; VII 37:5.

³⁹ Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, ed. E. DE PLACES, SC 266, pp. 240-241; VI 11:20.

⁴⁰ Irenaeus Ludgunensis, *Adversus Haereses*, ed. A. ROUSSEAU, SC 100/2, pp. 678-679; IV 21:2.

⁴¹ Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, ed. I.A. HEIKEL, GCS 23, p. 332; VII 2:24.

7.1.2. *Daniel* as instrument to read Scriptures: the “allegoric-scriptural” reception of the “tales”

Under the definition of “allegoric-scriptural” reception of “tales” are here collected those frequent cases in which Origen extrapolates materials from *Dn* stories in order to ground and sustain the elaboration of his commentaries to other biblical texts. This exegetical modality can be considered as the typical expression of both the literary genre of “commentary” in a wide sense, and Origen’s systematic approach to the Bible: in order to support a peculiar interpretation, the author freely mentions and combines possible parallels coming from the entire scriptural patrimony, starting from the presuppose that its every element can be equally considered as “God’s word”⁴².

In those cases, “tales” do not represent the real object of the interpretation, but rather the instrument allowing the author to decipher other passages. This hermeneutical perspective offers a valid explanation for two typical aspects of such use of the “haggadic *Dn*”:

- The choice of “peripheral passages” of the stories.
Origen selects from “tales” every detail needed to elaborate his commentaries. He does not pay attention either to the narrative or to the theological cores of the stories, such as the experience of the furnace, the denial of the statue, the prayer of the Hebrews, the exposition *ad bestias* or the menace of the elders, but he rather extrapolates from them every element he can exploit and associate to the biblical passages he is commenting.
- The development of a “peripheral interpretation” of *Dn*.
Origen seems to perform a total freedom in the attribution of peculiar senses and meanings to the passages of “tales” he selects, since he is not actually focusing on the stories of *Dn* as unitary and coherent “types” of Christian experiences, but he just needs to establish a connection between each quotation of them – considered as an absolute element – and the text he is interpreting.

In this perspective, “tales” become a sort of “great collector” of individual elements: losing their narrative unity – an element which appears to be on the contrary guaranteed by the typological interpretation –, they seem to be “shattered” in a mosaic of parts prone to multifarious, ever-changing

⁴² See *supra*, p. 341.

interpretations.

A clear example explaining in which sense the author operates a selection of “peripheral passages” is offered by an allusion to the story of Susanna recurring in *Homiliae in Genesim*⁴³:

Homiliae in Genesim 15:2. Let us see, by all means, how we ought to hear about what is written, that “Joseph, your son, is living”⁴⁴. I do not understand it to have been said in the common sense. For if, for example, we should assume that he could have been overcome with desire and committed sin with his master’s wife⁴⁵, I do not think that this would have been announced about him by the patriarchs to Jacob, his father: “Your son, Joseph, is living”. For if he had done this, he undoubtedly would not be living. For “the soul which sins, the same shall die”⁴⁶. But Susanna also teaches the same things when she says: “For me there are anguishes everywhere. If I do this thing – that is, if I sin – it is death for me; and if I do not do this – I shall not escape your hands”⁴⁷. Therefore you see that she understood that there is death in sin⁴⁸.

The starting point of the exposition is represented by the intention to comment the passage of *Gn* 45:26, which should not be assumed “*communiter*”, according to Origen. The author wants to demonstrate that the declaration of Joseph’s survival does not refer either to a material circumstance or to the physical subsistence of the patriarch, but it rather alludes to a peculiar condition of his soul, which is “living”

⁴³ For an introduction about this work, “frutto della predicazione quotidiana di un Origene maturo” (M.I. DANIELI, *Origene. Omelie sulla Genesi*, Roma 1978 [Collana di testi patristici 14], p. 7), see G. GENTILI, *Omelie sulla Genesi e sull’Esodo*, Milano 1976 (Collana patristica e del pensiero cristiano); E. DAL COVOLO-L. PERRONE (curr.), *Mosè ci viene letto nella Chiesa: letture di Omelie di Origene dalla Genesi*, Roma 1999 (Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 153), with a rich final bibliography about “Origene omileta”, pp. 141-162; M. SIMONETTI (cur.), *Omelie sulla Genesi*, Roma 2002 (Opere di Origene 1), pp. 7-24 and pp. 359-361, for a reference to *Homilia* 15; H. DE LUBAC-L. DOUTRELEAU (edd.), SC 7 bis, pp. 9-22 and pp. 350-371.

⁴⁴ *Gn* 45:26.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Gn* 39:7.

⁴⁶ *Ez* 18:4.

⁴⁷ *Dn* 13:22^o. Καὶ ἀνεστéναξεν Σουσαννα καὶ εἶπεν »Στενά μοι πάντοθεν· ἐάν τε γάρ τοῦτο πράξω, θάνατός μοι ἐστίν, ἐάν τε μὴ πράξω, οὐκ ἐκφεύξομαι τὰς χεῖρας ὑμῶν«. The reading of *Dn*^{OG} is similar, but the author seems to use Theodotion here.

⁴⁸ Origenes, *Homiliae in Genesim*, ed. L. DOUTRELEAU, SC 7 bis, pp. 354-455; 15:2. *Videamus sane quomodo audire debeamus de eo quod scriptum est quia “Ioseph filius tuus vivit”. Ego haec non communiter dicta suscipio. Si enim, verbi causa, ponamus quia potuisset vinci a libidine et peccasset cum uxore domini sui, non puto quod hoc a patriarchis nuntiatum de eo fuisset patri eius Iacob quia “filius tuus Ioseph vivit”. Hoc enim si fecisset, sine dubio non vivebat. Anima enim quae peccat, ipsa morietur. Sed et Susanna eadem docet, cum dicit: “Angustiae mihi undique. Si enim hoc fecero – id est peccavero – mors mihi est; et si non fecero, non effugiam manus vestras”. Vides ergo et ipsam mortem in peccato posuisse.* (see also W.A. BAEHRENS, GCS 29, pp. 128-129).

since it is free from sin.

In order to support his hypothesis, the author mentions the biblical equivalence between sin and death recurring in *Ez* 18:4, and then resorts to *Dn* 13, attributing this exact meaning to the words pronounced by Susanna. If it is true that the biblical context from which the passage of *Ez* is drawn is not mentioned at all, while the expression of Susanna is explicitly linked with the “tale”, also in the case of *Dn* 13 Origen does not actually formulate specific allusions to the narrative core of the episode: neither the reasons why Susanna is oppressed by anguishes are cited, nor a theological interpretation of her situation is offered. The woman threatened by the elders is just evoked as “mediator” of the words which allow the author to offer a peculiar interpretation of *Gn* 45:26.

Another interesting example comes from *Homiliae in Numeros*⁴⁹, where Origen alludes to the three Hebrews without mentioning the events of chapter 3 usually preferred by paleochristian exegesis because of their “martyrial value”.

Homiliae in Numeros 18:3. In order to better understand that wisdom in every knowledge comes from God, and that it turns into evil either because of men’s evil intention or because of the demons, which mix a certain corruption with God’s wisdom, let us read again what is written in *Daniel*, concerning the same Daniel and his three friends, who were taught by King Nabuchadnezzar for three years, since he wanted them to become extremely wise in his wisdom, that is in the wisdom of his homeland Babylon. So there is written: “The Lord gave them knowledge and intelligence and carefulness in every grammatical art, and he gave Daniel the intelligence for every word, vision and dream; and they were near the king, and in every word and carefulness and discipline, in whatever argument the king consulted them, he could find them ten times better than the sophists and the philosophes who were in his whole kingdom”⁵⁰. These things can be found in the *Septuaginta* text, while in Hebrew codes I could find something even stronger: though we do not use it, we will mention, just to make reference, what we read from there: “God gave them intelligence and carefulness in every grammatical wisdom, and Daniel had intelligence in every vision and dream”, and soon after: “And they stood in front of the king, and in every word, wisdom and discipline in which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the charmers and wizards who were in his

⁴⁹ About this work see A. MÉHAT, SC 29, pp. 10-64 and M.I. DANIELI, *Origene. Omelie sui Numeri*, Roma 1988 (Collana di testi patristici 76).

⁵⁰ *Dn*^{OG} 1:17, 19-20.

kingdom”. From this, everyone can understand in which sense also Balaam said about himself “one who knows the knowledge of the Most High”⁵¹, that is in order that it could be understood that the origin of every knowledge comes from him, and that the things which were granted for utility turn into perdition because of both human malice, and the demons’ insinuations and temptations.⁵²

The mention of Daniel’s and the three Hebrews’ story recurs here in the context of an interpretation of a passage derived from the fourth message of Balaam in *Num* 24:16, when the prophet, speaking with the first person voice, defines himself as the one “who has knowledge from the Most High”.

In order to explain both the fact that true knowledge comes from God, and the reason why it can turn into something evil exclusively depends on the actions of men or demons, Origen comes back to the very beginning of the Hebrews’ episode⁵³: if they were found wiser than the wise men of Nabuchadnezzar’s court, it was exactly because their knowledge came “from the Most High”.

In this circumstance, the author is not interested in the real core of Daniel’s companions’ experience, whose destiny in the furnace is not even mentioned; the biblical “tale” is just useful for Origen since it offers – though in a “peripheral” detail – the needed elements to ground his interpretation of *Num* 24:16.

The systematic and circumstantial approach of Origen to the text seems to be clearly expressed by a “philological notice” introduced in the exposition: after specifying *which* translation of *Dn* he is

⁵¹ *Num* 24:16.

⁵² Origenes, *Homiliae in Numeros*, ed. W.A. BAEHRENS, GCS 30, pp. 171-172; 18:3. *Ut autem amplius adhuc intelligamus totius scientiae sapientiam a Deo originem trahere, ab hominibus autem mali propositi vel etiam a daemonibus corruptelas quasdam sapientiae Dei admiscens declinari ad malum, relegamus ea, quae in Daniele scripta sunt de ipso Daniele et tribus amicis eius, quos Nabuchodonosor rex tribus annis erudiendos tradidit, volens eos in sua, id est patria Babyloniorum, sapientia scientissimos fieri. Ibi ergo scriptum est quia: “Dedit iis Dominus scientiam et intellectum et prudentiam in omni arte grammatica; et Daniele dedit intellectum in omni verbo et visione et somniis; et erant apud regem, et in omni verbo et prudentia et disciplina, in quibuscumque quaesivit ab iis rex, invenit eos decuplo amplius quam erant sophistae et philosophi, qui erant in omni regno eius”. Et haec quidem in exemplaribus septuaginta interpretum habentur; in Haebraeorum vero codicibus aliquid etiam vehementius repperi, quibus quamvis non utamur, tamen agnoscendi gratia dicemus, etiam ibi quae legimus: “Dedit inquit eis Deus intellectum et prudentiam in omni grammatica sapientia; et Daniel intellexit in omni visione et somniis”, et post pauca: “et steterunt inquit in conspectu regis, et in omni verbo sapientiae et disciplinae, in quo quaesivit ab iis rex, invenit eos decuplo super omnes incantatores et magos, qui erant in omni regno eius”. Ex his ergo omnibus potest intelligi, quomodo et Balaam dixerit de semet ipso: “qui scit scientiam excelsi”, scilicet ut intellegatur quod origo totius scientiae ab ipso acceperit exordium, vitio autem humanae malitiae, adspirantibus et subripientibus etiam daemonibus in perniciem versa sint, quae pro utilitate concessa sunt.* (The edition of SC does not present the Latin text but only the translation).

⁵³ In “Latin tradition” the cases in which the authors resort to the first chapters of the “tales” in order to elaborate a discourse concerning Daniel or the Hebrews are very rare. It happens only 4 times out of 17 quotations of these episodes in Tertullian (it is the case of: *De anima* 48:3; *De idolatria* 17:2; *De ieiunio* 9:2; *De oratione* 25:5). It never happens in Cyprian, who always refers to chapters 3, 6, 13 and 14 when he mentions “tales”.

assuming – that is *Dn*^{OG}, reported with absolute fidelity⁵⁴ – he adds a further reference to *another* reading of the passage, that he declares to have found in *Hebraeorum codicibus* and that he feels the need to mention just to offer a full framework of the scriptural panorama. It must be noticed that, however the reference to such Hebrew *codices* ought to be interpreted, the passage found in them by Origen corresponds to the reading of *Dn*⁵⁵.

Under the point of view of the contents, the author defines such version of *Dn*'s quotation as “something even stronger” than the one he has derived from *Dn*^{OG}, and necessarily the allusion rebounds on the elements distinguishing the two readings: in the passage from *Dn*^{OG}, the wise men overtaken by the Hebrews are defined as “sophists” and “philosophes”, while in the passage found in *Hebraeorum codicibus* they are better than “charmners” and “wizards”.

It is possible to think that the second option is assumed by Origen as a sort of “evolution” in comparison to the first one, since Daniel's companions would not just prevail on those categories which must have represented the highest degree of “human wisdom” in Nabuchadnezzar's reign, but also on those who seem to personify a sort of “supernatural wisdom”. Considering the entire passage, the couple formed by “sophist and philosophes” may be linked with those men who “pervert” the knowledge derived from God, while that one composed of “charmners and wizards” may be associated with the action of demons (*ab hominibus autem mali propositi vel etiam a daemonibus corruptelas quasdam sapientiae Dei admiscentibus declinari ad malum*).

From *Homiliae in Numeros* comes one of the clearest examples of “peripheral reception” of the “tales”.

Homiliae in Numeros 25:3. Do you want to see how names are applied to realities not just with saints, but also with Gentiles and Barbarians? Concerning the saints, it is renown why Abram was called “Abraham” and Sarai “Sarah”, and Jacob “Israel”⁵⁶. But we learn that this custom is practiced also by Barbarians. One of the

⁵⁴ *Dn*^{OG} 1:17. Καὶ τοῖς νεανίσκοις ἔδωκεν ὁ κύριος ἐπιστήμην καὶ σύνεσιν καὶ φρόνησιν ἐν πάσῃ γραμματικῇ τέχνῃ· καὶ τῷ Δανιηλ ἔδωκε σύνεσιν ἐν παντὶ ῥήματι καὶ ὁράματι καὶ ἐνυπνίοις καὶ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ. 19. Καὶ ἦσαν παρὰ τῷ βασιλεῖ. 20. Καὶ ἐν παντὶ λόγῳ καὶ συνέσει καὶ παιδείᾳ ὅσα ἐζήτησε παρ' αὐτῶν ὁ βασιλεὺς, κατέλαβεν αὐτοὺς σοφωτέρους δεκαπλασίως ὑπὲρ τοὺς σοφιστὰς καὶ τοὺς φιλοσόφους τοὺς ἐν πάσῃ τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ.

⁵⁵ *Dn*⁵⁵ 1:17. ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς σύνεσιν καὶ φρόνησιν ἐν πάσῃ γραμματικῇ καὶ σοφίᾳ· καὶ Δανιηλ συνήκεν ἐν πάσῃ ὁράσει καὶ ἐνυπνίοις. 19. Καὶ ἔστησαν ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως. 20. Καὶ ἐν παντὶ ῥήματι σοφίας καὶ ἐπιστήμης, ὧν ἐζήτησεν παρ' αὐτῶν ὁ βασιλεὺς, εὗρεν αὐτοὺς δεκαπλασίονας παρὰ πάντας τοὺς ἐπαιδοδοὺς καὶ τοὺς μάγους τοὺς ὄντας ἐν πάσῃ τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ.

⁵⁶ *Gn* 17:5; 17:15; 35:10.

sons of Israel was named Joseph by his parents, did not he? When he went to Egypt and stayed in the presence of the Pharaoh, the Pharaoh changed his name, and from Joseph he named him Psonthomphanec, a name he composed in its language, from the revelation of secrets or dreams⁵⁷. And not just to Joseph in the presence of the Pharaoh was applied the name by the king, but also Daniel in Babylon was called Balthasar, and Ananias, Azarias and Misahel are called Sidrac, Misac and Abdenago⁵⁸. Thus you see that both the names of the Israelites as well as those of barbarian men are applied in the law not fortuitously, but to realities and rational grounds.⁵⁹

The passage perfectly describes the attitude of Origen, who extrapolates a detail substantially lacking in narrative or theological importance, and uses it in order to offer a parallel for a biblical case he is examining. In the present circumstance, the author is not interested in anything concerning either the meaning of the story, or its narrative development: he simply selects an element once again derived from the beginning of the “tale” regarding the denomination of Ananias, Azarias and Misael (*Dn* 1:6-7), and adapts it to the needs of his exposition.

Such approach seems to characterize the entire production of *Homiliae*, in which the same exegetical process underlies a range of heterogeneous outcomes. It is useful to simply mention the case of *Homiliae in Leviticum*⁶⁰, where a passage of the prayer in the furnace (*Dn* 3:38-39), comparing the Hebrews’ condition to a sacrifice for God, is assumed to comment *Lev* 6:6; or a section of *Homiliae in Ezechielem*⁶¹, in which the situation of Daniel and his companions, imprisoned without having

⁵⁷ A. MÉHAT (ed.), SC 29, p. 478, translates the passage with the expression: “et au lieu de Joseph le surnomma Psonthomphanec, ce qui signifie en sa langue qu’il révélait les secrets et les songes”. In this context it seems cautious to propose a more literary translation.

⁵⁸ *Dn* 1:6-7.

⁵⁹ Origenes, *Homiliae in Numeros*, ed. W.A. BAEHRENS, GCS 30, pp. 235-236; 25:3. *Vis autem videre quoniam non solum apud sanctos nomina pro rebus aptantur, sed etiam apud Gentiles et Barbaros? De sanctis quidem notum est, cur Abram Abraham vocitatus sit et Sara Sarra et Iacob Istrahel. Doceamus autem quos mos iste habeatur etiam apud Barbaros. Nonne unus ex filiis Istrahel a parentibus suis Ioseph nomen acceperat? Cum autem transivit in Aegyptum et stetit ante Pharaonem, commutavit nomen eius et de Ioseph cognominavit eum Psonthomphanec, quod lingua sua Pharaon de secretorum vel somniorum revelatione composuit. Et non solum Ioseph huic apud Pharaonem ex re nomen aptatur, sed et Daniel in Babylonia Balthasar nominatur et Ananias atque Azarias et Misael Sidrac, Misac, Abdenago vocitantur. Vides ergo quia tam Istraheliticorum quam etiam barbarorum hominum nomina non fortuitu, sed pro rebus et causis aptantur in lege.*

⁶⁰ Origenes, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, ed. M. BORRET, SC 286, pp. 177-180; 4:5. *Vendit mihi arietem et Daniel, cum dicit quia: “Non est locus ad sacrificandum in conspectu tuo, ut possimus invenire misericordiam. Sed in anima contribulata et Spiritu humilitatis suscipiamur, velut in multitudine agnorum pinguium; sic fiat sacrificium nostrum in conspectu tuo hodie”.* About *Homiliae in Leviticum* see also *infra*, pp. 372-377.

⁶¹ Origenes, *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, ed. M. BORRET, SC 352, pp. 38-40; 1:2. *Et ne forte aliquis arbitretur peccatores a Deo traditos ab eo ulterius non gubernari et semel in captivitatem redactos ultra dispensationem eius et misericordiam non mereri,*

committed any sin, is evoked to explain why the people of Israel had to bear slavery⁶². The same method characterizes the production of *catenae*⁶³.

praesentem locum diligentius consideremus. Daniel non peccavit, Ananias, Azarias, Misael a peccato immunes fuerunt et tamen captivi effecti sunt, ut ibi positi captivum populum consolaretur et per exhortationem vocis suae paenitentes in Hierusalem restituerent castigatos pro tempore. Also in this case the reference is to the very beginning of their story, *Dn* 1:6-19.

⁶² Origenes, *Homiliae in Ezechielem*, 1:1. About the connection between *Dn* “tales” and the theme of captivity see also Origenes, *Commentarii in Romanos*, ed. T. HEITHER, FC 2/5, pp. 248-251; 10:21.

⁶³ In *Fragmenta e catenis in Ezechielem A* the author, commenting *Ez* 14:13-14, mentions the fast of Daniel. Origenes, *Fragmenta e catenis in Ezechielem A*, ed. P. MIGNE PG 13, p. 808 B 15; 428-429. *Omnis qui posuerit in corde suo non pollui in cibis et potibus spiritalis Nabuchodonosor, sed animam suam jejuniis affligere in hae Babylone propter cognitionem veritatis; qui inquam, ejusmodi est, Daniel est, et quae de illo narrantur, de hoc quoque congrue dicantur. Idem enim utriusque status, idem utriusque habitus, ita ut uterque merito Daniel possit vocari.* The reference is to *Dn* 1:6-7. The theme of Daniel’s fast returns also in Tertullianus, *De Ieiunio*, 9:5, but in this case the author refers to *Dn* 14:33-36, a crucial moment of the biblical story, instead of mentioning it in a generic perspective. In *Fragmenta e Catenis in Jeremiam* the prophet and his companions are cursorily cited for having obtained the territory of Babylon. Origenes, *Fragmenta e Catenis in Jeremiam*, ed. P. NAUTIN, GCS 6, p. 230; 66. ἐμερίσαντο γὰρ οἱ προφῆται, οὗτος μὲν τὴν Ἰουδαίαν, τὴν δὲ Βαβυλῶνα Δανιὴλ καὶ οἱ τρεῖς παῖδες.

7.2 THE “ALLEGORIC-FIGURAL” INTERPRETATION: “TALES” AS MODELS OF CHRISTIAN REALITIES

As has been mentioned, a specific district of paleochristian allegory is represented by those cases in which the biblical protagonists are assumed as “*figurae*” of Christian realities and virtues, in quality of models, which are supposed to be constantly considered by the members of the community. What actually seems to distinguish such exegesis from the “typological reading”, apart from the decisive lack of the concept of “fulfilment” and “completion”, is the absence of precise references to peculiar historical events or characters: in other words, the reflection elaborated through such interpretative instrument appears to offer generic and always valid paradigms⁶⁴.

In this perimeter, the interpretation of Origen reveals quite different in comparison with that one of other authors: if, in general, he does not seem to be very interested in such use of *Dn* “tales”, also when he assumes this perspective he apparently does not linger on “moral” outcomes – as other writers do, peculiarly concerning the figure of Susanna – but he rather concentrates on the development of a specific argument, that is the reflection about scriptural interpretation and, more generally, the theme of wisdom.

7.2.1. The “tale” of Susanna and its “moral” interpretation

As has been mentioned, one of the trajectories of paleochristian allegoric-figural interpretation of “tales” is represented by those cases in which *Dn* protagonists are assumed as symbols and paradigmatic models of the “moral” virtues recommended to the believers.

The real object of such tradition is not that much represented by “biblical events”, but rather by scriptural characters, which directly become *figurae* and examples of the behaviour recommended to the members of the community, in a process that sometimes seems to draw close to a sort of “personification”.

As first interesting *datum*, it must be underlined that the section of the “tales” which eminently undergoes such interpretation is chapter 13. Particularly in this specific context, the approach of Origen strongly differs from that one of the other authors: the writer from Alexandria is actually the only one who does not that much linger on the figure of the woman threatened by the elders, and

⁶⁴ About such definition see again *supra*, introduction, pp. 21-23.

rather chooses to stress the role of Daniel who saves Susanna with his intervention.

a) *Daniel in the story of Susanna: the “moral allegory” in Origen*

A passage of *Homiliae in Psalmos*⁶⁵ clearly expresses the peculiar interpretation of the episode of Susanna given by Origen.

Homiliae in Psalmos 4. And so, also the Christian – whose “struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and the authorities, against the powers of this world of darkness, against the spirits of evil in the skies”⁶⁶ –, having so many great adversaries, has to be vigilant as a combatant, if it is possible, so that he can win whenever he combats, and immediately achieve the crowns among the *παῖδας*, that is in juvenile competition⁶⁷. Do you want me to show you some among the children – that is among unweaned ones – who were immediately crowned? See the blessed Daniel, who deserved, since when he was a child, the grace of prophecy, and, arguing with the unrighteous elders, as a child he obtained the crown of justice and chastity.⁶⁸

In a generic sense, the “frame” in which the allusion to *Dn* is included represents the first interesting element to notice: the condition of the *Christianus* is here described and presented as a struggle against authorities and rulers. Though Origen is not properly mentioning the theme of martyrdom, both the general tone of the passage and the vocabulary – which belongs to the semantic field of *militia Christi* (*certamen, agonista, vigilare, vincat, conflixerit, corona*) – seem to intercept that “martyrial tradition” which interpret the earthly experience of the believers as a radical and irreducible choice against the rules and the values of the historical world, in favour of the antiphrastical system embodied and promoted by

⁶⁵ An efficacious introduction about this work can be found in E. PRINZIVALLI (ed.), *Origene. Omelie sui Salmi*, Firenze 1991, pp. 7-24. The monograph work enriches the elements already studied in ID., *Vinea spiritalis intellegentiae. L'interpretazione omiletica dei salmi in Origene. Un'indagine a partire dalle omelie sui salmi 36-37-38*, “Annali di storia dell'esegesi” 7 (1990), pp. 397-416.

⁶⁶ *Eph* 6:12.

⁶⁷ I accept the translation of the expression proposed by E. PRINZIVALLI (ed.) 1991, p. 184.

⁶⁸ Origenes, *Homiliae in Psalmos (in Ps 36)*, ed. E. PRINZIVALLI 1991, pp.184-185; II 130. *Ita ergo et Christianus, cui “certamen est non adversus carnem et sanguinem, sed adversus principatus et potestates, et adversus mundi huius rectores tenebrarum harum, adversus spiritalia nequitiæ in caelestibus”, cum tantos habeat et tales adversarios, tamquam agonista vigilare debet, si fieri potest, ut semper vincat quotiescumque conflixerit, et primas inter παῖδας, id est inter pueros, statim capiat coronas. Vis tibi ostendam aliquos qui inter pueros, id est, in primo statim lacte coronati sunt? Respicie beatum Danielem, qui a puero et prophetiae gratiam meruit, et iniquos arguens presbyteros, puer coronam iustitiae et castitatis obtinuit.*

Christ himself⁶⁹.

All the more reason why, in a context endowed with such connotation it becomes relevant that the author does not mention *Dn* 13 in a “martyrial perspective”; he rather formulates a reference to the circumstantial element of the prophet’s young age. Origen neither focuses on the “core” of the story of Susanna – to which typological tradition offers a martyrial interpretation⁷⁰ and which could have been easily connected with the condition of the *agonista* –, nor resorts to the figure of the threatened woman to evoke the image of those who oppose to earthly authorities; he rather alludes to the prophet, who received since his youth the grace of prophecy (*Dn* 13:45) and contrasted the elders precociously pursuing a symbolic “crown”⁷¹.

In other words, a specific detail of his argumentation is sutured to a peripheral portion of the biblical story, which is not extensively remembered nor actually described. The character of Daniel is here chosen as an example and a symbol of two Christian virtues, which are *iustitia et castitas*. If the attribute of “justice” can properly pertain to the one who defended Susanna against the evil elders, the reference to chastity represents a trait usually and distinctively associated to the woman⁷²: the fact that such trait ends up being here attributed to Daniel becomes relevant at least because the prophet seems to be treated as the real protagonist of the story, to the extent that he “inherits” the principal moral characteristic of Susanna.

b) Susanna as figura: the allegory of chastity

It has already been possible to reflect about the complex “typological” meaning assumed by Susanna, prevalently conceived in early Christian literature as a “type” of the threatened church, and as a specific martyrial symbol in iconographic developments. Notwithstanding such interesting outcomes, a more consistent literary tradition attributes to the figure of the woman an allegoric reading.

The diffusion of this interpretation goes beyond the boundaries of Alexandrian context – where it

⁶⁹ The importance of the theme of *militia Christi* in the context of martyrial documentation emerges in the clearest way by the studies of R. CACITTI, *Massimiliano – un obiettore di coscienza nel tardo impero*, “Humanitas” 36 (1980), pp. 828-841, and ID., *Mihi non licet militare. Fondamento biblico, sacramento battesimale e istanze morali del rifiuto della guerra nel cristianesimo delle origini*, Milano 2011. For an overall view about the motif see A. VON HARNACK, *Militia Christi. Die Christliche Religion und der Soldatenstand in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Darmstadt 1963.

⁷⁰ See *supra*, in part. chapters 2 and 6.

⁷¹ The same reading of the story returns in Origenes, *Excerpta in Psalmos*, ed. P. MIGNE, PG 17, coll. 133-136; 24:78-79. *Cecidisti a puero? Adolescentem imitare, et vince per illam aetatem. In utero supplantavit Esauum Jacobus; a puero Daniel prophetavit, et seniores coarguit.*

⁷² See *infra*, pp. 357-362.

counts a single reference in Clement – to involve the testimonies of Novatian and Methodius. The three references substantially express the same content and present Susanna as a *figura* of chastity.

Clement of Alexandria⁷³ cites the woman in book IV of *Stromata*⁷⁴, together with two other exemplary figures, Esther and Moses' sister.

***Stromata* IV 19:119,3.** I pass over silence Susanna and Moses' sister, how the first ruled together with the prophet, leading all the women admired by the Hebrews for their wisdom, and the second, with an extraordinary decency, going further toward death, being condemned by impure lovers, remained a firm witness of chastity⁷⁵.

The protagonist of *Dn* 13 is in this circumstance mentioned for her “extraordinary decency” (σεμνότητος ὑπερβολῆ), and as the one who remained firm in her chastity.

It is interesting to notice that, in a generic sense, the book IV of *Stromata* touches both the theme of martyrdom and perfection, and a reflection concerning the importance for everyone to practice “la philosophie, sans distinction de statut sociale ni de sexe”⁷⁶. If the mention of Susanna is coherent with the generic plan of a work in which women play an important role, it appears relevant that the character of *Dn* 13 is not mentioned as an example of martyrdom, but as a generic symbol of the quality of chastity⁷⁷.

The same outcome substantially emerges from the Hymn set by Methodius at the end of his *Symposium*⁷⁸, representing “uno dei documenti più antichi della poesia ispirata del cristianesimo”⁷⁹:

⁷³ About the author and the text see *supra*, chapter 4, pp. 230-231.

⁷⁴ For a general introduction about book IV of *Stromata* see A. VAN DEN HOEK-C. MONDÉSERT (edd.), SC 463, pp. 9-33. For references about the author and the plan of the entire work see *supra*, chapter 4, pp. 230-231. Bibliographic coordinates about book IV are offered by the same A. VAN DEN HOEK-C. MONDÉSERT (edd.), SC 463, pp. 43-50.

⁷⁵ Clement Alexandrinus, *Stromata*, ed. A. VAN DEN HOEK-C. MONDÉSERT, SC 463, pp. 254-255; VI 19:119, 3. Σιωπῶ γὰρ Σουσάνναν καὶ τὴν Μωυσέως ἀδελφὴν, ὡς ἡ μὲν συνεστρατήγησεν τῷ προφήτῃ πασῶν ἐξάρχουσα τῶν κατὰ σοφίαν παρ' Ἑβραίοις εὐδοκίμων γυναικῶν, ἡ δὲ σεμνότητος ὑπερβολῆ καὶ μέχρι θανάτου χωροῦσα πρὸς τῶν ἀκολάστων ἐραστῶν κατακρινομένη μάρτυς ἀγνείας ἔμεινεν ἀρρεπῆς. The edition of SC is based on the text of O. STÄHLIN-L. FRÜCHTEL, GCS 15bis2, pp. 300-301, but it offers a critical revision of some details of the text (pp. 34-39).

⁷⁶ A. VAN DEN HOEK-C. MONDÉSERT (edd.), SC 463, p. 9.

⁷⁷ A reflection about the role of women in martyrdom is articulated by the author in the passage IV 56-69, where he mentions “une parade de femmes combattantes, comme les Amazones et les Sarmates, puis de femme philosophes” (A. VAN DEN HOEK-C. MONDÉSERT [edd.], SC 463, p. 19). Susanna is not cited in this circumstance.

⁷⁸ About the author see *supra*, chapter 3, pp. 126-127. Methodius' *Symposium*, “the only authentic work of his that is preserved completely in Greek” (J. QUASTEN-J.C. PLUMPE, *The Symposium: a Treatise on Chastity*, New York 1958 [Ancient Christian Writers], p. 3), represents an attempt to “mostrare la natura e la funzione di quella virtù

Symposium, Thecla Hymn 15. Watching the nice aspect of Susanna / the two judges, full of passion, said “Oh woman, / lusting we come to your bed on the sly, oh beloved” / And she said, with trembling cries: / “I am chaste for you...”⁸⁰

As in *Stromata*, also in this occasion the mention of Susanna recurs together with that one of another feminine figure – Judit in this case – as well considered as an example of chastity, one of the principal thematic cores of the entire work⁸¹.

A similar interpretation returns in *De Bono Pudicitia* of Novatian⁸², who offers a far more detailed expositions of the reasons underling the definition of Susanna as example of chastity.

De Bono Pudicitia 9:1. But the continence of women affords us as well, in a different way, a comparable example of chastity. **2.** As we can read, there was Susanna, the daughter of Hilkiah and the wife of Joachim, as fair of aspect and fairer still in her customs. Display did not commit her to [the cultivation of] her beauty: she was guileless. Purity had adorned her and, with purity, nature alone. **3.** Two of the elders fell desperately in love with her, without remembering the fear of God, nor their advanced and fading years; and so, the flames of recidivous lust brought them back to the exciting ardor of former youth. They set snares for the unfortunate woman’s integrity. **4.** They are ravishers of purity who feign love but harbour hate.

(*sc.* chastity) che è la massima espressione d’amore verso Dio nella totale consacrazione a lui”, as N. ANTONIONO (cur.), *La verginità*, Roma 2000 (Testi patristici 152), p. 5, notices. The work of Methodius combines such reference to chastity with an allusion to the theme of martyrdom: the virtue of the virgins is after all “l’equivalente di un martirio spirituale” (p. 9). About the text see also H. MUSURILLO, *St. Methodius. The Symposium. A Treatise on Chastity*, London 1958 (Ancient Christian Writers 2).

⁷⁹ M. PELLEGRINO, *L’inno del Simposio di S. Metodio Martire*, Torino 1958, p. 3. About the Hymn see also V. BUCHHEIT, *Studien zu Methodius von Olympos*, Berlin 1958 (Texte und Untersuchungen 69), pp.158-160.

⁸⁰ Methodius Olympius, *Symposium*, edd. H. MUSURILLO-V.H. DEBIDOUR, SC 95, pp. 317-318. Thecla Hymne 15. Ὁρῶντες εἶδος εὐπρεπὲς ὑφῆς δύο κριταὶ / Σουσάννας ἐμμανεῖς ἔρωτι λέξαν ὧ γύναι, / κρυπτῶν σου γάμον λέχη ποθοῦντες ἤκομεν, φίλα. / Ἡ δ’ ἐντρόμοις ἔφη βοαίς / Ἀγνεύω σοι . . . /.

⁸¹ About the theme of eros and chastity in the work see the contributions of E. PRINZIVALLI, *Desiderio di generazione e generazione del desiderio. Metodio d’Olimpo e le polemiche sull’eros tra il III e il IV secc.*, in S. PRICOCO (cur.), *L’eros difficile. Amore e sessualità nell’antico cristianesimo*, Catanzaro 1998, pp. 39-66, in part. pp. 47-66, and B. ZORZI, *Castità e generazione nel bello: l’eros nel “Simposio” di Metodio d’Olimpo*, “Reportata. Passato e presente nella teologia” (2003) (a telematic journal).

⁸² About the figure of Novatian, mentioned by R.J. DE SIMONE, *The Father of the Church. Novatian*, Washington 1974, as “the first Roman theologian to write a theological treatise in Latin” on the Trinity, see in part. C. MOHRMANN, *Les origines de la latinité chrétienne à Rome*, “Vigiliae Christianae” 3 (1949), pp. 67-106 and 163-183; see also J.L. PAPANDREA, *Novatian of Rome and the Culmination of Pre Nicene Orthodoxy*, Eugene 2011 (Princeton Theological Monograph Series 175), in part. pp. 47-72.

They threatened her, who resisted them, with false accusations, adulterers themselves, they appear as denouncers of adultery. **5.** Trapped between two menacing cliffs of lust, she cried to the Lord for help, because her body lacked the strength to restrain them. The Lord from the sky heard purity calling to him, and when, oppressed by injustice, she was led to punishment, she saw the penalty imposed upon her enemies. Twice victress, though she had found herself so often in deadly peril, she escaped both lust and death. **6.** It would be endless, if I give you more examples. I am satisfied with these two, mainly because the case for purity has there been vigorously defended. **10:1.** The unwelcome thought of noble lineage, which for some is an incentive to lewdness, could not soften their resolution, nor did a beautiful body and a well proportioned figure, which frequently produces the impression that, this being like the flower of youth which quickly passes away, advantage should be taken of every pleasure that present itself; the early years of budding and maturing youth had no adverse effect on them, when young hot blood enkindles the raging heats of nature and sets in motion the blind passions that dwell in the very marrow of the bones, seeking relief for itself even at the endangerment of modesty. Opportunity for concealment, without witnesses, did not allure them, though this often exerts an overpowering force for the perpetration of crime when there is a prospect for impunity through acquittal, neither pressure from the authority of those who commanded them, nor the boldness afforded by accomplices and conspirators – though often good intentions are broken down by such things – could make them yield; gifts, which even good men often accept, allegations, threats, suffering, even death could not weaken them **2.** Nothing is so barbarous, so unbearable, so distressing as the abandonment of the sublime standards of purity. **3.** In the divine judgement they were found so deserving of reward that one was honoured with an all but regal throne; the other was reconciled with her husband and compensated by the death of the enemies. **4.** We should keep these and similar examples before our eyes and meditate on them day and night.⁸³

⁸³ Novatianus, *De bono pudicitiae*, ed. G.F. DIERCKS, CCL 4, pp. 121-123; 9:1. *Sed non minus ex parte diversa aliud nobis pudicitiae simile de continentia feminarum exoritur exemplum. 2. Fuit ut legimus, Susanna, filia Heliciae, uxor Ioachim, pulcherrima facie, pulchrior moribus. Hanc nullum ad decorem commendabat species: simplex enim erat. Excoluerat pudicitia et cum pudicitia sola natura. 3. Hanc ex senioribus duo coeperant deperire, nihil memores nec divini timoris, sed nec suae annis iam marcescentis aetatis; ita illos in fragrantia transactae iuventutis incendia recidivae libidinis flamma revocabat. Insidias infaustae de simplicitate mulieri parant. 4. Pudicitiae latrones amorem confitentur, sed oderunt. Resistenti minantur calumnias, adulterii se dicunt accusatores voto adulteri. 5. Inter duo libidinis scopulos auxilium de Domino petebat, quia viribus corporis repugnare non valebat. Et exaudivit de caelo clamantem ad se pudicitiam Dominus et cum iniquitate oppressa duceretur ad poenam, vidit inimicorum liberat vindictam. Bis victrix et in periculo suo tam funeste totiens consaepta et libidinem evasit et mortem. 6. Infinitum erit si exempla*

Novatian presents a long *excursus* about Susanna's story, which is reported in a narrative perspective that touches some fundamental passages of the biblical "tale", particularly focusing on the relation between the protagonist and the elders. After a short introduction of the woman (9:2. *filia Heliciae, uxor Ioachim*), the author evokes the action of those *seniores* who, seduced by her beauty and her customs, neglected God and acted as "ravishers of purity", trying to threaten her in the first place, and then denouncing her for adultery. Both the strength of the woman, who did not hesitate in opposing to them, and the faith which led her to ask for God's help, finally brought Susanna to a double victory, on both lust and death.

Some characteristic points of this exposition have to be more punctually stressed:

- 1) Certainly, as the same title of the treatise implies, the principal argument with which the "tale" is connected is *pudicitia*, mentioned 7 times in the passage here analysed. It must be noticed that Susanna does not appear to be just assumed as an exemplary character describing such quality, but she rather seems to be directly identified with it. In other words, *pudicitia* reveals to be in some measure personified and overlapped with the figure of the woman, as emerges from the expression: *et exaudivit de caelo clamantem ad se pudicitiam Dominus* (9:5). In the same perspective it is possible to interpret the definition of the elders as *pudicitiae latrones* (9:4).
- 2) Another relevant aspect of the passage is represented by the fact that the figure of Daniel is never mentioned: contrary to what happens in Origen⁸⁴, Susanna is here presented as the only responsible for her own salvation, which is certainly granted by God, but does not seem to need for other human intermediaries.

prosequar plura. His duobus contentus sum, praesertim cum omnibus sit viribus per istos pudicitia defensata. 10:1. Non illos emollire potuit invita generosi sanguinis memoria, quae in quibusdam licentiam lasciviae ministrat, non decor corporis et apte positorum figura membrorum, quae suggerit plerumque, ut quasi flos quidam properantis velociter transitorius aetatis porrectae voluptatis occasione passatura, non anni primi virentis et melioris aetatis, cum rudis adhuc sanguis aestuans naturae flammam accendit et in medullis caeca versat incendia ad remedium suum etiam per periculum pudoris itura, non ulla latebrarum et sine ullo conscio, ut a quibusdam putatur, occasio, quae maxima vis est admittendi sceleris, dum liberationis occurrit impunitas, non imposita necessitas de auctoritate iubentium et in temeritate participum atque sociorum, quo genere franguntur etiam recta saepe consilia, non praemia ipsa, quibus adquiescunt saepe et boni, non accusationes, non minae, non poenae, non mortes. 2. Nihil tam saevum, tam durum, tam triste, quam cecidisse de alto pudicitiae gradu. 3. Digni tanto divini iudicii praemio, quorum alter regio paene throno illustraretur, altera concordia mariti dotata inimicorum mortibus redimeretur. 4. Haec sunt et his similia semper nobis ante oculos exempla ponenda, his paria diebus noctibusque meditanda.

⁸⁴ See *supra*, pp. 356-357.

- 3) At the end of the exposition, the author offers a sort of suggestion concerning the proper attitude to maintain towards biblical *exempla* and, signally, that of *Dn* 13. Adding the expression *haec sunt et his similia semper nobis ante oculos exempla ponenda, his paria diebus noctibusque meditanda* (10:3), Novatian reveals to be quite far from a typological perspective: present events and community members are not conceived in quality of antitypes fulfilling and bringing the “tale” to completion; the Scriptures have to be simply assumed as a lesson, a suggestion, a model of behaviour from which to derive the guidelines of the Christian proper way of living. It seems possible to say that Susanna is not here performing the role of a “type” destined to be accomplished in a successive *stadium* of salvation history, but she is rather mentioned as a *figura* that has to be “meditated day and night” by future believers.

c) “Allegory” in iconography? The “illustration” of Susanna’s story

A fundamental aspect of iconographic exegesis, emerging also from the restricted perimeter of *Dn* themes, is undoubtedly represented by its “typological nature”⁸⁵, as the entire first section of the present work has already tried to highlight. The figurative use of the “iconographic types” presupposes the idea that in visual each scene is meant to evoke a Christian reality, which is assumed as a completion and fulfilment, in the light of the hermeneutical “key”, explicitly or implicitly represented by Christ.

It has already been widely possible to notice that the method through which iconography fully expresses such nature is the process of combination of the scenes, through which it manages to modulate the specific meaning of each type in relation with the others⁸⁶. Apart from such development of the visual elaboration, it remains true that every single subject, in different degrees of clarity and definition, already performs an “internal” typological value, from which its same assumption in the iconographic panorama depends: if such typological value clearly emerges in cases such as that one of the sacrifice of Isaac, which intrinsically evokes the experience of “the lamb-Christ”, it requires to be defined through a deeper reflection in cases such as that one of the type of Susanna among the elders, which eventually revealed to be mainly conceived as an anticipation of the “martyrial condition” of the community⁸⁷.

⁸⁵ See *supra*, introduction, pp. 21-23.

⁸⁶ As already suggested, the work by G. PELIZZARI 2013 offers the most efficacious panorama about the method with which iconography elaborates its meanings.

⁸⁷ See *supra*, chapter 6, pp. 318-334.

Especially in such subtle circumstances – and peculiarly when the figure of Christ does not represent one of the two explicit terms of the typology – , the study of the scenes’ building process and the extensive analysis of their uses offer the needed elements to formulate an interpretative proposal, constantly considering, at least as a starting point, the literary reception of the same biblical material.

Mainly in the light of the complexity of “Susanna type” interpretation, the existence of a literary tradition conceiving the woman as a generic symbol of chastity forces to wonder whether also in iconography such perspective may have played any role. The interpretation of the scene as a reference to chastity is sustained and explained by K.A. SMITH⁸⁸, and it cannot be excluded that the potrait of the woman between the elders preserved an allegoric meaning – mainly derived from literature – which completed and enriched the “martyrial value” clearly testified by documents such as the fresco of Celerina⁸⁹.

Notwithstanding this, it must be noticed that the possible subsistence of an allegoric interpretation of *Dn* 13 does not seem to principally involve the specific type of the woman, but it rather has to be considered as a realistic option for the cases of the already mentioned early, extended “illustrations” of the biblical story⁹⁰. Some elements concerning their elaboration and use concretely betray the common “rules” of iconographic production, so that it becomes possible to wonder whether those peculiarities may depend on the assumption of a different exegetical technique – that is an allegoric method.

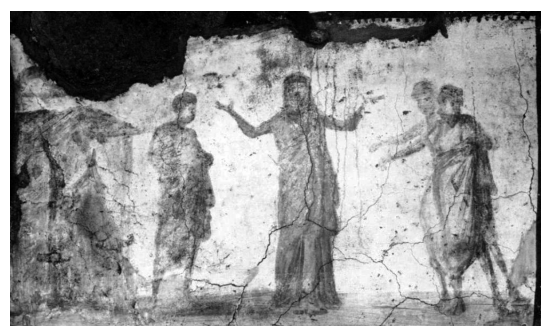
A first peculiarity of these representations concerns their heterogeneity: it is actually impossible to identify a recognisable tradition made by fixed and codified themes. The “tale” of Susanna is apparently treated in a much more fluid way compared with the other narrations of *Dn*, from the earliest attestation in Priscilla catacomb⁹¹, where Daniel is represented as spectator of the *seniores*’

⁸⁸ K.A. SMITH 1993, p. 9.

⁸⁹ See *supra*, chapter 6, pp. 331-332.

⁹⁰ See *supra*, chapter 6, pp. 322-323.

⁹¹ It is the case of the representations of Cappella Greca in Priscilla catacomb:



(Fig. 1)

temptation and then as an orant figure next to the saved woman – a composition which will not know a further use⁹² –, to the diffused illustrations of the “judgment”, which anyway assume a range of various features⁹³.

Since the “repetitiveness” represents a distinctive trait of a “figurative type”, which clearly has to be well-codified in order to be efficaciously recognized in iconographic programs, it seems possible to say that the figures derived from the story of Susanna cannot properly be considered as “types”, but rather as “illustrative” reproductions of passages of the narration.

Such perspective may principally emerge from a specific perimeter of this tradition: the case of those sarcophagi whose entire central body is devoted to the story of *Dn* 13. The adoption of an “illustrative” and “narrative” point of view would be apparently confirmed by the fact that the reproductions of Susanna’s episode do not usually dialogue with other figurative types, so that their “exegetical potential” becomes unavoidably weaker.

A good example is Gerona sarcophagus (late 4th century; *fig. 3*), showing the principal phases of the “tale”, from the moment in which the woman is threatened by the elders in the garden, to the scene

See J. WILPERT 1903, *tab.* 14:1-2; the third image is from K. SMITH 1993, p. 9; NR 39, p. 27.

⁹² For a description see M. MINASI, in F. BISCONTI 2000, pp. 283-284.

⁹³ In Eusebius’ crypt (Callisto catacomb, NR 8, p. 107), Daniel is portrayed in the act of condemning one of the elders, while the other one is exposed to judgement next to Susanna. A different development is attested on sarcophagus from Museo Pio Cristiano (REP 1:146, *fig. 2*, where the image of Daniel is flanked by Susanna and an elder, while the second one is portrayed behind a tree:



(*Fig. 2*)

The representation of the judgement returns also in a mosaic of St. Constance church, see H. STERN, *Le mosaïque de l'église de Sainte-Costance à Rome*, “Dumbarton Oaks Papers” 12 (1958), pp. 159-218, in part. 169-171, and in a musive arch still in Priscilla catacomb (R. GIULIANI, *Un arcosolio mosaicato nel secondo piano del cimitero di Priscilla. Il contributo delle analisi di fluorescenza da ultravioletti e da raggi X per la conoscenza di una decorazione musiva in avanzato stato di degrade*, in A.A. V.V., *Atti del IV Colloquio dell'Associazione Italiana per lo Studio e la Conservazione del Mosaico, Palermo 9-13 Dicembre 1996*, Ravenna 1997, pp. 791-806).

of the judgement that absolves the chaste protagonist and condemns the evil *seniores*⁹⁴. Lacking of a fixed and codified structure and preferably unbound from links with other scenes, the representations concerning this “tale” resemble more “illustrations” than “types”, and do not actually seem to perform a definable typological value.



(Fig. 3)

Evaluating the possibility that those representations had more the intention to “narrate” and expose a story than that one to activate an exegetical process, it remains necessary to define which are the contents of these narrations and which is the perspective of its exposition.

A possible element from which to start is represented by the identification of a significant *tertium comparationis* between the range of various subjects: next to the figure of Susanna, a central role is here performed also by the character of Daniel, the protagonist of the scenes of judgement against the elders, always introduced as the mediator of the woman’s salvation.

In the light of such arguments, it does not seem inappropriate to suggest that in this case iconography did not just assume the exegetical method adopted by literature – that one of allegory –, but also adopted the same interpretative contents developed by the authors: the entire episode of Susanna would assume an allegoric-moral value in which the figure of Daniel performs the role of “righteous” man⁹⁵ who defends the chastity of the woman against the evil action of the two elders.

⁹⁴ G. BOVINI, *I sarcofagi paleocristiani della Spagna*, Città del Vaticano 1954, fig.18.

⁹⁵ This outcome mainly returns in Origen’s allegoric-moral reading, see *supra*, pp. 356-357.

7.2.2. “Tales” as models to build a “theological system”. Christian wisdom and the reading of Scriptures

The “moral” interpretation of *Dn* 13, conceiving Susanna and Daniel as symbols of righteousness and chastity, can be considered as the principal and most fruitful tradition in the perimeter of “tales” “figural-allegoric” reception.

Next to such outcome, another interesting perspective, representing a specific trait of Origen’s elaboration, deserves to be shortly delineated: it consists in the use of *Dn* narrations in the context of theological elaborations touching the theme of wisdom and the reflection about the interpretation of Scriptures. Such tradition keeps on adopting a “figural” reading of the stories, whose protagonists are assumed in quality of abstracts symbols of Christian realities, but the function of the allegoric process does not tend to the formulation of moral examples, but rather to the exposition of a theoretical system.

a) “Tales” and the degrees of Christian wisdom

The analysis of Origen’s interpretation of *Num* has already revealed a passage in which the “tale” of the three Hebrews is mentioned to support the author’s opinion that knowledge can only come from God⁹⁶. The same connection between Daniel’s companions and the theme of wisdom returns two other times in *Contra Celsum*⁹⁷. The different genre of the work, which can be considered as an apologetic writing⁹⁸, implies an exegetical passage of a certain relevance.

⁹⁶ About the theme of knowledge and its provenance from God in Origen, though in a perspective linked with the concept of prayer, see L. PERRONE, *Prayer in Origen’s Contra Celsum. The Knowledge of God and the Truth of Christianity*, “Vigiliae Christianae” 55 (2001), pp. 1-19.

⁹⁷ The work was “probably composed circa A.D. 248” (M. MARCOVICH [ed.] 2001, p. ix). See also, among the others, H. CHADWICK, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, London-New York-New Rochelle-Melbourne-Sydney 1965, pp. xiv-xv; M. EDWARDS-M. GOODMAN-S. PRICE (edd.), *Apologetics in the Roman Empire*, Oxford-New York 1999, p. 131 and P. RESSA, *Origene. Contro Celso*, Brescia 2000, pp. 54-59. For a rich bibliography about the work see P. RESSA 2000, pp. 631-637. A selected but efficacious bibliography is also in M. MARCOVICH (ed.) 2001, pp. xvii-xxiii and in M. FIEDROWICZ-C. BARTHOLD, FC 50/1, pp. 157-179. For a study about the *status quaestionis* on *Contra Celsum* see A. LE BOULLUEC, *Vingt ans de recherche sur le Contre Celse. État de lieux*, in L. PERRONE (cur.), *Discorsi di verità. Paganesimo, giudaismo e cristianesimo a confronto nel Contro Celso di Origene. Atti del II Convegno del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su “Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina”*, Roma 1998 (Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum 61), pp. 9-28. About the theme of the reception of Scriptures in the treatise see, in particular, M. SIMONETTI, *Origene. I Principi, Contra Celsum e altri scritti filosofici*, Firenze 1975, in part. pp. 40-45 (“Filosofia e Sacra Scrittura”); M. FÉDOU, *Christianism et religions païennes dans le Contre Celse d’Origène*, Paris 1988, in part. pp. 116-139 (“Mythe et allégorie”); L.N. FERNANDO, *Origen’s Use of Scripture in Contra Celsum*, in G. DORIVAL-A. LE BOULLUEC (edd.) 1995, pp. 243-250; M. BORRET, *L’Écriture d’après le païen Celse*, in C. MONDÉSERT (ed.), *Le monde grec ancien et la Bible*, Paris 1984 and G. SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Ispirazione delle Scritture e divinazione pagana. Aspetti della polemica tra Origene e Celso*, in G. DORIVAL-A. LE BOULLUEC (edd.) 1995, pp. 287-302.

If in the *Homiliae* the author uses the story of the Hebrews in quality of literary parallels capable to support a peculiar interpretation of a biblical passage, in the case of *Contra Celsum* the author elaborates an articulated, theoretical exposition against the *Alethès Logós*⁹⁹, a sort of extensive *compendium* of arguments against Christianity¹⁰⁰, assigned to the Platonist philosopher. The treatise “helps us to see both the arguments which Origen would have used when engaged in disputation with learned pagans at Alexandria or Cesarea, and the way in which he himself in his own mind could be satisfied that Christianity....was a profound philosophy”¹⁰¹.

If, on one side, the work can be considered, “sul piano strettamente formale”, as a sort of “commentario di segno rovesciato, nel quale il testo preso in esame...viene sottoposto a una critica minuziosa e severa”¹⁰², the confutation of Celsus’ position is conducted through a demonstration of the superiority of Christian doctrine, so that “Origene fornisce al suo scritto una valenza non soltanto negativa...ma anche positive, con la dimostrazione della verità del cristianesimo”¹⁰³. Such “positive component” of the argumentation, apart from allowing the reader to grasp some important aspects of Origen’s thought, actually implies an active exegetical approach to the biblical material¹⁰⁴.

Exactly for this reason, it becomes even more so interesting to trace a sort of “unitary tradition” concerning the reception of *Dn* “tales” in this text, connected with the development of the principal arguments of Origen’s thought: the reflection about wisdom and the reading of Scriptures.

⁹⁸ For a reflection about such definition and the acceptance in which it should be assumed see M. EDWARDS-M. GOODMAN-S. PRICE (edd.) 1999, pp. 132 and 134-136. The same Origen uses the word *apologia* to refer to his work (p. 135).

⁹⁹ A rich panorama about the figure of Celsus and the features of his work is offered by P. RESSA 2000, pp. 13-54.

¹⁰⁰ M. EDWARDS-M. GOODMAN-S. PRICE (edd.) 1999, p. 133. Celsus’ critics move from a basic argument: “there was a true account of the world, which was the common heritage not only of Greeks, but of the whole civilized mankind...this true account involves, for instance, the assumption of one God...the Christians have abandoned this true account to adopt...a «barbarian» namely Jewish doctrine... But the Christians, in turn, revolted against Judaism, which at least was a recognized religion... They have stepped outside the Law... They deserve to be reproached. Indeed, they deserve to be persecuted and punished” (pp. 133-134). About the identity of Celsus see also H. CHADWICK 1965, pp. xxiv-xxviii. About Celsus’ theology see IBID., pp. xvi-xxi.

¹⁰¹ H. CHADWICK 1965, p. viii.

¹⁰² P. RESSA 2001, p. 57. See also M. RIZZI 1993, p. 198.

¹⁰³ P. RESSA 2000, p. 62.

¹⁰⁴ For an overall view about the use of Scriptures in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*, see M. SIMONETTI, *La Sacra Scrittura nel Contro Celso*, in L. PERRONE (cur.) 1998, pp. 97-113. The article presents both a reflection about Celsus’ position about Christian Scriptures and the reaction of Origen, according to whom “la Sacra Scrittura rappresenta il fondamento e la norma paradigmatica per ogni aspetto della vita cristiana, e in particolare per la totalità della dottrina cristiana”.

A first evidence recurs in book 6 of *Contra Celsum*. The passage exposes a reflection “sui problemi dell’adorazione e del culto: gli angeli, il giudizio finale, la resurrezione”¹⁰⁵. According to the Platonist philosopher, the pretensions of both Jews and Christians concerning those arguments would have no fundament, since their opinions are derived from those of other people, as the comparison between Platonic theology and Christian developments would demonstrate¹⁰⁶. In order to defend his religion and the dignity of his belief in comparison with Greek philosophy, Origen exposes a complex reflection about the importance of wisdom in Christian life.

***Contra Celsum* 6:14.** Celsus describes as “very uneducated” and as “slaves” and as “quite ignorant” those who do not understand what he has to say and have not been educated in the learning of the Greek. But we call very uneducated those who are not ashamed to address lifeless objects¹⁰⁷, and invoke what is diseased that it might grant them good health, and ask what is dead to give life, and beseech what is helpless for succour. Even if some maintain that these objects are not gods but imitations of the true gods and symbols of them, none the less they too are “uneducated and slaves and ignorant” since they imagine that the hands of artisans can make imitations of the divinity. So we say that the most insignificant of us has been delivered from this lack of education and ignorance, and the most intelligent understand and comprehend the divine hope. But we also maintain that it is not possible for a man who has not been trained in human wisdom to receive the more divine, and hold that all human wisdom is foolishness in comparison with divine wisdom. Instead of arguing, as he ought, in support of his assertion, he calls us “sorcerers” and says that we “flee headlong from cultured people because they are not prepared to be deceived; but we trap illiterate folk”. He did not see that from the beginning our wise men were educated in the learning of foreign peoples – Moses in all the wisdom of the Egyptians¹⁰⁸, and Daniel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael, in all the writings of the Assyrians¹⁰⁹, so that they were found to know ten times as much as all the wise men there. And, though they are few in proportion to the multitudes, there are even at the present time wise men in the churches who have been converted after having been educated in what we call wisdom “according to the

¹⁰⁵ A. COLONNA (cur.), *Contro Celso di Origene*, Torino 1971, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ A. COLONNA, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Wis* 13:17-18.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Acts* 7:22.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Dn* 1:17.

flesh”¹¹⁰; and there are also men who have passed of from that to the divine wisdom.¹¹¹

The passage here reported is included in a section of *Contra Celsum* devoted to the definition of the concepts of “human” and “divine wisdom”. In the preceding elaboration (*Contra Celsum* 6:13¹¹²), “human wisdom”¹¹³ had already been presented as the wisdom of the world (σοφία τοῦ κόσμου), corresponding with “an exercise for the soul”, which is anyway “folly” in front of God (μωρία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ), according to the definition of *1Cor* 3:19. “Divine wisdom” is on the contrary conceived as a prerogative granted by God, corresponding with a sort of final landing place of the soul (τελείων δέ ἐστιν) and its “meat” by *Eb* 5:14.

According to Origen’s exposition, the distinction between these categories of wisdom would not come from Greek culture, as Celsus affirmed, since it already belonged to the prophets¹¹⁴. In the conclusive section of the chapter, the author from Alexandria states that, according to *1Cor* 12:8-9, three different charisma associated with wisdom exist, and they all come from the Spirit: “divine

¹¹⁰ *1Cor* 1:26.

¹¹¹ Origenes, *Contra Celsum*, ed. M. MARCOVICH 2001, pp. 391-392; 6:14. Καίτοι γε ἄλλους μὲν φησιν ἀπαιδευτοτάτους εἶναι καὶ ἀνδράποδα καὶ ἀμαθεστάτους ὁ Κέλσος, τοὺς μὴ ἐπισταμένους αὐτοῦ τὰ πράγματα μηδὲ παιδευθέντας τὰ Ἑλλήνων μαθήματα· ἡμεῖς δὲ ἀπαιδευτοτάτους φαμὲν τοὺς “μὴ αἰσχυνομένους | ἐν τῷ τοῖς ἀφύχοις προσλαλεῖν καὶ περὶ μὲν ὑγείας τὸ ἀσθενὲς ἐπικαλουμένους, περὶ δὲ ζωῆς τὸ νεκρὸν ἀξιοῦντας, περὶ δ’ ἐπικουρίας τὸ ἀπειρότατον ἰκετεύοντας”. Κἂν τινες δὲ μὴ ταῦτα φῶσιν εἶναι τοὺς θεοὺς, ἀλλὰ μιμήματα τῶν ἀληθινῶν κάκεινων σύμβολα, οὐδὲν ἦττον καὶ οὗτοι, ἐν βαναύσων χερσὶ τὰ μιμήματα τῆς θειότητος φανταζόμενοι εἶναι, ἀπαιδευτοὶ εἰσι καὶ ἀνδράποδα καὶ ἀμαθεῖς· ὡς τοὺς ἐσχάτους τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀπηλλάχθαι ταύτης τῆς ἀπαιδευσίας καὶ τῆς ἀμαθίας, καὶ φρονιμωτάτοις δὲ τὴν θείαν ἐλπίδα νοεῖσθαι καὶ καταλαμβάνεσθαι φαμὲν. Λέγομεν δὲ καὶ οὐχ οἶόν τ’ εἶναι μὴ ἐγγυμασάμενον τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ σοφίᾳ χωρεῖν τὴν θειοτέραν, καὶ μωρίαν πᾶσαν τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην σοφίαν ὡς πρὸς τὴν θείαν ὁμολογοῦμεν. Εἶτα δέον αὐτὸν ἀγωνίζεσθαι περὶ τοῦ λόγου, ὁ δὲ γόητας ἡμᾶς καλεῖ καὶ φησιν ὅτι φεύγομεν τοὺς χαριστέρους προτροπάδην ὡς οὐχ ἐτοιμοὺς ἀπατάσθαι, παλεύομεν δὲ τοὺς ἀγροικότερους. Οὐ γὰρ εἶδεν ἄνωθεν καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ τοῖς ἐξωθεν μαθήμασι πεπαιδευμένους τοὺς παρ’ ἡμῖν σοφοὺς, Μωϋσέα μὲν “πάσῃ Αἰγυπτίων σοφίᾳ”, Δανιὴλ δὲ καὶ Ἀνανίαν καὶ Ἀζαρίαν καὶ Μισαὴλ πᾶσι τοῖς Ἀσσυρίων γράμμασιν, ὥστ’ αὐτοὺς εὐρεθῆναι πάντων τῶν ἐκεῖ σοφῶν δεκαπλασίους. Καὶ νῦν δὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι ἔχουσι μὲν ἀνάλογον τοῖς πλήθεσιν ὀλίγους σοφοὺς προσελθόντας καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς καλουμένης παρ’ ἡμῖν “κατὰ σάρκα” σοφίας, ἔχουσι δὲ καὶ τοὺς διαβεβηκότας ἀπ’ ἐκείνης ἐπὶ τὴν θείαν σοφίαν. (See also M. BORRET, SC 147, pp. 212-216).

¹¹² Origenes *Contra Celsum*, ed. M. MARCOVICH 2001, p. 390; 6:13. Οὐκοῦν κατὰ ταῦτα ἢ μὲν τις θεία σοφία ἐστίν, ἢ δ’ ἀνθρωπίνη. Καὶ ἢ μὲν ἀνθρωπίνη ἐστίν ἢ καθ’ ἡμᾶς λεγομένη “σοφία τοῦ κόσμου”, ἣτις ἐστὶ “μωρία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ”. ἢ δὲ θεία καὶ ἕτερα παρὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην, εἴπερ ἐστὶ θεία, χάριτι θεοῦ δωρουμένου αὐτῇ τοῖς ἑαυτοῦς ἐπιτηδεῖους πρὸς παραδοχὴν αὐτῆς κατασκευάσει παραγίνεται, καὶ μάλιστα τοῖς ἐκ τοῦ ἐγνωκέναι τὴν διαφορὰν ἑκατέρας σοφίας πρὸς τὴν ἕτεραν ἐν ταῖς πρὸς θεὸν εὐχαῖς λέγουσι...

¹¹³ About the character of human intelligence in *Contra Celsum*, see D. CALIANDRO, *Il Lógos e l’uomo nella visione cosmica di Origene nel Contro Celso*, Roma 1987, pp. 28-30.

¹¹⁴ Origenes *Contra Celsum*, ed. M. MARCOVICH 2001, p. 390; 6:13. Καὶ ἀρχαία μὲν ἀληθῶς ἐστὶν ἢδε ἢ δόξα, οὐχ, ὡς οἶεται δὲ Κέλσος, τῆς περὶ αὐτῶν ἀρχαιότητος εἰς Ἡράκλειτον καὶ Πλάτωνα ἀνανεφομένης. Ἀνωτέρω γὰρ τούτων οἱ προφήται διέστειλαν τὸ περὶ ἑκατέρας σοφίας·

wisdom”, “knowledge” and “faith”¹¹⁵. It becomes in this way possible to mark a passage from a generic subdivision between the two categories of earthly and divine wisdom, to a more articulated system made of three levels¹¹⁶.

In the successive chapter (6:14), in which the reference to *Dn* is included, the author tries to determine the identity of those “underbred”, “slaves” and “ignorant” who are apparently excluded from every level of wisdom. If Celsus associates them with Christians, who are not acquainted with his law nor trained in Greek learning, Origen identifies them with those who “address lifeless objects, invoke what is diseased that it might grant them good health, and ask what is dead to give life, and beseech what is helpless for succour”. Contrary to what Celsus affirms, the author states that this kind of ignorance does not even belong to the lower among Christians, implying that every believer owns at least that “earthly wisdom” which is described – immediately after – as a preliminary (though still “folly”) condition to accede to the following step, represented by “divine wisdom”.

After exposing such considerations, the issue of the debate seems to quickly and sensibly change. Reprimanding Celsus for the weakness of his position, that would have deserved a stronger defence, Origen himself ends up following the rhythm of his adversary’s discourse and focusing to the second critic moved by him: Christians would be “sorcerers” who address to the rustic people, prone to be cheated, not to face with polished ones.

To rebut such accuse, Origen resorts to the ancient wisdom of First Testament “wise men”, who were cognizant of foreign branches of knowledge: next to Moses, he mentions Daniel, Ananias, Azarias and Misael, trained in “Assyrian learning” and not equalled by any of their contemporaries. A cogent link between the reference to such “external knowledge” of the Hebrews and the intention to prove that Christians do not address to rustic people seems quite difficult to catch: apparently, the citation of *Dn* “tales” should be associated, in a more generic perspective, with the necessity to prove that wisdom belongs to Origen’s religion.

¹¹⁵ Origenes *Contra Celsum*, ed. M. MARCOVICH 2001, pp. 390-391; 6:13. Ἡ θεία τοίνυν σοφία, ἕτέρα οὐσα τῆς πίστεως, πρῶτόν ἐστι τῶν καλουμένων “χαρισμάτων” τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ μετ’ ἐκείνην δεύτερον τοῖς ἀκριβοῦν τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐπισταμένοις ἢ καλουμένη γνώσις, καὶ τρίτον, ἐπεὶ σώζεσθαι χρὴ καὶ τοὺς ἀπλουστέρους προσιόντας κατὰ δύναμιν τῇ θεοσεβείᾳ, ἢ πίστις.

¹¹⁶ For a reflection about the “knowledge of the *Lógos*” in Origen see K.J. TORJESEN 1986, pp. 82-83. The theme of knowledge and wisdom is connected, since *Contra Celsum*, to that one of scriptural interpretation. Even though this development does not involve *Dn* “tales” in *Contra Celsum*, as it happens in *Homiliae in Leviticum* (see *infra*, pp. 373-378), it seems interesting to mention a study which focuses on the interpretative levels of Scriptures in the present treatise: D.G. MCCARTNEY, *Literal and Allegorical Interpretation in Origen’s Contra Celsum*, “Westminster Theological Journal” 48 (1986), pp. 281-301.

In the same way, also the final consideration which seals chapter 6:14 appears to be linked with the global theme of the passage: in present churches, says Origen, it is possible to find both a few wise men who have come from that wisdom “according to the flesh”, and some who have reached “divine wisdom”. It becomes reasonable to wonder whether this consideration is recalling the three-way split previously formulated by the author: if so, the following correspondences would emerge:

- 1) every Christian would own wisdom “according to the flesh”, corresponding with “earthly wisdom”. It may be probably identified with the “first charisma”;
- 2) a few Christians would have reached a superior degree of wisdom, possibly corresponding with that one of “knowledge”;
- 3) only some Christians would arrive to the final “end”, the “divine wisdom” corresponding with “faith”.

What actually matters in this context is not that much to inscribe the discourse of Origen in a frame of perfect coherency, but rather to stress how *Dn* “tales” are mentioned by the author in the context of a deeper and articulated reflection, which entails both the central theme of wisdom, and the punctual reference to the present of community. It would be overrated to search for traces of a “typological” approach in the passage: the reference to biblical subjects is here formulated in the term of an example and a symbol, not necessarily nor clearly destined to be fulfilled in the present. Notwithstanding this, in comparison with the case of *Homiliae in Numeros*, in which a similar theme returns, *Contra Celsum* shows a different perspective in the use of *Dn* narrations: in the former case, the author was generically using them to comment a biblical passage, in this case he is more actively resorting to the same material to expose a theological system.

b) “*Tales*” and the “*revelation*” of *Scripture*

The perception of the privileged connection between the theme of wisdom and the experience of Daniel and his companions finds another attestation in a passage of book 3 of *Contra Celsum*¹¹⁷, which tries to rebut Celsus’ opinion that Christian *consortium* is mainly composed of ignorant and smurfbrain people¹¹⁸.

The citation of *Dn* recurs – so to speak – in the *pars construens* of Origen’s answer: here the author tries to demonstrate that his religion appraises about wisdom more than any other belief, resorting to First Testament examples such as the words of *Ps* 50:8, the figure of Salomon and the episodes narrated in *Dn*.

***Contra Celsum* 3:45.** The *Logos* so desires wise men among believers that, in order to exercise the understanding of the hearers, it has expressed certain truths in enigmatic forms, others in the so-called “dark sayings”, others in parables and others again in problems. And one of the prophets, Hosea, says at the end of his prophecies, “Who is wise and will understand these things? Or prudent, and will know them?”¹¹⁹. Daniel and those imprisoned with him made such progress in learning what was practiced by the king’s wise men in Babylon, that they were shown to be ten times better than any of them¹²⁰. And it is also said in Ezechiel to the ruler of Tyre, who was proud of his wisdom “Are you wiser than Daniel? Every secret was not revealed to you”.¹²¹

The mention of Daniel and his companions recurs in the context of a quite specific allusion to a peculiar implication of the importance of wisdom in Christian religion: exactly in order to stimulate

¹¹⁷ In book 3, Origen offers his answer to Celsus’ conviction that “ogni controversia fra Giudei e Cristiani è priva di senso e inutile; le controversie provengono dallo spirito intollerante dei Cristiani; nessun Dio o figlio di Dio è mai venuto sulla terra” A. COLONNA (cur.) 1971, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ Origenes, *Contra Celsum* 3:44.

¹¹⁹ *Os* 14:10.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Dn* 1:20.

¹²¹ Origenes, *Contra Celsum*, ed. M. MARCOVICH 2001, p. 188; 3:45. | Ὅτι δὲ βούλεται, σοφούς εἶναι ἐν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ὁ λόγος, ὥστε ὑπὲρ τοῦ γυμνάσαι τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν ἀκούοντων τὰ μὲν ἐν αἰνίγμασι τὰ δὲ ἐν τοῖς καλουμένοις σκοτεινοῖς λόγοις λελαληκέναι, τὰ δὲ διὰ παραβολῶν καὶ ἄλλα διὰ προβλημάτων. Καὶ φησι γέ τις τῶν προφητῶν, ὁ Ὡσηέ, ἐπὶ τέλει τῶν λόγων ἑαυτοῦ· “Τίς σοφὸς καὶ συνήσει ταῦτα; Ἡ συνετὸς καὶ ἐπιγνώσεται αὐτά;” Δανιὴλ δὲ καὶ οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ αἰχμαλωτισθέντες τοσοῦτον προέκοψαν καὶ ἐν τοῖς μαθήμασιν, ἅτινα ἤσκουν ἐν Βαβυλῶνι οἱ περὶ τὸν βασιλέα σοφοί, ὡς πάντων αὐτῶν διαφέροντας ἀποδειχθῆναι τούτους “δεκαπλασίως”. Λέγεται δὲ καὶ ἐν τῷ Ἰεζεκιὴλ πρὸς τὸν Τύρου ἄρχοντα, μέγα φρονοῦντα ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ· Μὴ σὺ σοφώτερος εἶ τοῦ Δανιήλ; Πᾶν κρύφιον οὐχ ὑπεδείχθη σοι; See also M. BORRET (ed.) SC 136, pp. 108-111.

such quality, the *Logos* would have expressed his truths under the form of “dark sayings”, “parables” and “problems”¹²². The reference is in this case to the same literary features of Scripture, whose comprehension would be exclusively possible for wise men. A question extrapolated from *Os*, concerning the identity of those who can understand, mediates and introduces the reference to Daniel and his companions, whose experience becomes a proof of such centrality of wisdom¹²³.

In this circumstance, the allusion to the “tales” is not just assumed as a biblical reference to “sustain” the elaboration of a “reverse commentary”, but it is more precisely connected with the speculation of Origen concerning the same process of reading and understanding the meaning of Scriptures, which represents one of the principal and distinctive cores of the author’s reflection¹²⁴.

c) “*Tales*” and the truth of God’s word. A possible case of “*peripheral typology*”?

The fullest expression of the link among the theme of wisdom, the reflection about scriptural interpretation and the use of “tales”, can be found in a passage of *Homiliae in Leviticum*: in this context, the biblical material derived from *Dn* is narrowly introduced in a discourse concerning the correct approach to Scripture and the reasons underling it.

In this peculiar occasion the mention of the “tales” cannot be considered as part of the biblical commentary in the stricter sense, since it returns in the introductory section of the work, where the author – more than interpreting specific passages of *Lev* – is still formulating the premises. For this reason, it does not seem strange to spot here an exegetical attitude comparable to that one of *Contra Celsum* and quite different from the outcomes typically expected from *Homiliae*.

Homiliae in Leviticum 1:1. For, if I also should follow the simple understanding, as certain ones among us do, and without using – as they are used to mock us – the stratagems of language or the cloud of allegory, I would draw out the voice of the lawgiver¹²⁵; I myself a man of the church, living under the faith of Christ, and placed in the midst of the church, I am compelled by the authority of the divine precept to sacrifice calves and lambs and to offer fine wheat flour with incense and oil. For they

¹²² About the concept of *Lógos* emerging from *Contra Celsum* see D. CALIANDRO 1987, in part. pp. 70-103. About the connection between *Loógos* and wisdom see IBID., pp. 74-79.

¹²³ M. SIMONETTI, in L. PERRONE 1998, p. 111, underlines that “ogni volta che il discorso di Origene in materia di Sacra Scrittura verte sull’oscurità del testo e sul suo significato spirituale il richiamo all’interpretazione allegorica è pressoché di prammatica”.

¹²⁴ See *supra*, pp. 340-342.

¹²⁵ About this figure, already mentioned at the beginning of chapter 1:1, cf. *Mt* 22:15; 23.

do this, those who force us to be subservient to the historical sense and to keep to the letter of the law. But it is time for us to use the words of the holy Susanna against these wicked presbyters, which indeed those who deny the story of Susanna excise from the list of divine books, but we both receive it and aptly use it against them saying: “For me there are anguishes everywhere”. For if I shall agree with you to follow the letter of the law, “it will mean death for me”; but if I will not agree, “I shall not escape your hands. But it is better for me to fall into your hands without resistance than to sin in the sight of the Lord”¹²⁶. Therefore, let us fall, if it is necessary, into your detractions, so long as the church, which has already turned to Christ the Lord, may know the truth of the word which is completely concealed under the cover of the letter; for thus the Apostle said, “if anyone turns to the Lord, the veil will be removed; for where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom”¹²⁷. Thus, the Lord himself, the holy Spirit himself must be entreated by us to remove every cloud and all darkness which obscures the vision of our hearts hardened with the stains of sins in order that we may be able to behold the spiritual and wonderful knowledge of his Law, according to him who said, “Unveil my eyes and I shall observe the wonders of your Law”¹²⁸. Therefore as best we are able, let us briefly narrate a few things from many, not studying so much the interpretation of single words – for this is done by one who writes at leisure –, but bringing forth the things which pertain to the edification of the church; in order that we might provide opportunities of understanding for our hearers rather than pursue wideranging expositions, according to that which is written, “give an opportunity to the wise person and he will be wiser”^{129,130}

¹²⁶ *Dn* 13:22-23.

¹²⁷ *2Cor* 3:16-17.

¹²⁸ *Ps* 118:18.

¹²⁹ *Prov* 9:9.

¹³⁰ Origenes, *Homiliae in Leviticum*, ed. M. BORRET, SC 286, pp. 177-180; 1:1. *Si enim secundum quosdam etiam nostrorum intellectum simplicem sequar et absque ulla – ut ipsi ridere nos solent – strophæ verbi et allegoricae nubilo vocem legislatoris excipiam, ego ecclesiasticus sub fide Christi vivens et in medio Ecclesiae positus ad sacrificandum vitulos et agnos et ad offerendam similam cum ture et oleo divini praecepti auctoritate compellor. Hoc enim agunt, qui deservire nos historiae et servare legis litteram cogunt. Sed tempus est nos adversum improbos presbyteros uti sanctae Susannae vocibus, quas illi quidem repudiantes historiam Susannae de catalogo divinorum voluminum desecarunt, nos autem et suscipimus et opportune contra ipsos proferimus dicentes: Angustiae mihi undique. Si enim consensero vobis, ut legis litteram sequar, mors mihi erit; si autem non consensero, non effugiam manus vestra. Sed melius est me nullo gestu incidere in manus vestras quam peccare in conspectu Domini. Incidamus ergo et nos, si ita necesse est, in obtreactiones vestras, tantum ut veritatem verbi Dei sub litterae tegmine coopertam ad Christum iam Dominum conversa cognoscat Ecclesia; sic enim dixit et Apostolus quia: Si conversus quis fuerit ad Dominum, auferetur velamen; ubi enim Spiritus Domini, ibi libertas. Ipse igitur nobis Dominus, ipse sanctus Spiritus deprecandus est, ut omnem nebulam omnemque caliginem, quae peccatorum sordibus concreta visum nostri cordis obscurat, auferre dignetur, ut possimus legis eius intelligentiam spiritalem et mirabilem contueri, secundum eum qui dixit: Revela oculos meos, et considerabo mirabilia de lege tua. Igitur quam possumus breviter*

The passage is included in the first chapter of *Homilia* 1, which presents an argumentation about both the sense of the Bible and the way to discover it. At the beginning of the section, the author introduces a sort of parallelism between the same *Logos* and Scripture¹³¹: as the divinity of *Logos* was veiled by the flesh¹³² – so that only the elect men could recognize it – also the spiritual meaning of Scripture is concealed by the veil of the letter.

In the light of such premise, the author states the importance for Christians to draw near *Lev* with a constant awareness of such hidden Spirit¹³³, contrary to those who pay attention to the “historical sense” of Scripture and end up misreading it.

Exactly in order to dissociate from them and their approach, Origen resorts to the words pronounced by Susanna in *Dn* 13:22-23. The first worry of the author is to assume a specific “philological position” concerning the text he is adopting, which he considers authentic¹³⁴ and – for this reason – worthy to be mentioned as God’s word. After such clarification (which expresses a typical

pauca perstringamus ex multis, non tam singulorum verborum explanationi studentes – hoc enim facere per otium scribentis est – sed quae ad aedificationem Ecclesiae pertinent, proferentes; ut occasiones potius intelligentiae auditoribus demus quam expositionum latitudinem persequamur, secundum illud, quod scriptum est: Da occasionem sapienti, et sapientior erit.

¹³¹ About the theme of *Lógos* in this work see M. MARITANO-E. DAL COVOLO (curr.), *Omèlie sul Levitico. Lettura origeniana*, Roma 2003, pp. 15-48 (“Il sacrificio del Logos”).

¹³² About “l’incarnazione della parola” in Origen see H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Parola e mistero in Origene*, Milano 1991 (Già e non ancora 211), pp. 37-42.

¹³³ The specificity of such conception of the “hidden sense” of Scriptures in Origen see in part. G. ASTRUC-MORIZE-A. LE BOULLUEC, *Le sens caché des Ecritures selon Jean Chrysostome et Origène*, “Studia Patristica” 25 (1993), pp. 1-26, in part. pp. 15-26.

¹³⁴ The authenticity of the “book of Susanna” is the argument of an important correspondence between Origen and Iulius Africanus (for an edition of the letter of Origen see N. DE LANGE [ed.], SC 302, pp. 514-573. About the epistle of Africanus see W. REICHARDT, *Die Briefe des Sextus Julius Africanus an Aristides und Origenes*, Leipzig 1909 [Texte und Untersuchungen 34/3]). The principal core of the conversation is reported by Rufinus, in his Latin translation of Eusebius’ *Historia Ecclesiastica*: according to the ancient author, Iulius Africanus would have sent a letter to Origen implying that the story of Susanna could be invented and alien to the prophetic literature, while Origen would have answered warning him against the deceptions of Jews, since everything translated by the seventy translators of the Bible had to be considered as divine Scripture confirmed by apostolic authority (see GCS 2, pp. 585-587). If “le but d’Africanus est de démontrer à Origène que l’histoire de Suzanne n’est pas une partie authentique de la prophétie de Daniel”, starting from considerations which mainly insist on the absence of the story from the Hebrew Bible, the author from Alexandria “soutient que l’Église devrait se fier à sa tradition à elle, qui est un don de la Providence” and states that “la raison pour laquelle les Juifs n’ont pas l’histoire dans leur Bible est que leurs chefs l’ont délibérément supprimée, et il prétend qu’ils en ont fait autant de tous les passages où il s’agissait du meurtre des conversation” (N. DE LANGE [ed.], SC 302, pp. 478-479). In this context, it seems enough to mention such conversation to highlight the subsistence of an active reflection, since antiquity, concerning a section of the text of *Dn* whose peculiar *status* emerges also from the oscillating position it assumes in the “book”. About the letter of Origen see also D. BARTHÉLEMY, *Origène et le texte de l’Ancien Testament*, in J. FONTAINE-C. KANNENGISSER (edd.), *Épektasis. Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal J. Daniélou*, Paris 1972, pp. 247-261, and P. NAUTIN 1977, pp. 176-182-344-347. About the ancient testimonies about the correspondence see N. DE LANGE (ed.), SC 302, pp. 471-472. See also J.W. TRIGG, *Biblical Interpretation*, Wilmington 1988, pp. 16-136.

trait of his method, as it has already been possible to underline¹³⁵), Origen selects from the episode of Susanna a passage already cited in the context of *Homiliae in Genesim*¹³⁶, exposing it to a far richer exegetical process.

The author freely manipulates the biblical material, introducing in Susanna's words a clause that influences and orients the interpretation: if in *Dn* 13 the elders put at risk the woman's chastity, in Origen's reading they force her to "follow the letter of the Law", which would mean death for her. The solution found by the woman in the biblical "tale" remains unchanged: "it is better for me to fall into your hands without resistance than to sin in the sight of the Lord", she states.

The equivalence established between "following the letter" and "dying" finds an internal explanation at the beginning of the same chapter, when Origen mentions "the letter which kills", assuming an expression derived from *2Cor* 3:6. Through such allusion, the reference to death made by Susanna is easily associated with the destiny of those who do not accede to a real comprehension of Scriptures.

Under the exegetical point of view, the most interesting element of the passage seems to be represented by the association between the characters of the biblical tales and a the historical present: the elders appears to be linked with those who do not accede to the real meaning of Scripture and simply grasp the letter "according to the flesh". In the light of the argumentation developed at the beginning of chapter 1, it is possible both to deeply understand the real value and meaning of such approach to Scripture, and to better define the identity of those who are evoked by the elders: if the divine sense of Bible is "veiled" under the letter as the divinity of *Logos* was concealed in the flesh, those who force Susanna to remain linked to the letter can be compared to those who did not recognize Christ¹³⁷.

The argument is supported by the same explanation of *Dn* quotation offered by the author: as Susanna did, also Christians have to undergo the detraction of those who menace them, if it is necessary in order to disclose the truth hidden by the letter. "Unveiling" the sense of Scriptures¹³⁸

¹³⁵ See ad es. *supra*, n. 31.

¹³⁶ See *supra*, p. 349.

¹³⁷ M.I. DANIELI, *Origene. Omelie sul Levitico*, Roma 1985, p. 5, describing the beginning of *Homiliae in Leviticum* speaks about "Unità del *Logos* che ha parlato nell'Antico Testamento e nel Nuovo Testamento, necessità di non arrestarsi alla lettera «secondo la carne», urgenza della conversione al Cristo per assimilare una intelligenza nuova della Scrittura". In a similar way, as to K.J. TORJESEN 1987, p. 84, says "the progress in the knowledge of the spiritual world is progress in the knowledge of the *Logos*".

¹³⁸ An in-depth study of Origen's approach to Scriptures cannot be conducted here, where it is enough to remember the already mentioned "three levels" of the interpretation identified by the author, which are the "literal", the "allegorical" and the "spiritual" one. It would seem hazardous to try to reconduce the specific

corresponds with “turning to the Lord”, a condition which coincides with “freedom”, according to *2Cor* 3:16-17.

In the final section of chapter 1:1, the link between wisdom and the correct interpretation of Scripture is eventually established: only God can remove “every cloud and all darkness” preventing men from that “spiritual knowledge” which is needed to accede to the real meaning of the Law¹³⁹. Exactly in order to make the wise man become wiser (*Da occasionem sapienti, et sapientior erit*), Origen declares his intention to face the text of *Lev* stressing “the things which pertain to the edification of the church” (*ad aedificationem Ecclesiae*).

In conclusion, the case of *Homiliae in Leviticum* sutures and further explains the elements emerging also from the use of *Dn* “tales” attested in *Contra Celsum*. In the treatise against the Platonist, the author associates the experience of Daniel and his companions to the themes of Christian wisdom and to an allusion to the capacity to read and interpret Scriptures. In the introductory section of *Homiliae*, the words extrapolated by Susanna’s episode are manipulated in order to expose a reflection about the importance to “unveil” the deep meaning of Scriptures, concealed by the “cloud of the letter”, as the same *Logos* manifested in the flesh. Through the mention of the “tale”, the author manages to stress the risks connected with a “literal approach” to the Law, which brings to death and corresponds with the same denial of Christ’s divinity. The capacity to accede to a more conscious understanding of Scripture depends on the action of God, which is considered by Origen as the only one who can grant the “spiritual knowledge”.

Both the deep integration of Susanna’s words in the exposition and the connection established between the elders and those who “defame” Christians allow at least to wonder whether in this case the author is applying a typological interpretation to a “peripheral” section of “tales”, which means to a

development of the passage here studied to the theoretical, complex system of Origen; what actually seems relevant here, is the introduction of the figures of *Dn* “tales” in the context of this important discourse. It is anyway important to underline how, according to P. HENNE 2004, pp. 66-67, such “three levels” should be interpreted in two different perspectives: according to the first one “le sens littéral correspond à la réalité historique, il s’attache à la relation même des faits ou au texte de lois; le sens allégorique se place au niveau moral, il se préoccupe de l’application des textes à la vie de l’âme, sans pour autant qu’intervienne la perspective chrétienne; le sens spirituel s’élève jusqu’à la perspective mystique, il évoque le mystère de Dieu, de l’Eglise et des réalités de la foi”; according to the second, “il y a le sens historique, un sens mystique qui concerne Dieu et l’Eglise, un sens spirituel qui affecte l’âme... Le sens spirituel qui dans le premier schéma parlait de l’âme en général, se concentre dans le second tableau sur l’âme dans la mesure où elle est tournée vers le Seigneur. Dans ce dernier cas, le destin individuel est perçu dans une vaste vision de l’histoire de la salut”. The system of Origen is described also in H. DE LUBAC, *Exégèse Médiévale. Les quatre sens de l’Écriture*, 1/1, Paris 1959.

¹³⁹ The relation between the interpretation of Scripture and the “wisdom” of the believer is expressed, in Origen, by “il tema della manna... Essa sta per la Scrittura: identica oggettivamente, essa si adatta nel gusto ai bisogni del credente, a seconda del loro sviluppo interiore”, see P.C. BORI, *L’interpretazione infinita. L’ermeneutica cristiana antica e le sue interpretazioni*, Bologna 1987, p. 61.

passage that does not undergo similar readings in other writers. The possibility seems plausible, and in any case it remains true that the preamble of *Homiliae in Leviticum* attests a much richer and more stratified interpretative approach to the “tales” than the one attested in the resting production of Origen.

Considering the cases of *Contra Celsum* and the development in *Homiliae in Leviticum*, it does not seem inappropriate to speak about a unitary – though very narrow – tradition which links the stories from *Dn* to the generic theme of wisdom and to the specific speculation about scriptural exegesis. The *datum* is even more relevant in the light of the varied and heterogeneous outcomes coming from this author’s production.

7.3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present section of the work tried to outline a secondary tradition in the “tales” paleochristian adoption, that is the “allegoric” use of the stories. Some final considerations can be exposed in order to define the principal traits of this complex panorama, which is characterized as a sort of mosaic of heterogeneous tendencies.

In a generic perspective, it is possible to affirm that the “allegoric use” of “tales” seems to focus on portions of the narration which do not actually undergo a typological interpretation: the attention of the authors actually moves from the “core” of the episode narrated in *Dn* either to specific details of it or to generic mentions of the biblical protagonists. In the same way, also the themes and the arguments with which the stories are connected are radically different from those involved in the typological use of the “tales”: in particular, it is significantly possible to stress the relevant disappearance of the martyrial theme, whose elaboration apparently does not pass through the adoption of an allegoric perspective.

The geographic and theological perimeter which offers the most interesting outcomes is clearly that one of Alexandrian Christianities, since Origen performs the role of paradigmatic “collector” of most of the interpretative tendencies.

In particular, two exegetical trajectories are mainly attested in the production of this author:

- 1) the reception of *formulae* (in part. *Dn* 3, 86; 13:42; 13:56) which are freely introduced in the argumentation as crystallized materials;
- 2) the “scriptural-allegoric” interpretation of “tales”, which are adopted in the context of commentaries with the specific function to explain a range of proto and neotestamentary passages. Especially in this case, the author seems to use the “haggadic *Dn*” as a sort of gatherer of single motifs and themes which are all prone to be extrapolated and interpreted in every direction.

The “allegoric” reading of “tales” seems to express its most interesting outcomes in the context of the so-called “figural approach”, that one which mentions *Dn* protagonists in qualities of *figurae*, models and symbols of Christian realities. In this specific perimeter, the story of Susanna offers the most interesting outcomes. On one side, Origen, disassociating from the voice of the other authors, focuses on the role of Daniel in the balance of the “tale”, presenting him in quality of both mediator of the salvation of the woman, and symbol of chastity and righteousness; on the other, Clement of

Alexandria, Novatian and Methodius of Olympus agree in mentioning Susanna as paradigm and model of chastity.

In this context, a possible exceptional case of “allegoric” reception in iconography has been mentioned: the heterogeneous and unstable “narrative” illustrations of the story of the woman threatened by the elders – never really defined as fixed “types” and often untied from wider figurative programs – may represent a case of “allegoric” reproduction of a biblical story from which Christians could derive an important example of virtues: on one side, the righteousness of Daniel, often portrayed as a judge who condemns the elders; on the other, the chastity of Susanna, who did not vacillate in front of the *seniores*’ menaces.

A different interpretative perspective, also associable to the “figural” allegory and eminently expressed by Origen, conceives the protagonists of “tales” as a paradigm of Christian wisdom, a quality directly granted by God and representing a distinctive trait of the religion so harshly contrasted by Celsus. From “models of wisdom”, Daniel and his companions also become “models of scriptural interpretation”, introduced in articulated speculations concerning the correct approach to Scripture: the same words of Susanna are introduced to testify the importance to receive God’s words in a “spiritual” perspective, that is “unveiling” the spiritual meaning concealed by the letter. The elaboration of Origen, which can be considered as an isolated, narrow tradition in the varied panorama of the “tales” allegoric adoption, seems to find its fullest expression at the beginning of *Homiliae in Leviticum*: here the action of the elders is compared to that one of those who do not recognize Christ’s divinity, through an interpretative operation which seems to overstep the boundary of allegory and to possibly assume a typological gradation.