Seeing Christ through Scriptures at the Paschal Celebration: Exegesis as Mystery Performance in the Paschal Writings of Melito, Pseudo-Hippolytus, and Origen

A. Introduction

The intent of this article is to investigate the manner in which Christians of the second and third centuries in Asia Minor and Alexandria approached the reading of Scripture in, or in connection with, the liturgical context of the Paschal feast. I will attempt to show how such reading, within that context, was primarily a performance similar to those of the Greek mysteries, rather than merely an intellectual exercise. According to the paschal writings of Melito, Pseudo-Hippolytus, and Origen, scriptural hermeneutics do not seem to imply the solving of an enigma, but rather constitutes an actual participation in, or encounter with, a reality imperceptible by senses: the manifestation of the Logos-Christ. Correspondingly, at the end of the exegetic performance and throughout its course, the exegete is not only a collector of new information; on the contrary, as the ancient Greek used to become the subject of an actual meeting with the manifestations of a god/goddess, so the ancient Christian was the spectator of a transforming encounter, mediated by Scripture, with the various manifestations of the Logos-Christ. Most likely, this kind of exegesis was the reflection of a Christian polemical attitude towards the mystery religions.

Cumulative evidence will lead to the hypothesis that this type of mystery exegesis connected with, or part of, the complex liturgical feast of Pascha probably emerged in the second-century Asia Minor and Melito is the first witness to, if not the inventor of, this way of reading Scriptures. Pseudo-Hippolytus developed it and Origen took over this kind of exegesis.

1 Putting it into Aristotle's words, it was a matter of pathein rather than mathein, of 'experiencing' rather than 'learning' (see Fr. 15 from Synesius Dion., 48, in N. Turchi, Fontes Historiae Mysteriorum Aevi Hellenistici [Rome 1930]). Cf. Plutarch, Isis, 382de and Clement, Str. 5.71.1.

OCP 74 (2008) 27-47
exegesis either from Melito, or from Clement, or from an ongoing tradition.

B. Jewish Precedents of Exegesis as Mystery Rite

The Jewish conception of reading the Torah as an experience that leads to the knowledge of divine mysteries seems to constitute a precedent for the early Christian mystery exegesis. Although various Jewish Diaspora writers such as Aristobulus, Artapanus, Orphica’s author, Pseudo-Phocylides, or Josephus employed terminology of the pagan rites, Philo associated the exegetical practice as religious experience with mystery terminology and Greek techniques of allegorical interpretation. In *Cher.* 42 ff., for example, one can find early roots of interpreting Scripture as a mystery rite. The Alexandrian theologian, as an initiated mystagogue, develops, metaphorically or not, his hermeneutic exercise as a mystery performance and invites the reader to take part in this exercise in order to become an initiated in the divine knowledge. Moreover, in his commentary on Exodus, Philo develops an allegorical exegesis in connection with the Passover narrative.

However, one might suggest that Melito’s, Pseudo-Hippolytus’s, and Origen’s innovation consists in connecting the old method of reading Scripture as a religious experience with the Christian typological interpretation, Greek mystery terminology, Jewish terms and images, and the Paschal liturgical celebration. Within this complex context of the Paschal feast, viewed as the character of the Christian mystery,
C. Melito of Sardis's Mystery Exegesis

The bishop of Sardis, who is known to have sent an apology on behalf of his fellow Christians to the emperor-philosopher Marcus Aurelius between the years A.D. 169-177, begins his homily *Peri Pascha* (the date of which is not certain) with a series of paradoxical pairs of terms: he maintains that the mystery of the Pascha (τὸ τοῦ πάσχα μυστήριον) is both old and new, eternal and temporary, perishable and imperishable, mortal and immortal. Nevertheless, Melito does not contradict himself for the reason that he does not predicate these attributes at the same time, but all the first attributes are associated with the old Passover, the Jewish Pasch, while all the second ones refer to the mystery of the new, i.e. Christian, Pascha. This distinction appears to be pivotal for the Melitonean vision.

1. The Old Mystery of Pesach Performed by Moses

As the passages PP 11-14 illustrate, God is the source and agent of the old mystery. In spite of using the term μυστήριον in the singular and not

---

5 While emphasizing mystery terminology, the present article does not deny the existence of Jewish vocabulary and themes in the writings of the above-mentioned Christian theologians. On the contrary, scholars have emphasized this vocabulary as well.


8 PP 3 (11-18): "Old is the law, but new the word; temporary the model, but eternal the grace; perishable the sheep, imperishable the Lord" (Hall, *On Pascha*, 3).
the plural (τὰ μυστήρια) Melito's reference to the term is not a philosophical abstraction, but a genuine action performed by human beings and also a genuine action performed by God himself. Succinctly said, it was a cult or mystery performance, not an abstraction. God explains to Moses how to perform during the night the mystery of Israel's salvation and how the angel of death will bind Pharaoh and punish the Egyptian people. Melito further in PP 15-17 portrays Moses as hierophant officiating at a mystery for the initiated people of Israel:

Then Moses, when he had slain the sheep, and at night (νύκτα) performed the mystery (δασκάλισε τὸ μυστήριον) with the sons of Israel, marked (διαφάγωσεν) the doors of the houses to protect the people and win the angel's respect.9

The text further explains how the Israelites, unlike the Egyptians, sacrificed the sheep, ate the Pascha, performed the mystery (τὸ μυστήριον ταλείται), and became marked with a sign able to gain the respect of the angel of death.10 In contrast, the Egyptians remained uninitiated into the mystery (ἄμυτοι τὸ μυστήριον), not taking part in the Pascha (ἄμυτοι τὸν πίσχα), without the seal of blood (ἀσφράγισον τοῦ ἀμύτου), and thus without the protection of the spirit. Consequently, they easily fall prey to the angel that, in one night, "made them childless."11

While in PP 18-30 Melito describes the calamity and mourning that the angel of death spread over the whole land of Egypt, in 31-33 he explains that the Lord Christ worked within the old mystery as life, type, and spirit.

9 Melito, PP 15 (88-91). S. G. Hall comments: "Melito regards the Pascha as an initiatory rite with apotropaic effect, and insinuates into 14-16 the language of Christian baptism an anunction [implying much mystery language, especially σαραγίζων, χρίσεων, πνεύμα, ἀμύτως] (Hall, Melito, 9, n. 5). Another scholar, A. Stewart-Sykes, argues that Peri Pascha might be an early liturgy; see The Lamb's High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha, and the Quartodeeiman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis (Leiden 1998).

10 The seal of blood may have a similar function with the protective mystery charm (amulet or talisman) against the natural calamity or plague (Cf. P. Kingsley, Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic. Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition [Oxford 1995] 307-312).

11 PP 16 (92) - 17 (104). Criticizing the Egyptians for not being initiated in the mystery of the Pascha might be seen as a general polemic against the pagans. Moreover, Melito in many pages describes Egypt's punishment in terms of mourning, death, and darkness of Hades. For the connection between children and mystery, see P. Lambrechts, "L'importance de l'infant dans les religions à mystères," Hommages W. Deonna (Brussels 1957) 322-333.
2. The Theory of Types as Connection between the two Mystery Series

The exegesis of Exodus 12 may have originated in the Jewish tradition of the Pesach Haggadah in which the father of every family explains to his children the story of exodus, and will become a pattern for future paschal homilies or treatises, as one can see in Melitontan, Pseudo-Hippolytus, Origen, and partially in the homilies newly ascribed to Apollinarius of Laodicea. Moreover, Pseudo-Hippolytus and Origen follow the same bipartite Melitontan structure: while the first part is an exposition of the paschal figures and types of the old mystery from Exodus 12, the second part becomes an illustration of the true or prefigured realities. First comes the type or the Pesach, second the antitype or the Pascha.

Melito describes the relationship between the old and new mystery of Pascha through typological exegesis, a method that the author took over from previous Christian exegetical tradition. The old sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people (Scriptures accepted by the Christians as well) express ideas and depict Old Testament events that came to be associated with the events of the divine economy after the Incarnation. For instance, in 1 Cor 10:1-11 and Gal 4:21-31, Paul associates the crossing of the Red Sea with the Christian Baptism, in which case the crossing of the sea is a figure or type (ὁ τύπος) for the Christian sacrament (ὁ ἱερός). Following the same logic, the manna of the desert was the figure of the Eucharist, while the pillar of cloud or fire was the figure of Christ himself. Scholars have called this type of exegesis typology, and it was a communality of the majority of Christian writers of the first three centuries. This fact prompted Jean Danielou to view typology as the Christian exegesis par excellence.

For a detailed analysis of the central biblical themes which received a typological interpretation in the first centuries (e.g. Adam, Noah, the flood, Abraham sacrificing Isaac, the exodus or the fall of Jericho), see Jean Danielou’s classic Sacramentum Futuri: Etudes sur les origines de la typologie biblique. According to his perspective, allegory was of Philhellenic inspiration and essentially Greek. However, for Henri de Lubac, on the basis of Gal 2:24, allegory was as Christian as typology. Moreover, for de Lubac “Origen’s allegorism is typological” and the distinction between typology and allegory seems to be analogous to that between theory and practice (“Typologie et allegorisme,” Revue des sciences religieuses 34 [1947] 220-221). Other researchers such as H. Crouzel see in allegory the method through which various terrestrial realities symbolize celestial realities, while typology is the method through which one historical reality denotes another historical reality, especially post-incarnational, or an event having Christ as subject. See Crouzel, Origen (San Francisco 1989) 80-81.
However, at least for Melito, Pseudo-Hippolytus, and Origen, typology seem to play the function of connecting the two series of mysteries by relating an old figure or type with its corresponding antitype. Furthermore, typology reveals the unique source and agent of the two series of mysteries, the Logos-Christ and thus the fact that there is only one mystery developed in different grades and stages.

3. Melito's Term ἰσοτύπος: From 'Secret' to 'Performance'

The main exegetes who preceded Melito, namely Justin, Tertullian, and Irenaeus, continued to use the method of typology originated in the Pauline writings, especially for the theological polemics in which they were involved. Within these polemics, major opponents were the Jewish readers, who did not see in Scriptures the Christological meanings described for instance by Justin. Furthermore, also take into account both Marcionite theologians, not very lenient towards obscure scriptural passages, and the ironies of philosophically educated Greeks, such as Celsus, Porphyry or the emperor Julian the 'Apostate'.

The idea of obscure words was not new, since as early as the book of Proverbs 1:6, one encounters a reflection on the concepts of parable (παραβολή), obscure word (σκοτεινὸς λόγος), or enigma (αἰνήμα). Centuries later, Justin would call these obscure passages mystery (μυστήριον) or symbol (σύμβολον), and Christian theologians would interpret them mainly typologically.

It is worth mentioning that, although the term μυστήριον appears in the Pauline corpus, a development of exegesis as mystery performance or cult does not seem to materialize in Christian context before Melito. In Justin, for instance, the term can be encountered when the writer claims that prophecies describe future events through parables, mysteries, and symbols of events (ἐν παραβολάς ἢ μυστηρίοις ἢ ἐν συμβολάς έργον). Justin's theological rationale was that the Holy Spirit manifests itself through parable and in a hidden way (ἐν παραβολῇ ἢ καὶ παρακεκλήσασθαι ἱμμένος).

It seems that in the Justinean and Irenaean theological visions Christ's coming was perceived as producing major exegetical consequences,


15 Dial. 68.6. J. D. B. Hamilton noticed that "Justin's use of mystery is non-cultic" and Clement was the first to contrast the mysteries of Dionysos with the 'holy mysteries' [in the plural] of Christ (e.g. Protrep. XII.118.4); see Hamilton's "The Church and the Language," 479-494, esp. 484-485.

16 Dial. 52.1. Clement of Alexandria also maintains the idea that the entire Scripture was written in parables (see Str. V.25.1).
namely Justin, Tertullian, Irenaeus claims that the good news about Christ was hidden (κεκρυμμένος) in prophecies and symbolized through types and parables (διὰ τύπων καὶ παραβολῶν καταμίμητο) which could be understood only at the time of their fulfillment. 18

For Melito, on the contrary the term μυστήριον seems to signify a performance or cult rather than a secret or enigma. Trying to frame Melito’s Sitz im Leben, it is worth mentioning the rise of allegorical techniques of interpretation around the first century AD with the Middle Platonists and Neo-Pythagorians, with Heracleitos and Cornutus. 19 Philo and other Jewish writers were also important players. Moreover, Bockmuehl investigated the application of these techniques in the domain of mysteries: “The mystical technique appears not to have been practiced before Plutarch (c. A.D. 45-120), but it went on to find rich development in the second and third centuries, e.g. in Numerius and Porphyry.” 20

As I have noted above, Melito applied these techniques in connecting the two (old and new) mysteries of Pascha. One might suppose that the Sardisian Christian bishop adopted this strategy as a polemical reaction to the mystery context of the Asia Minor of the second century. One should not overlook the fact that “Ephesians’ Artemis” had been celebrated in festivals at least until A.D. 262 when Goths destroyed the Artemision. At the same time, Cybele, the other mother goddess, if not identical to Artemis, was celebrated in the northeastern Anatolian regions and the worship of Cybele was spread from here all over the Roman Empire. 21 Attis was also venerated in connection with Cybele, while Sebazios had his special mysteries, which in time had become a sort of Asia Minor version of the Dionysian ones. 22 The most important cities of Asia Minor may be then encountered in the stories about Apollonius of

17 The following fragment is illustrative for this theological vision: “And when Isaiah calls Him [Christ] the Angel of mighty counsel, did he not foretell Him to be the Teacher of those truths which He did teach when He came [to earth]? [...] For if the prophets declared obscurely (παραβολάζων) that Christ would suffer, and thereafter be Lord of all, yet that [declaration] could not be understood by any man until He Himself persuaded the apostles that such statements were expressly related in the Scriptures” (Dial. 76, ANF 1).


19 Bockmuehl, Revelation and Mystery, 79-80.

20 Bockmuehl, Revelation and Mystery, 80; see also note 87.

21 For the large extent of Cybele worship in Asia Minor, see for instance M. J. Vermaseren, Corpus Cultus Cybelæ Attidisque, Vol. I: Asia Minor (Leiden / New York 1987). For festivals of Cybele and Attis, see M. J. Vermaseren’s Cybele and Attis. The Myth and the Cult (London 1877), esp. 21-3, 110-2. For the worship of Jupiter in Asia Minor, see also M. Hörig and E. Schwerheim, Corpus Cultus Iovis Dolicheni (Leiden 1987) 3-16.

Tyana, a famous Neo-Pythagorean prophet and philosopher. His biography, written and often mythicized by Philostratos around A.D. 240, offers an emblematic picture for the mentalities of that time. Another case, not less famous, was that of Alexander of Abonuteichos, the second-century prophet satirized by Lucian of Samosata, the satire in itself being a testimony of his celebrity. Asia Minor of the second century was, therefore, the center of a significant bloom of mysteries and mystery mentalities. Within this context, the Christian polemical reaction, and particularly that of a bishop as Melito, cannot be a surprise.23

Moreover, one may find similarities between the role that the reading of Exodus 12 and its commentary or homily play in the Paschal celebration and the role the transmission (παράδοσις) of the ἴσπολ Λόγος plays in the context of mystery cults.24 Placed between the stage of purification (καθάρμος) and that of the highest revelation (ἐποπτεία), the stage of παράδοσις was one of transmission of sacred knowledge and a preparation for the vision of the mysteries.25 Melito, too, invites his initiands to understand and see the mystery of the Lord. The sensorial modality of this discovery is seeing, the standard sensorial modality in the mysteries: "If you want to see the mystery of the Lord (τὸ τοῦ κυρίου μυστήριον ἱδσά)...."26 During the stage of the 'Christian' paradosis, the Christian initiate has to see the economic <<...>> the invisible... Christian may see... 27

4. Christ the Perfect Mystic

Starting with the mystery of the Resurrection, the Christian may have recourse to the mystery that Jesus is the λόγος. The Logos-Christ, as the model of the human and the cosmic, is the antitype of the earthly mysteries, as the type of the divine. The perfect mystic is the one who, on the one hand, through the experience of death, Melito suggests, saw him 'emerge from the Anaktoron, in the shining nights of the mysteries [Plut. De prof. virt. 81c; Plut. De prof. virt. 10.81d-e]. A 'great light' would become visible 'when the Anaktoron was opened [ibid.].'
osopher. His biogra-
around A.D. 240, of-
time. Another case
hos, the second-cen-
tire in itself being a
and mystery mentali-
tation, and particu-
role that the reading
the Paschal celebra-
stage of purification
(sanctification), the stage
of a model (of the
mystery cults, 153-
ems and the mystai then
[Plut. De prof.
as opened [Ibid.])
initiand has to reconstruct and try to see the series of manifestations of
the economic mysteries in their traces in Scripture. In this way the
Christian may become a μοστής in Christ's mysteries.

4. Christ the Pascha: The New Mystery

Starting with PP 66, Melito describes the series of manifestations of
the mystery that the Logos performed in the new times, i.e., after his In-
carnation. The emblematic thing is that the same Logos-Christ performs
both mystery series. While in the old times he suffered in Abel, Isaac,
Jacob, Joseph, Moses or David, in the new series of mysteries the same
Logos-Christ takes flesh in the virgin and suffers passions, death, burial,
resurrection, and thus causes humans' salvation from death. The whole
history of salvation is therefore envisioned as the mystery of Logos-
Christ's economy.

Moreover, one can identify a double dynamic of the connection be-
tween the figure (τοῦτος) of the old mystery and the Logos-Christ. On the
one hand, though in a hidden way, the Logos manifests itself towards or
within the type. In a chain of rhetorical questions addressed to the angel
of death, Melito exclaims:

It is clear that your respect was won when you saw the mystery of the Lord
occurring in the sheep, the life of the Lord in the slaughter of the lamb, the
model of the Lord in the death of the sheep; that is why you did not strike Is-
rael, but made only Egypt childless.

On the other hand, a reverse dynamic emerges from the type towards
the antitype, as far as it is in its antitype that mystery of the type is ful-
filled and the old obscure words of the sacred text may find their mean-
ing. As the bishop of Sardis explains to his church fellows: "What is said
and what is done is nothing, beloved, without a comparison and pre-

(Burkert, Homo Necans, 277). The vision of light also represents a common feature of Jew-
ish mysticism. For an analysis of the Paschal manifestation of light in the mentality of the
Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity, see my "Seeking to See Him at the Festival
of Pascha: The Expectation of the Divine Glory in Early Christian Paschal Materials and
Rabbinic Literature," in G. Lurie and A. Orlov, The Theophaneia School: Jewish Roots of

27 "Therefore if you wish to see the mystery of the Lord, look at Abel who is similarly
murdered, at Isaac who is similarly bound, at Joseph who is similarly sold, at Moses who is
similarly exposed, at David who is similarly persecuted, at the prophets, etc." (PP 59-60:
Hill, On Pascha, 33).

28 PP 32 (203) – 33 (212). For the pre-incarnational economy of the Logos-Christ, see
also IP 81-88, or 96, in which Christ is depicted as the one who created the world and man,
saved Israel from Egypt, and gave him the Law.
liminary sketch. (Οὐδὲν ἑστιν, ἀγαπητοί, τὸ λεγόμενον καὶ γινόμενον δίχα παραβολῆς καὶ προκεντικός.) 29 He further explains that every important construction needs a preliminary sketch (τὸ προκέντημα) made out of wax, clay or wood. In the economic process, this preliminary sketch is the mystery hidden in the Old Testament events and known only by the prophets. Melito does not conceive of the sketch as completed work (ἐργον), but merely the image of its future fulfillment; in his own words, what is going to be (after the Incarnation) may be seen in the image of the type (τὸ μέλλον διὰ τῆς τυπικῆς εἰκόνος ὑπάρχοντος). 30

The old mystery is then involved into the dynamism of being changed into its antitype, as expressed here: “For indeed the law has become word, and the old new [...], and the commandment grace, and the model (τύπος) reality (ἀληθεία), and the lamb a Son, and the sheep a Man, and the Man God.” 31 Using a different metaphor, the type is not changed into its antitype but only transfers its power (ἡ δύναμις) to the reality, and the law was fulfilled, conceding its power to the gospel. 32

While the economic series is fulfilled in the mystery of the Pascha, 33 the level of initiation remains opened and the fulfilled mystery always new in its being rediscovered:

The mystery of the Lord having been prefigured well in advance and having been seen through a model (διὰ τύπον ὑπάρχοντος), is today believed in now that it is fulfilled (τετελεσμένον), though considered new by men. For the mystery of the Lord is new and old. 34

This sentence assumes that the mystery of economy is one, though manifested in various ways. Hidden in the letters of the ancient Scriptures and within the divine economy, it remains to be forever new in every process of being rediscovered.

29 PP 35 (217-218).
31 PP 7 (41-9).
32 PP 42 (271-272).
33 “[Τ]he mystery of the Pascha has been fulfilled in the body of the Lord (τὸ τοῦ πασχα μοστηρίου τετέλεσται ἐν τῷ τοῦ χριστοῦ σώματι) [PP 56 (396-397)].”
34 PP 58 (405-412).
D. Pseudo-Hippolytus's Paschal Mystery Exegesis

Pseudo-Hippolytus, an anonymous author who most likely lived in the same province — Asia Minor — and not much later than Melito, developed a similar vision. In general, Pseudo-Hippolytus is indebted to Melito both in terms of homily structure or theological perspective. For him, biblical exegesis is mystery performance as well. Declared within the liturgical context of the paschal night after the reading from Exodus 12, the homily becomes the explanation of the ιεροι λόγοι (now in the Christian version of δέιγμα γραφῆς) of the mystery:

While the divine Scripture (δέιγμα γραφῆς) has mystically (μουσώνως) pre-announced this sacred feast (ιερά ἐσορία) of Pascha, we will now investigate the revealed things in minute detail and search for the hidden mysteries of Scripture in response to your prayers. We will not suppress the truth in what is written, but contemplate through the figures the accuracy of the mysteries (τὸν δὲ ἀκριβέστατον τῶν μυστηρίων διὰ τῶν τύπων δεουρούντες).
For the author, while the types (οἱ τύποι), symbols (τὰ σύμβολα), and mysteries (τὰ μυστήρια) have occurred in Israel in a visible way (ὁρατῶς), they reach their completion in the Christian Pascha in a spiritual modality (πνευματικῶς τελεσθερεύομενα).  

The new Paschal mystery is the common celebration of all (κοινὴ τῶν ὀλίγων πανήγυρις), eternal feast of angels and archangels, life for the entire world, wound of death, food for humans, sacred ritual (ἱερὰ τελετή) of the heaven and earth, and prophesizes old and new mysteries which can be scrutinized in a visible way (ὁρατῶς) on earth and perceived through the mind (νοούμενα) in heaven.

Pseudo-Hippolytus, as a mystagogue knowing the mysteries of Scripture, guides his new initiates on the traces of the scriptural mysteries, namely over the types, connecting them with their antitypes. In this way, he remakes the history of divine economy in its double aspect: in Law and Incarnation. Egypt pre-announced (προσκομιζόμενο) the truth (ἀλήθεια) in figures (οἱ τύποι) and the Law pre-interpreted (προφητεύοντα) it in images/copies (εἰκόνας), bringing into being only the shadow of the things to come (τὸν μελλόντον σκιά). But the Christian initiand can discover the models of those copies (τῶν εἰκόνων τὰ μορφώματα) and the completions of the figures (τῶν τύπων τὰ πλήρωματα), and, instead of shadow, the accuracy and confirmation of the truth (ἡ ἀκριβεία καὶ βεβαιωσι τῆς ἀληθείας).

Akin to Melito, pseudo-Hippolytus divides mysteries into old and new and envisages the divine economy developed over two stages, the boundary between them being the event of the Incarnation. While in the first part of the homily, the antitypes, in the sense of the ἀλήθειας μυστήριων, are preannounced in the consecrated object, the author, according to pseudo-Hippolytus' view, the celebration of the Christian Pascha in the paschal lambs (λαμβάνει τοὺς ἁπαντάς τῶν μυστηρίων τῆς θεότητος) announces the event of the Incarnation in this way. Taking over another aspect of the Incarnation in the paschal lamb, the group of initiates, according to pseudo-Hippolytus, is united with Christ in the Paschal mystery...

An important element of this participation in a sacrificial act is the consecrated object, in the paschal lamb, the in-breaking of the Christian mystery. The author does not mention the lamb. Another main element is the paschal feast. In another document, the group of initiates, according to pseudo-Hippolytus, is united with Christ in the paschal lamb.

Pursuing this idea, the black manifestation of the divinity of the initiates is initiated in the paschal lamb, and in similar words, the paschal lamb, and the new manifestation of the Lamb is...
symbols (τὰ σύμβολα), and in a visible way (ὀρφανοῦς), Oscha in a spiritual modal­

substitution of all (κοινῆ τῶν 

changes, life for the en­

cred ritual (ιερὰ τελετή)40 

and new mysteries which 

δέονται) on earth and per­

mysteries, in the second part he describes the mysteries of the truth (τὰ 

αὐτῆς μυστήρια):43 Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascen­

sion. Taking over a Pauline idea from Col 2:9, the homilist expresses the 

Incarnation in this way: "compressing in himself all the greatness of the 

divinity [...] without diminishing the glory."44

An important dimension of mystery ceremony regards the real partic­

ipation in a sacred or consecrated substance, i.e. the process of eating 

the consecrated offerings (τὰ ιερά). For the Israelites, in Pseudo-Hip­

polytus’ view, the consecrated offerings eaten in a mystery rite consisted 

in the paschal lamb. But for Christians, the paschal lamb is just the 

figure of the Christian Pascha and Eucharist. In addition, the mystery sub­

stance Christians eat with spiritual knowledge brings death’s defeat.45 

The author does not speak metaphorically in either case, but concretely. 

Another main element of mystery celebrations consists in the preserva­

tion of the secrets performed and contemplated in the ceremony within 

the group of initiated people. Now, the group is the ecclesia and the cen­

tral secret is eating the Pascha or the sacred body of Christ.46 

Pursuing this intelligible or noetic itinerary of contemplating the di­

vine manifestations of the Logos in figures and truth, Christians turn out 

to be initiated in the old and new things with a sacred knowledge (οἱ τὰ 

καινὰ καὶ παλαιὰ μετὰ γνώσεως ιερὰς μυστήρων); in other words, of the old 

and new manifestations of the divine economy.47

E. Mystery Exegesis in Origen’s Paschal Treatise

Mystery exegesis may be also encountered in the Origenian paschal 
treatise discovered at Tura in 1941.48 According to extant vestiges, there 

were a few other paschal documents at the time Origen wrote his trea­

tise.49 Among them, those belonging to Apollinarius of Hierapolis and 

43 IP 7 (5).

44 IP 45 (10-13): πάν τῆς θεότητος εἰς ἑαυτὸν συναφοῦς καὶ συναγαγόν [...] οὐ [...] τῇ δόξῃ 

διαπανοῦμενον.

45 IP 50 (5-6).

46 IP 40 and 41.

47 IP 4 (1-2).

48 See O. Guéraud and P. Nautin, Origène. Sur la Paque. Traité inédit publié d’après un 
papyrus de Tura (Paris 1979) [abbreviated PP] For an extensive commentary, see H. 
Buchinger’s monumental Pascha bei Origenes (Innsbruck 2005). 

49 I.e., the Paschal writings of Apollinarius of Hierapolis, Irenaeus of Lyon, Victor of 
Rome, Clement of Alexandria, and Hippolytus of Rome. See G. Visona, "Pasqua quartode­
Clement of Alexandria are fragmentary preserved in the Byzantine document entitled the *Chronicon pascale*. In spite of reduced quantity of preserved material, one can identify two new central ideas that emerged within these documents and both are preserved in the Origenian treatise.

First, while Melito's and Pseudo-Hippolytus's homilies were Quartodeciman and developed the etymology of the Greek word πάσχα from the Greek verb πάσχω (to suffer, to be affected), Apollinarius and Clement were anti-Quartodeciman. In his turn, Origen perhaps inherited these two ideas from Clement, namely the anti-Quartodeciman position and the idea that πάσχα means "crossing," or "passage."

It seems that the conception of Pascha as passage was a Jewish common place, as far as Josephus translated it by υπέρβασις (trespass). Philo by διάβασις (crossing over) and διώβεια (crossing), while Aquila rendered it with ὑπέρβασις. Either from Clement or directly from Philo, Origen took over the term of φασά, which for Philo does not have its origins in the Greek πάσχα, but in the Hebrew נְסָחָ (pesach). In his turn, Origen perhaps inherited these two ideas from Clement, namely the anti-Quartodeciman position and the idea that πάσχα means "crossing," or "passage."

Scholars have emphasized Clement's mystery exegesis especially present in *Protrepticos* and *Stromateis*. Since mystery exegesis appears to be an Alexandrian interpreter, Torjensen's argument still holds. In *Ludus Veritatis* and *Protostoria*, Torjensen's art of Alexandrian interpretation of Scripture, the method of metaphorical interpretation is able to mediate between the physical and spiritual mentality:

Origen, as an Alexandrian interpreter, has undergone an experience of knowledge as follows:

1. Paschal Mystery

Scholars have emphasized the interpretation of Sardis for differentiation between the mystery performance and demonstration. According to the ancient Jewish practice of sacrifice (πασχάδον),

As for the difference between the mystery distinction being Eucharistic in nature,

We have the tradition that water is sacred and the art of water is to burn an offering (αἰσθητὸν)

58 Bouyer, 59 See K. J. astrow, 60 Torjensen
61 Campbel
62 Origen,
served in the Byzantine ve reduced quantity of enal ideas that emerged the Origenian treatise. tive ideas were Quar Greek word παρασχεσ from Tollinarius and Clement access to Philo’s writ its origins in the Greek turn, Origen perhaps in the anti-Quartodeciman or “passage.” rage was a Jewish com παραπαί (trespass), while Aquila or directly from Philo, the Greek word παρασχεσ Šasha. Again, through Origen took over the Phil the passage from the mention that, to a tion that originates in (2P 3:30-31; 7:1-3). by exegesis especially the Paschal Mystery Exegesis and the Eucharistic Sacrifice Scholars have also shown that Origen is indebted to the bishop of Sardis for different aspects of his hermeneutics. The exegesis as a mystery performance at the Paschal feast might also be of Asia Minor inspiration. According to Origen, the θερι γραφαί describe how God ordered to the ancient Israelites to fulfill a sacred service (θεριγραφία) and a sacred sacrifice (θεριοθεσία) in a mystical way (μεταμφιστάνω). As for the new mysteries, the Alexandrian preserves the traditional distinction between type/figure and antitype/truth and makes the following Eucharistic statement:

We have to sacrifice the true lamb (ἐξοντός) in order to be sanctified / consecrated priests (ἰεροθεσία) or to come closer to the priestly status and have to burn and eat his flesh. [...] He Himself says that this Pasch a is not sensible (ἐξοντος) but intelligible (ζωοντός): If you do not eat my flesh and drink my

61 Campbell Bonner emphasized the Melitorean inspiration of the Origenian passage HLo X.1, where Origen describes the relation between the Old and New Testament through the image of the preliminary sketch; see The Homily on the Passion by Melito, Bishop of Sardis (Studies and Documents XII; Cambridge 1940) 56-72. In a similar way, Jean Danielou proved that Origen quoted the Sardian a few times, e.g. in CPs I.1, CGn 1.26, or CMt X.9-11 (“Figure et événement chez Meliton”, in Neotestamentica et patristica [Leiden 1962] 290-292). The large amount of Melitorean themes, and especially their diversity, and that of the Origenian treatises in which they have been taken over, may constitute an argument for the idea that the bishop of Sardis was an important theological authority for the great Alexandrian.
62 Origen, Peri Pascha 39 (9-29).
blood, you will not have life in yourself (Jn 6:53). Should we eat His flesh and drink His blood in a sensible way? But if He speaks in an intelligible way, then Pascha is not sensible, but intelligible.\(^63\)

In this fragment, the Christian Pascha is identified with the Eucharist, and the Jewish Pesach consequently becomes the type of the Christian Eucharist. Origen then inserts his exegetical vision in this liturgical or ritualistic context. If one takes a look at the goal of the Paschal ritual, one can notice that the participants in this ritual (expressed in the plural first person) have to become consecrated priests or sanctified, or at least closer to the priestly status. The verb exploited in this context is τιπών, which means, in the active voice, “to make holy, to consecrate to the gods,” while in the passive voice, as in the present passage, has the meaning of “being a consecrated priest.”\(^64\) The conception most likely recalls the idea of universal or general priesthood (e.g. 1 Pt 2:5), as long as every partaker of the Eucharist actually sacrifices (Μου) and eats Christ’s body.

Furthermore, Origen associates another Eucharistic theme with the Paschal context: Those who eat the sacred body will receive life, while those who do not eat will not have any defense before the angel of death which is called here with a term from the Epistle to the Hebrews 11:28, “the destroyer” (ὁ δισθρόντα).\(^65\) Origen further operates with a new distinction among those who will survive the destroyer, putting forward the degrees of advancement in mysteries. First are the perfect ones, those who fight for their purity and eat from the lambs’ flock and wheat bread. This food is purer and more appropriate to those who live spiritually (λογικάς, more precisely, akin to the Logos). They are followed by those still under sin and eating from the kids’ flock and barley bread.\(^66\)

2. Mystery Exegesis and Paschal Liturgical Context

Origen also associates with the Paschal context an exegesis focused on Scripture: “If the lamb is Christ and Christ is the Logos, what is the flesh of the divine words in that case if not the divine Scriptures?”\(^67\) A

\(^63\) Origen, PP 13 (3-35). On passage 26, he explains how the flesh, i.e. the Scripture, does not have to be eaten green, which means literally interpreted, but burned on the fire of the Holy Spirit, and in this way spiritually read.

\(^64\) Liddell-Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, v.I, p.823. For textual references, see Pl. Lg. 771b; Inscriptiones Graecae, Voluminum ii et iii, ed. J. Kirchner, 1126.16; Berl. Sitzb. 1927.8; Aeschin. I.19.

\(^65\) Origen, PP 14. (10, 13).

\(^66\) Origen, PP 23.

\(^67\) Origen, PP 26 (5-8).
Should we eat His flesh and asks in an intelligible way.

Identified with the Eucharist the type of the Christian vision in this liturgical meal of the Paschal ritual, (expressed in the plural or sanctified, or at least in this context is ἱεροῦ, y, to consecrate to the present passage, has the reception most likely received e.g. 1 Pt 2:5), as long as (ωιο) and eats Christ's adstic theme with the will receive life, while before the angel of death to the Hebrews 11:28, generates with a new discourse, putting forward the perfect ones, those lock and wheat bread. who live spiritually are followed by those barley bread.66

Employing mystery terminology, Origen sets his discourse in a Greek mystery framework. Nonetheless, in spite of the mystery terminology present in the text, the content is Christian-liturgical, and the context in which Origen places his discourse is also Christian, very similar with those of Melito, Pseudo-Hippolytus, and Clement. Expressing Christian cult in mystery terminology, Origen has a double discursive intention: Christian cult is also a mystery and, moreover, it is a superior mystery. One can reasonably suppose that Melito, Pseudo-Hippolytus, Clement, and Origen had the narrative strategy as in the case of taking over Greek philosophical terminology, namely polemicizing against the Greek communities that constituted their environment at the time. Consequently, their strategy towards Greek philosophy and mysteries was one of borrowing terminology and claiming that Christianity is the true philosophy and the receptacle of the highest mysteries.73

68 Origen, PP 33 (1-3).
70 As Burkert affirms: “The basic idea of an initiation ritual is generally taken to be that of death and rebirth” (Burkert, Ancient Mystery Cults, 99). He further gives examples from various mystery cults such as Isis and Osiris, Dionysos and Persephone. The Mithraic monuments also “indicate that the day of the initiation ritual was a new birthday; the mystes was natus et renatus.” Burkert, 100. Cf. M. Eliade, Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth (New York 1975, c1958).
72 Origen, PP 31 (23-24).
73 One may notice that the Greek mystery and philosophical themes and terms are not only instruments through which Origen builds his exegesis in Peri Pascha. He employs Jewish or Jewish-Christian ascetic themes and terminology as well. To overcome sensoriality and to avoid sexuality (see pages 35-37) as preparation for eating Pascha, or to participate in the heavenly mysteries, all of these are features belonging to the Jewish ascetic and ascensional framework. Torjensen's position is emblematic in expressing interpreter's ascension and transformation: “The myth of ascent provides a locative framework in which the teacher is «translated» into the realm of the divine and through proximity to the divine is assimilated to the divine and then returns as a mediator. This transmigration or translo-
In his text, Origen assumes that Christians take part in Christ's body in varying degrees: part of them in the head, others in the hands, feet, chest, entrails or viscera. There are, therefore, different degrees of initiation and those who eat the viscera reach the highest level, becoming initiated in the meaning (λόγος) of the mystery of Incarnation, which is cardinal. Thus Origen can conceive of a hierarchy among paschal mysteries. While the Old-Testament Paschal mysteries (mysteria paschae [in Lat.]) have been changed at the coming of the New Testament, the New-Testament mysteries (mysteria [Lat.]) will be removed, in their turn, at the time of resurrection.

The Origenian exegetical itinerary, as well as the Melitonian one, displays and make discernible the manifestations of the Logos in Scriptures. It is a way by which the words of the sacred text turn into transparent enigmas and mirrors of the things to come. (Here the Alexandrian recalls the famous 1 Cor 13:12.) In Origen's view, the flesh, blood, and bones, which have to be eaten, represent symbolically the elements of the sacred text through which the heavenly realities may be envisioned. While 'bones' refer to the words (αὐτὰ λέξεις) of Scripture and 'flesh' to the meanings (τὰ φρονήματα), 'blood' is the faith which saves from the 'destroyer'. The parallel to the myth of the dismembered deity carries on with the idea of a new birth (ποιμὶν). For Origen, the true Pascha has to refer, in a spiritual way, to the passage from darkness to light, which is a new birth (γένεσιν). The meaning of a new birth cannot be different from the passage to a perfect behavior (τέλεια πολιτεία) and a perfect love (τέλεια ἀγάπη), which may start from this earthly existence.

3. Typology vs. Allegory in Paschal Mystery Exegesis?

The goal of this study does not justify further detailing of the Origenian exegesis, which has been explored by so many previous schol-
see the part in Christ's body that is in the hands, feet, and different degrees of imitation in the highest level, becoming Incarnation, which is the Logos in Scripture as: "The Incarnation, which is among paschal mysteries (mysteria paschae) in the New Testament, the New Testament. It moved, in their turn, at the Melititonian one, distinguishing the Logos in Scripture or the flesh, blood, and especially the elements of nature and 'flesh' to the new birth cannot be seen from the 'de-terred deity carries on the darkness to light, new birth cannot be in terms of horizontal or vertical spatiality. There are fragments in which Christ is encountered on earth where his body is consumed, similar to the texts of the two Asian Minor theologians, and fragments in which the vertical dimension is evident, as well as the implied allegory.

Consequently, on the one hand, Origen preserves the mystery exegesis developed by the Asian Minor theologians. On the other hand, he empas-

80 For a thorough presentation and a very comprehensive bibliography on Origen's exegesis, see, for example, C. Kannengiesser, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis* (vol. I; Leiden / Boston 2004) 536-574.

81 It is worth mentioning that Origen did not write his *Peri Pascha* in his youth, but the work represents a mature undertaking, done during his stay in Caesarea between 235-248; i.e. between the writing of his commentaries on John and those on Matthew, most likely around 245 (Guéraud and Nautin, *Origene*, 109).

sizes more powerfully the Platonic distinction between the sensible realities and their intelligible models.\(^{85}\)

An important observation is that the vertical dimension cannot be found in the Pauline fragment about allegory, where the two wives of Abraham refer to the Old and New Testament (Gal 4:20-24). Due to its very large original sense (“speaking about something else”), the notion of “allegory” has, therefore, a broader extension than that of “typology.” Perhaps a more suitable distinction to the textual data is that which F. M. Young employs, namely typology is a form of allegory.\(^{86}\) For this reason, allegory can incorporate typology as a genus incorporates a species. From a historical perspective, the extensive Alexandrian use of allegory brought a larger hermeneutical freedom than the Asia Minor theologians did. But this freedom at times brought speculative constructions lacking a sound connection with the biblical text.

However, according to one of Burkert’s illuminating insights, any allegory in a religious context is mystical, as Demetrius and Macrobius illustrate.\(^{87}\) In this way, the typology used in a mystery context, including those of the three Christian authors analyzed in this article, might also be considered an allegory.

F. Concluding Remarks

The chain of argument of the present paper leads to the tentative conclusion that biblical exegesis in the Paschal context of the first three centuries in Asia Minor and Alexandria was part of a complex liturgical-exegetical system. Within that context, it was not a mere pious reading or an intellectual exercise but rather a cultic investigation through which the one who does the hermeneutical task undergoes transformation and encounters the concrete manifestations of the Logos. It seems that it played a similar role with the transmission and explication of the iepoI lógoi in the mystery cults.

\(^{85}\) E.g. CC 2, Clo 1.24. Certain Platonic distinctions (especially that between paradigm and copy) also occur in Melito (e.g. PP 37-39) and Pseudo-Hippolytus [e.g. IP 2 (1-8); 6 (8-10)]. Moreover, the last one also discloses the idea that the mystery exegesis translates the exegete from the sensible to the intelligible world [IP 3 (30-31); 6 (8-10)].

\(^{86}\) F. M. Young, Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of the Christian Culture (Cambridge 1997) 198. On page 201, Young also underlines certain species of typology: exemplary (biographical), prophetic (historical), spatial, and recapitulative.

\(^{87}\) Burkert, Ancient Mystery Cults, 78-82. Demetrius, in his On Style 101 (300 BC – 100 AD), states that “the mysteries too are expressed in the form of allegory, in order to arouse consternation and dread, just as they are performed in darkness and night.” Macrobius, in S. Sc. 1.2.17f, concurs: “Thus the mysteries themselves are hidden in the tunnels of figurative expression.” See Burkert, Ancient Mystery Cults, 79.
Moreover, the Asia Minor theologians developed a theory of two mysteries or series of manifestations of the Paschal mystery where the typology had the function of connecting the two series. On the basis of Burkert’s understanding of allegory, one may also affirm that the typology used in a mystery context is a form of allegory.

Origen, in his turn, probably took over the mystery exegesis of Pascha from diverse media, such as Philo, Clement, and Asia Minor theologians and developed it in connection with, if not even within the context of, the Paschal feast. The Alexandrian theologian employed in his Peri Pascha the two mysteries theory together with the theory of types. In addition, Pseudo-Hippolytus and Origen elaborated Eucharistic features in connection with the feast of Pascha.

Generally speaking, it might be suggested that Melito, Pseudo-Hippolytus, and Origen associated the Paschal liturgical event with an exegetical moment in which, as in a dramatic performance, the audience was asked to discover and contemplate God’s manifested mysteries in Abel’s, Isaac’s, Jacob’s, or Joseph’s sufferings, in the sacrificed lamb and the salvation from Egypt, as well as in Christ’s Incarnation, salvific Passions, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension. Paschal exegesis was therefore not an abstract ratiocination, but a cultic activity, which should involve Christ’s contemplation.