

Ancient Christian Exegesis of Psalms and Ancient Philology on Homer

How did ancient attentive readers read a text? Incomprehensible phraseology, contradictions with other passages, and philosophical criticism were issues of critically reading the poems of Homer, but also of critique against the Bible. Questions and methods of Alexandrian philology on Homer influenced Jewish interpreters such as Demetrius and Philo, but also Christian exegetes like Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea and their successors. Pagan philologists like Zenodot of Ephesus, Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarchus of Samothrake and Jewish or Christian theologians had in part to give answers to similar questions.

Generally spoken, this is by no means really new, but it is very seldom that we find examples of the analogies presented in the scholarly literature, and for academic courses it would also be helpful to illustrate this point. I will present some examples for this general thesis but also for my special thesis: Christian reading of the Psalms as related to Jesus Christ is a specific Christian interpretation but does not imply a full break between Christian and Greco-Roman exegesis. Prosopographic exegesis and the counterbalancing of contradictions are tasks for both. After a brief look at parallels of terminology, this paper will offer examples for each of these issues. A few examples of Jewish Exegesis will be added. To be sure, I can give only some examples of the rich wealth of Jewish exegesis, and I am aware of the problems of chronology concerning the Midrash Tehillim, but I think these problems are of no decisive importance for the scenario unfolded in this paper.

1. Philology on Homer and Christian Exegesis – General Remarks

1.1. Divergences and Analogies between Pagan and Christian Exegesis

The divergences between pagan and Christian Exegesis are implied in the distinct status of the Bible for the life of the Churches and the believers. The poems of Homer had been criticized severely by Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Plato, nonetheless they were basic texts for Greco-Roman culture,

estimated even as a preliminary stage for philosophical education¹, and offering examples for virtue and vice.² Yet they were not, as such, normative for spiritual and moral life. The Bible, on the other hand, was regarded as authoritative by Christians despite their doctrinal differences, and, in contradistinction to the human fictions of Greek literature,³ it was regarded as being without senseless texts⁴ or error even in historical topics or marginal details.⁵ This difference implies consequences in exegetical technique and the perception of problems for interpretation.

The philologists on Homer suspected unfitting verses and doublets of being spurious (*ἄθεραῖν*) – that was not possible for Jews and Christians. But some arguments of pagan philology do have their Christian counterparts, as we shall see. However, in order to establish the thesis of partial analogies between pagan and Christian exegesis we have to ask for common terminology; if there were no analogies here it would be difficult to defend our thesis.

1.2. The Terminology of Pagan and Christian Exegesis

The remarks of Zenodot of Ephesus, Aristophanes of Byzantium and Aristarch of Samothrake on Homer's *Iliad* are published in Hartmut Erbse's critical edition.⁶ Negative commenting words are οὐ πιθανός (not plausible)⁷, ἄκαιρος (untimely)⁸, εὐτελής (low)⁹, γελοῖος (ridiculous)¹⁰ and ἀπρεπής or οὐ πρέπων (not becomingly)¹¹, ἀνάρμοστον (unfitting)¹², ἀσθενές

¹ Strabo, *Geogr* 1:2, 3, LCL:4–6.

² Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 53:11, LCL:566.

³ This was a common topic of Jewish and Christian critique, cf. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1:26, LCL 186:172; Theophilus, *Autol.* 2:8.9, PTS 44:51.

⁴ Sometimes Jerome comments a Septuagint reading by the formula *nescio quid uolentes ... LXX transtulerunt* (eg. Jerome, *In Os.* 3:13.1, CCSL 76:141). But this is an exception within Jewish and Christian Literature.

⁵ According to NIEHOFF, "Homeric Scholarship," there have really been differences between a group of Jewish exegetes who criticized Biblical texts close to Aristarch and other exegetes like Philo who did not; Niehoff hints on Philo, *Mut.* 60–62: LCL 275:172.

⁶ HARTMUT ERBSE (ed.), *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem (Scholia Vetera)*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969); Vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971); Vol. 3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974); Vol 4 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975); Vol. 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977).

⁷ *Il.* 12:350, Erbse 3:369.

⁸ To *Il.* 15:231–235, Erbse 4:63; to *Il.* 20:251–255, Erbse 5:44.

⁹ To *Il.* 22:487–499, Erbse 5:357; to *Il.* 15:212–217, Erbse 4:58; cf. NIEHOFF, "Homeric Scholarship," 178–179.

¹⁰ To *Il.* 10:409–411, Erbse 3:125; *Il.* 21:538–539, Erbse 5:249f.; *Il.* 24:25–30, Erbse 5:521; cf. further Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 39.1, Russell and Konstan, 68.

¹¹ Erbse 5:31; ἄκαιρον and ἀπρεπές side by side in the Scholia to *Il.* 21:331, Erbse 5:202; cf. further Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 28,4, Russell and Konstan, 54.

¹² To *Il.* 8:164–166, Erbse 2:330.

τῆς φράσεως (weakness of wording)¹³, references of the stem ψευ- (false, deceptive, lying)¹⁴; περισσός (superfluous)¹⁵ and οὐκ ἀναγκαῖος (not necessary)¹⁶, καταχρηστικῶς (use of a term in other than its proper connotation)¹⁷, διαφωνεῖν (contradict)¹⁸. Positive characterizations are ἀρμόζειν (to be appropriate)¹⁹, ὀρθός (correct)²⁰, δεόντως²¹, οὐκ ἀπίθανον (not implausible)²² and εὐκαιρος (opportunistically)²³, καλῶς (rightly)²⁴ and πρέπον²⁵ for a well-done sentence made by the poet. The authors use ὁμηρικῶς²⁶, οὐχ ὁμηρικῶς²⁷ and even ὁμηρικότερον²⁸ when they discuss Homeric style; they remark differences in linguistic usage between the epoch of Homer and later epochs.²⁹ The neutral article τὸ preceding a term refers to Grammatical issues, e.g. ἐστὶ γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐάω τὸ ἕασον.³⁰

We can add the terminology used by other philologists on Homer like Aristotle and Heraclitus, e.g. ἀπόρημα (matter of question),³¹ ἀλόγως (unfitting; groundless)³², εἰκότως (suitably)³³, φιλοσοφία (philosophy) as wisdom of the poet³⁴, συναδούν (harmonious)³⁵, διηνεκής (consistent)³⁶, εὐλογος (reasonably)³⁷.

¹³ To *Il.* 22:199–201, Erbse 5:309; *Il.* 24:71–73, Erbse 5:532.

¹⁴ To *Il.* 23:772, Erbse 5:487.

¹⁵ To *Il.* 21:185, Erbse 5:163; to *Il.* 23:581, Erbse 5:455.

¹⁶ To *Il.* 23:479, Erbse 5:441.

¹⁷ To *Il.* 20:224, Erbse 5:37.

¹⁸ E. g. to *Il.* 21:446, Erbse 5:229.

¹⁹ To *Il.* 12:368, Erbse 3:371; to *Il.* 15:449–451, Erbse 4:103.

²⁰ To *Il.* 11:13, Erbse 3:125; to *Il.* 16:29–32, Erbse 5:32.

²¹ To *Il.* 14:304–306, Erbse 3:637.

²² To *Il.* 5:587, Erbse 2:82; Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 73.10, Russell and Konstan, 118. Cf. the use of πῖθανῶς in Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 31.6; 40.11; 66.8, Russell and Konstan, 56, 74, 106.

²³ To *Il.* 21:379, Erbse 5:215.

²⁴ To *Il.* 5:502, Erbse 2:75 – cf. Mark 7:6!

²⁵ This category is used also in philosophical discussion about the proper way of theology; cf. Cicero, *nat. de.* 3:64, LCL 268:346; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 12:52, LCL:56–58; Plutarch, *Is.* 78,383a, LCL:184; cf. Xenophanes, *Frgm.* 1, Diehls and Kranz, 127.

²⁶ E. g. to *Il.* 9:605, Erbse 2:527.

²⁷ E. g. to *Il.* 9:651, Erbse 2:535.

²⁸ To *Il.* 24:20, Erbse 5:519.

²⁹ Concerning ψηφίδες (*Il.* 21:260) the philologists hint on Solon, *Frgm.* 45 R, Erbse 5:185; the place now called Samothrake is named Samos in *Il.* 24,78, Erbse 5:534.

³⁰ To *Il.* 21:221, Erbse 5:174.

³¹ Cf. just the title of Aristotle, *Ἀπορήματα Ὀμηρικά*.

³² Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 15.6; 57.2, Russell and Konstan, 28, 94.

³³ Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 45.3, 7, Russell and Konstan, 82.

³⁴ Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 53.2, Russell and Konstan, 92.

³⁵ Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 60.1, Russell and Konstan, 98.

³⁶ Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 60.1, Russell and Konstan, 98.

³⁷ Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems* 66.7; 67.4, Russell and Konstan, 106.

In Jewish exegetical literature the task of explaining difficulties can be named as ἐπιζητεῖν³⁸; terms like φυσικῶς³⁹ or ἀπόρημα⁴⁰ and εὐπρεπές⁴¹ are common, but also – Philo’s Questions and Answers on Genesis survived in Armenian, not in Greek – terms like ineptly⁴², unworthy⁴³, suitable⁴⁴, correctly⁴⁵. Some terms are part of inter-religious polemics, e.g. γελᾶν⁴⁶. Similarly to Ancient Philology on Homer, some questions within Philo’s works are questions of the “real history”⁴⁷, other questions are concerning the “meaning of the words ...”⁴⁸. Sometimes Philo asks “Why does (Scripture) say...”⁴⁹.

Not all of these words are used in Christian exegesis, so far I can see, yet analogies in terminology are to be noted. In Christian exegesis the terms εἰκότως⁵⁰, κυρίως⁵¹, καλῶς⁵² occur as a comment on a saying of the singer of Psalms, εὐκαίρως as a comment on Luke’s mode of writing.⁵³ Σαφέστερον is used as criterion for choosing one translation instead of another one.⁵⁴ εὐτελής characterizes common and unattractive phraseology where there can be a hidden λαμπρότης.⁵⁵ καταχρηστικῶς is a common term of Christian philology.⁵⁶ ἀρμόζειν is used very often; this paper will illustrate this fact. The pagan use of the neutral article also has its Christian

³⁸ Demetrius, in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praep. ev.* 9:29.16, GCS 43/1:538.

³⁹ Aristobulus, in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praep. ev.* 8:10.2, GCS 43/1:451.

⁴⁰ Philo, *Opif.* 72, LCL 226:56; cf. NIEHOFF, “Homeric Scholarship,” 170.

⁴¹ Philo, *Mut.* 60, LCL 275:172; cf. NIEHOFF, “Homeric Scholarship,” 176–177.

⁴² Philo, *Qu. Gen.* 1:9, LCL 380:6, concerning Gen 2: every tree is beautiful?

⁴³ Philo, *Qu. Gen.* 1:53, LCL 380:30–31, concerning Gen 3:21 (Why does God make tunics).

⁴⁴ Philo, *Qu. Gen.* 1:53, LCL 380:31 suitable to God.

⁴⁵ Philo, *Qu. Gen.* 1:58, LCL 380:36, concerning Gen 4:1 (“I have acquired a man through God”).

⁴⁶ Cf. Philo, *Confus.* 2, LCL 261:10.

⁴⁷ Cf. Philo, *Qu. Gen.* 1:27, LCL 380:16 (“Why was not woman, like other animals and man, also formed from earth, instead of the side of man?”); *Qu. Gen.* 1:32, LCL 380:19 (“Did the serpent speak in the manner of men?”).

⁴⁸ Philo, *Qu. Gen.* 1:22, 23, 24, 36, 39 etc., LCL 380:13, 14, 21, 23; *Confus.* 167; LCL 261:100.

⁴⁹ Philo, *Qu. Gen.* 1:9, 17, 29; 3:61; 4:1 etc.; LCL 380:6, 11, 17, 263, 265; cf. the phrase “Why is He (scil. God) said to have ...” in Philo, *Qu. Gen.* 1:5, 6, 7, CL 380:4–5.

⁵⁰ Theodor of Mopsuestia, *In Ps.*, PG 66:649b.

⁵¹ Theodor of Mopsuestia, *In Ps.*, PG 66:649c.

⁵² Diodor, *In Ps.*, concerning Ps 29:6; 33:2; 44:3, CCSG 6:167, 193, 269; Procopius of Gaza, *In Genesim*, GCS NF 22:193.

⁵³ John Chrysostom, *hom. in Ac.* 19,2, PG 60:152.

⁵⁴ Theodor of Mopsuestia, *In Ps.*, PG 66:653c; Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1269c.

⁵⁵ Origen, *Princ.* 4:1.7, GCS 2:304.

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, *Comm. Gal.*, PG 61:662; Ammonius of Alexandria, *Act.*, PG 85:1529c.

counterparts. Diodor of Tarsus explains Ps 34[35]:3: Τὸ Ἔκχεον ἀντὶ τοῦ γύμνωσον λέγει ῥομφαίαν. That is to be translated as follows: It (the Scripture) says ἔκχεον the sword instead of γύμνωσον.⁵⁷ In Porphyry's criticism on the Bible ἀπίθανον is part of a quotation edited in Latin.⁵⁸

2. Prosopographic Exegesis

Prosopopoïia, originally a rhetorical issue, became also part of ancient philology on Homer and on other poets. This approach considers the person who is responsible for a distinct phrase as important for a proper understanding of the poet's work. The critic judges whether a distinct phrase is fitting to the character, the ἦθος of the speaking person or not. The criterion of convenience with regard to morals and to character is decisive. Already in ancient times the insight is to be noted, that the point of view of a distinct person within a text must not be identical with the point of view of the author. To keep in mind the speaking person can help to balance contradictions within a single work.

This criterion of convenience with regard to morals and to character is important also in Christian exegesis, but the understanding of David as prophet and the Christological reading of the Psalms causes the necessity of historical criticism in order to find the appropriate interpretation of a Psalm. Cassiodorus, however, states, that in some cases a unity of the speaker is not given.⁵⁹ When he sometimes states that *per hunc totum psalmum (Christus) loquitur*,⁶⁰ it refers to the same problem.

2.1. Moral Critique

The teaching of God is part of a discourse between Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian theology where all participants had to justify their position with respect to two Platonic maxims: 1. God is good; 2. God is unchangeable.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Diodor, *In Ps.*, CCSG 6:200.

⁵⁸ Porphyry, in Augustine, *Ep.* 102.30, CSEL 34/2:570.

⁵⁹ Cassiodorus, *Expos. In Ps.* 17, CCSL 97:152: Ps 17 is not convenient only to one person: first the prophet is speaking, then the church, then Jesus Christ, and at the end again the church. Cf. also id., *Expos. In Ps.* 31 (CCSL 97:275): In the three first parts, the penitent is speaking whereas Jesus Christ answers in the fourth part. Cf. also id., *Expos. In Ps.* 39, CCSL 97:362: In the first part of Psalm 39 is the church the subject of speaking, in the second part Jesus Christ.

⁶⁰ Cassiodorus, *Expos. In Ps.* 27, CCSL 97:243; similarly *Expos. In Ps.* 30, CCSL 97:261, *Expos. In Ps.* 32, CCSL 97:283.

⁶¹ Plato, *Rep.* 2:379a–383c, LCL 237:182–198.

Only in a few cases do the philologists on Homer rebuke the poet for objectionable sentences. Their main theme in this regard is not sexuality of the deities but deception. Pallas Athene transmutes herself and appears to Hector, and Hector thinks his brother is with him. She says to him: We remain, and we resist unimpaired (*Il.* 22:231). This verse is rebuked: ἄτοπον θεὸν οὔσαν πλανᾶν τὸν Ἑκτορα – She, as a deity, should not deceive Hector who will die very soon.⁶²

In Homeric philology prosopographic exegesis as part of moral criticism can be used when the status of beings is involved. In *Il.* 15:182f. it is Iris who points to the higher status of Zeus compared with Poseidon. These verses are repositioned to a speech of Zeus himself (*Il.* 15:162f.): Only the “Father of gods and men” but not Iris is allowed to raise this question.⁶³

I continue with an example of Jewish exegesis. In the Midrash Tehillim on Psalm 9 it is reported a tradition lead back to Rab, the son of Samuel⁶⁴:

In the verse *And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good* (Gen 1:31), the words *very good* refer to the Inclination-to-evil in a man’s heart. But how can the Inclination-to-evil be termed *very good*? Because Scripture teaches that were it not for the Inclination-to-evil, a man would not take a wife, nor beget children with her, and so the world could not endure.

Christian exegetes had to justify objectionable words and deeds of God and of Jesus Christ but also of the apostles: Celsus, Porphyry and Julian the Apostate did not only repeat the common rebukes made against Christianity, they themselves read the Bible and rebuked it, cf. Julian the Apostate⁶⁵:

ἀνέγνων, ἔγνων, κατέγνων (I read, I understood, I rejected).

Objectionable Biblical sentences are allegorized by Philo and by the Christian exegetes; for the latter it was necessary especially with regard to the military activities of Joshua, in Greek named Jesus. Christian exegetes interpreted these stories in the line of struggle against sins. However, not all such Biblical passages could be explained in this way. The following examples demonstrate how the Christian exegetes dealt with such problems.

Ps 104[105]:25 states that God changed (μετέστρεψεν) the heart of the Pharaoh to hate God’s people, Israel. Eusebius of Caesarea does not see any problem⁶⁶, Ps.-Athanasius emphasizes God’s care for his people: Because

⁶² Erbse 5:314.

⁶³ Erbse 4:46.

⁶⁴ *The Midrash on Psalms Translated from the Hebrew and Aramaic* by BRAUDE, 131.

⁶⁵ Julian, in Sozomenos, *H.e.* 5:18.7, GCS NF 4:223, referring to Apollinaris of Laodicea’s writings. But this reaction on Christian texts, incl. the Bible, is typical for Julian in any way.

⁶⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:1308d exemplifies it by the fate of Joseph (Gen 37: 39).

the Israelites were to worship foreign gods in Egypt, God motivates the Egyptians to hate them in order that the Israelites fled to the only true God⁶⁷. According to Theodoret, it was not God himself who changed the mind of the Pharaoh but he let him his free will, his *αὐτεξουσία*, and did not hinder his plans.⁶⁸ Maximus declares: The wording *μετέστρεψεν* must be justified, because God is good and not causing any evil, and it can be justified: God foresaw the disposition of will (*διάθεσις*) in both the Egyptians and the Israelites.⁶⁹ Augustine also states that God is not the author of the evil; by contrast; it is his benignity to turn bad human doing in to good result. The Egyptians, however, were not good before they hated their prosperous sojourners. In that God multiplied his people, this act turned the wicked to envy.⁷⁰ Cassiodorus adds the example of Cain who was excited due to God's benignity to Abel.⁷¹

Concerning Jesus Christ, in the academic courses on ancient Christian exegesis I attended as student I only heard that the Fathers read the Psalms with regard to Jesus Christ, and then this topic was finished. If we really read ancient Christian commentaries on Psalms we can detect that the maxim of Christological exegesis does not close but opens some theological questions. Just one example: In Psalm 68[69]:23–24[22–23] we read:

Let their table become a trap for them, a stumbling block and a retribution; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see.

Eusebius of Caesarea shares with Origen and many other Christian authors the concept of the twofold sense of Biblical texts, literal and spiritual. With regard to the literal sense he declares that the sayings of Ps 68:23–24 do not fit David's own life,⁷² yet the Christological interpretation also raises problems, namely with regard to Jesus Christ's command to love the enemies; therefore the proper interpretation of these verses is as follows: V. 24f. is spoken not in the optative or the imperative but as prophetic prediction: He who told us to pray for our enemies (Matt 5:44) – how could he have wished the duration of their hearts?⁷³

Not as scrupulous was Theodoret when commenting on this psalm, but even in his discussion we detect a desire for justifying these verses: They

⁶⁷ In Ps.-Athanasius, *In Ps.*, PG 27:445b.

⁶⁸ Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1716c.

⁶⁹ Maximus Confessor, *Qu.* 121, CCSG 10:89.

⁷⁰ Augustine, *En. Ps.*, CCSL 39:1545.

⁷¹ Cassiodorus, *Expos. Ps.*, CCSL 98:950.

⁷² Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:728cd.

⁷³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:749d–752a. Counterbalancing Ps 68[69]:23 and 1John 5:16 with Lk 6:28, the Venerable Bede emphasizes that also Stephen's pray (Acts 7:60) is not a pray for sinning Christians but for his adversaries who are not converted (The Venerable Bede, *In Lc.* 2, CCSL 120:142–143).

plea for a decision in justice, because the Jews did to Jesus Christ what they themselves suffered by the Babylonians.⁷⁴

Another typical example of moral criticism as a rationale for prosopographic exegesis is to be found in Eusebius's commentary on Ps. 54[55]:16[15] "Let death come upon them; let them go down to Hades alive". Eusebius asks: How does David's plea for revenge fit (πιῶαν συμφωνίαν ἔχει) his virtue told in the Bible (cf. 1Sam 24; 26)? On the other hand, the positive words "His words became smoother than oil, and they are missiles" (v. 22[21]): Who could be shown to have done this to David? Therefore these words are not to be referred to the person of David (ἐπὶ τὸ τοῦ Δαυὶδ πρόσωπον) but are spoken prophetically and are fulfilled in the fate of Christ: Most of the members of the Sanhedrin decided to put him to death, but Nicodemus spoke against it (John 7:51).⁷⁵

2.2. Critique of Character – Reality in Jesus Christ

Plato's criticism of Homer caused the excision of some offensive passages. According to Plato it is not correct to present the deities as lamenting or laughing⁷⁶ – Zenodot knows manuscripts where the lament of Zeus concerning Sarpedon (*Il.* 16:432–458) or Achill's vituperating against Agamemnon (*Il.* 1:225–233)⁷⁷ are deleted⁷⁸, yet he himself is engaged in such critiques too: He cuts out the remark concerning Aphrodite's help in *Il.* 3:423–427⁷⁹, and in *Il.* 4:88 the remark that Pallas Athene would have "searched" Pandaros, as inappropriate for a deity⁸⁰. In the last Book of the Iliad the divine mother of Achilles, Thetis, admonishes her son to give way in the quarrel concerning the corpse of Hector, also with the words "death with the strong hand of fate are already close beside you." This is rebuked: ἀνοικεῖοι (scil. οἱ στίχοι) γὰρ ἡρώϊ καὶ θεῶ (These verses are inappropriate for a hero and a goddess).⁸¹ In the 10th Book of the Iliad Odysseus meets Dolon, a spy of Troy, alone in the field, and asks him for the plans of Trojans etc. (*Il.* 10:377–445). Within this dialogue *Il.* 10:409–411 are suspected as spurious for several reasons: 1. They are an unnecessary doublet of *Il.* 10:208–210. 2. It is ridiculous that Odysseus would ask whether the

⁷⁴ Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1408d; similarly Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PG 69:1172a; id., *Rom.*, PG 74:848b; In Ps.-Athanasius, *In Ps.*, PG 27:312a.

⁷⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:472d–473a.

⁷⁶ Plato, *Rep.* 2, 380e, LCL 237:188–190.

⁷⁷ Cf. the critical remark of Plato, *Rep.* 3, 389a, LCL 237:216.

⁷⁸ PFEIFFER, *Geschichte*, 145.

⁷⁹ PFEIFFER, *Geschichte*, 146; VAN THIEL, "Homertext," 22.

⁸⁰ VAN THIEL, "Homertext," 13.

⁸¹ Erbse 5:543.

Trojan heroes remain or go away to the city. 3. Dolon responds to the other words of Odysseus but not to these verses.

Psalm 21 was for Christian exegetes a challenge with regard to prosopographic exegesis. “My God, my God, why did you forsake me?” – these words are quoted by Jesus himself and therefore the whole psalm was regarded a psalm of Christ. But this psalm offers a conundrum of obstacles.

The words “why did you forsake me?” seem to contradict the believe that Jesus was sinless, but this was resolved by the theory of substitution: These words are spoken not on behalf of Jesus Christ himself but on behalf of the sinners.⁸²

The following words (v. 2b) “Far away from my deliverance are the words of my transgressions” offer an option of textual criticism to avoid problems. Aquila and Symmachus do not read ‘transgression’ (παρὰπτώματα) – according to Eusebius some say that this word seems not to fit the Lord who “committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth” (1Pet 2:22), – but λόγοι τῶν ὀδυρμῶν μου (words of my sigh), and these words fit the Lord who sighs at the sins of Israel and its deeds worthy of tears, and at Judas Iscariot. Yet Eusebius does not wish to follow these translators, but will argue against those who maintain that the reading παρὰπτώματα, would not be suitable for Jesus Christ⁸³: This psalm indeed can be referred to Jesus Christ, since he “takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Christ makes the sin of the other men his own sins, and therefore this psalm is appropriate to him.⁸⁴

The next verse offers another problem: How should we say that God “will not listen”?⁸⁵ Diodor, referring the psalm to David, has no problem: David knows that God would not listen to him, due to his sins.⁸⁶ According to Theodoret, indeed God did not listen to Jesus but delivered him over to his Passion.⁸⁷

The phrase “But as for me, I am a worm and not human” offers the next problem. It is common for Jewish and Christian exegesis that the speaker does not regard himself a real animal. In Jewish exegesis the metaphorical character of the “worm” is clearly seen. I quote the Midrash Tehillim:

⁸² Didymus of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PTS 15, *Frgm.* 176; Cassiodor, *Expos. Ps.*, CCSL 97:190.

⁸³ Cf. in later times Diodor of Tarsus, *In Ps.*, CCSG 6:127: Due to v. 2 (“Far away...”) he broadens up Ps 21 referring not only to Jesus Christ but also to David and his moral aberrations.

⁸⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:204a–205c; similarly Athanasius, *In Ps.*, PG 27:131b: τὰ ἡμῶν εἰς ἑαυτὸν μεταπιθίεις; Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1009a–1012b.

⁸⁵ Perhaps the formula “accept prayer” in the Targum of Psalms also is used in order to avoid a notion of divine inability.

⁸⁶ Diodor, *In Ps.*, CCSG 6:128.

⁸⁷ Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1013cd.

Like a worm is despised among creatures of the earth, so the children of Israel are despised among the nations of the earth.⁸⁸

The metaphoric character of the verse is noted also by Theodoret; due to his reading the following verses he explains the “worm” as expression of degradation.⁸⁹ Other Christian exegetes read this verse differently. Since they have to justify how Jesus Christ can be compared with a worm, they offer their own, sometimes surprising, solutions. They underline the shabby character of Jesus’s Passion⁹⁰; they emphasize that he is doomed to death⁹¹; they recognize an admonition to humility (*ταπεινοφροσύνη*)⁹²; but they have also a specific Christological interpretation: Unlike the human being the worm does not come into being due to sexual intercourse, therefore the worm hints on the mystery of the Virginal Birth of our Savior.⁹³

But there are other cases in which prosopographic exegesis enables us to understand the conscious difference between the person and the words spoken by this person: “Have mercy on me, O Lord, because I am weak” (Ps 6:3), spoken by a king, underlines his piety.⁹⁴

We might assume that within Christian exegesis the necessity of prosopographic exegesis is higher than in Jewish exegesis due to the principle of Christological reading of Old Testament texts. But it is only a hypothesis, to be corrected, if need be, by specialists in ancient Jewish exegesis of the Bible.

2.3. Historical Criticism

The Psalms of David which have a superscription referring to David’s life are examined by Christian exegetes with regard to the question whether the words spoken by David fit the situation indicated in the inscription⁹⁵ or, if the inscription is formulated in a general way, whether the words of the psalm can be referred to any situation in David’s life. In the case of ac-

⁸⁸ *The Midrash on In Ps.*, 316.

⁸⁹ Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1013a.

⁹⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:205c.

⁹¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:205cd.

⁹² (In Ps.?)-Athanasius, *In Ps.*, PG 27:132d–133a.

⁹³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:205c; Maximus Confessor, *Qu.* 157, CCSG 10:109.

⁹⁴ Asterius of Amasa, *Hom.* 20, PG 40:452a.

⁹⁵ Whereas Christian authors in former centuries regarded the titles as integral to the Psalms, Eusebius of Caesarea, Diodor, Theodoret and Jerome are aware of the secondary character of at least some titles; cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:1193cd; Diodor of Tarsus, *In Ps.* 9, CCSG 6:50; *In Ps.* 11, CCSG 6:66; Theodoret, *In Ps.* 42, PG 80:1176a; *In Ps.* 64, PG 80:1345b; *In Ps.* 69, PG 80:1413d–1416a; *In Ps.* 75, PG 80:1472c etc.; Jerome, *Commentarioli in Ps.* 92; 93 [93; 94], CCSL 72:225.

cordance, the term ἀρμόζει is used.⁹⁶ In cases of contradiction solutions were to be found.

In Ps 54[55]:12 we read: καὶ ἀνομία καὶ κόπος ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς (scil. πόλεως): lawlessness and trouble are within it (scil. the city). According to Theodoret these words do not fit David (οὐκ οἴμαι ἀρμόττειν), since Jerusalem was not ruled by Jews at this time.⁹⁷ But it was already Theodor of Mopsuestia who declared that David in this psalm prophesized the events before the Maccabean wars.⁹⁸

Ancient Christian exegetes used this kind of historical criticism also with regard to other persons mentioned in the Psalms. The superscription of Ps 46 marks this psalm as psalm of the sons of Core. In Ps 46[47]:4 we read: he subdued peoples to us (ἡμῖν), and nations under our feet. According to the Christian exegetes these words can not be said with regard to the sons of Core but to the apostles: No nation is subjected to the sons of Core.⁹⁹ Didymus of Alexandria and Theodoret repeat the reference to the apostles without explaining why such an exegesis is necessary: It is obvious for them.¹⁰⁰ According to Diodor of Tarsus the sons of Core are not the writers but the singers of this psalm, which is to be referred to the victory of the Maccabees over the armies of Antiochus.¹⁰¹

The common presupposition for these explanations is that the ἡμῖν in v. 4 refers strictly to the sons of Core, not to Israel in general. But why is it allowed to combine such words of the psalms with events which historically are set in another time? It was a common opinion that David was a prophet and could foresee the fate of Jerusalem before¹⁰² and after the besieging by Rabsake¹⁰³ or during the Maccabean wars¹⁰⁴. But some ancient Christian exegetes explicitly felt the necessity to justify their practice, and they justified their practice with the practice in the New Testament, e.g. in Mt 27:46¹⁰⁵ and Acts 1:20 – Jesus quotes Ps 21[22]:2, and Ps. 68[69]:26 is

⁹⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:472a.

⁹⁷ Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1274a.

⁹⁸ Theodor of Mopsuestia, *In Ps.*, PG 66, 673a–676c/CCSL 88 A:220f.

⁹⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:416a. Similarly Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PG 69:1052a: It was the apostles to whom the nations are overwhelmed.

¹⁰⁰ Didymus of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PG 39:1377a; Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1208b.

¹⁰¹ Diodor, *In Ps.*, CCSG 6:282.

¹⁰² Nicephorus Blemmyda, *In Ps.*, PG 142:1414d, in his comment on Ps. 19.

¹⁰³ Theodor of Mopsuestia, *In Ps.*, CCSL 88 A:271f., in his comment on Ps 75.

¹⁰⁴ Didymus of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PG 39:1476c; Theodor of Mopsuestia, *In Ps.*, CCSL 88 A:286, commenting Ps 78.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Didymus of Alexandria: Since the New Testament cites Ps 22:1 as spoken by Christ we have to explain the whole psalm as spoken by Christ (Didymus, *In Ps.*, PG 39:1276c).

referred to the fate of Judas.¹⁰⁶ Origen has conceptualized this hermeneutical issue¹⁰⁷:

Since, therefore, as will be clear to those who read, the connection taken literally is impossible, while the sense preferred is not impossible, but even the true one, it must be our object to grasp the whole meaning, which connects the account of what is literally impossible in an intelligible manner with what is not only not impossible, but also historically true, and which is allegorically understood, in respect of its not having literally occurred.

But historical criticism of Ps 46[47]:4 verse is an issue of Jewish exegesis as well when the ἡμῶν is referred not especially to the sons of Core but to the Israelites in general. I quote the comment in the “Midrash Tehillim”:

*He shall subdue the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet. When? When He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob (Ps 47:5). Another comment: When will God choose us and give us our inheritance? When God will sit upon the throne of His holiness (Ps 47:9). As Scripture says, I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen ... in that day (Haggai 2:22).*¹⁰⁸

And it is also a common strategy in Jewish exegesis to connect sentences of psalms with historical events of another time. In the “Midrash Tehillim” it can be said:

The passage beginning *Our Father trusted in Thee (Ps 22:5)* refers to Mordecai and to Esther.¹⁰⁹

3. Counterbalancing Contradictions

Whereas the pagan philologists suspected unfitting verses in the Homeric poems of being spurious this was not possible for Jews and Christians. But in the case of seemingly unfitting verses the Biblical exegetes also tried to justify why this or that is written *as* it is written in the Bible. Contradictions are solved by reflecting on the divergent historical situation, the divergent context of the distinct phrases, and the situation of the Biblical

¹⁰⁶ According to Hesychius of Jerusalem, *In Ps.*, PG 93:1313c the inscription of Ps 108:1 (Εἰς τὸ τέλος) is necessary because this Psalm tells some details of the passion story of Jesus Christ. The reference of Ps 108 to the fate of Jesus and Judas is a common way of interpretation in the Old Church, beginning with Acts 1:18; Papias of Hierapolis, *Frgm.* 3,2, Lindemann and Paulsen 294–297 (starting point for this monstrous description of Judas is Ps. 108[109]:18); Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:1336bc.

¹⁰⁷ Origen, *Princ.* 4:3.5 (20). Translation: CROMBIE, *ANF* 4:369.

¹⁰⁸ *The Midrash on Psalms Translated*, 458. In a similar way it is said: “Likewise, when the Messiah comes ... the children of Israel will not sing this song (scil. In Ps. 18^{MT}) until the Messiah will have been reviled” (ibid. 233).

¹⁰⁹ *The Midrash on Psalms Translated*, 317.

author which justifies the accommodation of Biblical truth to the intellectual capacity of the hearers. Doublets are not suspected in Christian philology, but welcome according to the maxim “on the evidence of two or three witnesses” (c.f. Dtn 19:15).

3.1. Contradiction between Biblical References

The philologists on Homer criticized many verses with regard to contradictions with other verses within Homer or to the overarching narrative. I will give an example for both: *Il.* 11:356f. are censured: The reader would understand this verse as a prediction of the death of Hector in the imminent battle, but the death of Hector is told just in book 22 of *Iliad*.¹¹⁰ *Il.* 11:78–83 is criticized due to the wording that “all Gods rebuked Zeus for fostering the Trojans.” According to the overarching narrative construction one part of the Olympic deities fosters the Trojans, while the other one fosters the Greeks. In accordance with this Aristophanes of Byzantium remarks: It is not all the deities who rebuke Zeus but only these who help the Greeks.¹¹¹

I continue with two examples of Jewish exegesis. Concerning the Words “Turn Thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am alone and poor” (Ps 24[25]:16) it is asked:

How could David have spoken of himself as alone and poor? As for his being alone, is it not written *And Jesse begot his first-born Eliab, and Abinadab the second, and Shimma the third, Nathanael the fourth, Raddai the fifth, Ozem the sixth, David the seventh* (1 Chron 2:13–15)? And as for his being poor, did not David say: *Now, behold, in my trouble have I prepared for the house of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver*, etc. (1 Chron. 22:14)? However, this is what David really meant when he prayed to the Holy One, blessed be He: “Because I was named king over Thy children, their eyes are turned to me, and so, as over against them, I am alone. And all of them need me, but I am poor in contrast to Thee, so mine eyes turn to Thee because they are Thy children.”¹¹²

The next example: Midrash Tehillim on Psalms 26:1 begins as follows:

A Psalm of David. Judge me, o Lord (Ps 26:1). But did not David also say, *Enter not into judgment with Thy servant* (Ps 143:2)? The two verses mean that David said to the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, judge me when Thou judgest the wicked. But enter not into judgment of me when Thou judgest the righteous.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Erbse 3:189f.

¹¹¹ Erbse 3:139.

¹¹² *The Midrash on Psalms Translated*, 355f.

¹¹³ *The Midrash on Psalms Translated*, 357. Another example for such a counterbalancing of contradictions deals with Ps 17:15 (“As for me, let me behold Thy presence in charity. Let me be satisfied, at the waking, with Thy likeness”) and Exod 33:20 (“Man

Maximus Confessor asks if there is any contradiction between Ps 2:11 (“Serve him in fear and jubilee him in trembling”) and 1John 4:18 (“love expulses the fear”)¹¹⁴ and answers: Fear is twofold: *ὁ μὲν ἐπὶ ἐγκλήμασιν, ὁ δὲ κατ’ ἀξίαν τοῦ ἀγαπωμένου*. Basilus of Caesarea explains: Fear is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7), but love is perfection of those who are were brought into harmony to education.¹¹⁵

According to Didymus of Alexandria some exegetes maintain that Ps 44 is said by God the Father to the Son, but Didymus refuses this explanation: In this case the wording “Therefore God, your God, anointed you with oil” (v. 8) is wrong, and it were necessary to write “I, God, anointed you”.¹¹⁶

Ps 59[60] offers a special problem. The superscription tells the story of a victory over the Syriac King, comparable to 2Sam 8:3f., but in Ps 59:3 we read: “O God, you rejected us and brought us down, you became angry and had compassion on us.” Eusebius of Caesarea seeks to avoid the impression that these words are *ἀκατάλληλα καὶ ἀνάρμοστα* (improper and inappropriate),¹¹⁷ and Basilus of Caesarea therefore asks how to avoid the impression that the words of this Psalm are the words of an ungrateful man?¹¹⁸ His answer: The title of this psalm is written when David did great deeds, but the meaning of the words written (scil. in the following) is to be related to the Last Judgment; therefore *εἰς τὸ τέλος* (to the end) in the superscription is adequate.¹¹⁹ Then also the superscription *ἀλλοιωθησομένοις* (for those who will be transmuted) is adequate. According to Basilus of Caesarea the *ἀλλοιωθησομένοις* (future instead of present) indicates that this psalm is not written for the Jews of David’s time, but for the Christians who convert from the veneration of false gods to the veneration of the true God.¹²⁰ Theodoret relates v. 3 to David’s prophetic foreseeing the fate of Israel, the Babylonian exile. Therefore v. 3 is adequate.¹²¹ Also the author of the Targum of Psalms notes the inconsistency and changes the introduction in a way that makes Ps 60:3 understandable.

shall not see Me and live”): It is impossible to see God in this world, but in the time-to-come it will be possible, cf. Isa 25:9; 52:8 (ibid., 219).

¹¹⁴ Maximus Confessor, *Qu.* 138, CCSG 10:98f.

¹¹⁵ Basilus of Caesarea, *Hom. Ps.* 32.6, PG 29:337b.

¹¹⁶ Didymus of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PG 39:1365ab.

¹¹⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:553d.

¹¹⁸ In general the relation between inscription and the subject of the following text is remarked skillfully, and the fact of contradiction seems estimated as normal, cf. the explanation of Diodor of Tarsus on Ps: 17:1: *Οὗτος ὁ ψαλμὸς σύμφωνον τῆ ὑποθέσει τὴν ἐπιγραφὴν ἔχει* (Diodor, *In Ps.*, CCSG 6:91).

¹¹⁹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:553d–556a.

¹²⁰ Basilus of Caesarea, *Hom. Ps.* 59.2, PG 29:461b–464c.

¹²¹ Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1316c–1317a.

Ps-Athanasius explains Ps 81 as a psalm of reprove against the Jews. We would be glad if he would not have interpreted the Psalm in this way, but the starting point for the author's strange exegesis is a real problem – How is the beginning of this Psalm (“God stood in a gathering of gods”, Ps 81[82]:1) compatible to Biblical monotheism?¹²² The author refers to the inscription “Pertaining to Asaph” and interprets the word “Asaph” in two ways: “gathering” (to be referred to God) and “synagogue” (to be referred to the Jewish community). The anti-Jewish exegesis is regrettable for us, but the starting point should be kept in mind.¹²³

3.2. Counterbalancing of Contradictions between Bible and History

Anachronisms are an issue for Homeric philology¹²⁴, but also for Biblical exegesis. Ps 44[45]:4 says: “Gird your sword”. According to Diodor of Tarsus the Jews refer these words to Solomon as they do with the whole psalm but in his view they are not correct; “your throne, o God, is forever and ever” v. 6 does not fit Solomon – he is never called “God” – but to Jesus Christ.¹²⁵ But this explanation causes another problem: How can we explain adequately the sword mentioned in Ps 44:4? Diodor answers: The “sword” of Jesus Christ is a metaphor for his punishment of the unbelievers.¹²⁶ But also in Jewish tradition this “sword” is explained metaphorically: according to the Midrash Tehillim the Torah “is likened to a sword”.¹²⁷

Another exegesis in the Midrash Tehillim also is theologically insightful:

... when the Holy Temple was destroyed, there was heard through the whole world a sound of weeping and wailing, as is said *In that day did the Lord, the God of hosts, call to weeping and to mourning* (Isa 22:12). Thereupon the ministering angels asked: “Can such things be in Thy presence? Is it not written of Thee *Glory and honor are in His presence; strength and gladness are in His place* (1 Chron. 16:27)?” God replied: “Is not My Temple destroyed, are not My children thrown in chains, and should I not therefore be in anguish?” Is it not written *I will be with him in anguish* (Ps 91:1)? It is also written *Now, therefore, what do I here? saith the Lord ... My people is taken away ... They that*

¹²² Due to the context, the “gods” sometimes were identified as “judges” (Theodoret, *Qu. Ex.* 51, PG 80:273b; Procopius of Gaza, *Catena in Exodum*, PG 87/1:621) which suggest an analog interpretation also for Exod 22:27[28]. Gregory the Great distinguishes between a transferred (*nuncupative*) and an essential (*essentialiter*) usage of the term “god” in the Bible; Exod 7:1; 22:8; 22:27[28]; Ps 81:1 belong to the first group (Gregory the Great, *In Ez.* 8.3, SC 327:278). In Targum Ps 82 we read: “As for God, his Shekinah dwells in the assembly of the righteous who are mighty in the Law; he judges among the judges of truth.” (STEC, *Targum of Psalms*, 160).

¹²³ In Ps.-Athanasius, *In Ps.*, PG 27:999c.

¹²⁴ Cf. WILSON, “Griechische Philologie im Altertum,” 97.

¹²⁵ Diodor, *In Ps.*, CCSG 6:268.

¹²⁶ Diodor, *In Ps.*, CCSG 6:270.

¹²⁷ *The Midrash on Psalms Translated*, 453.

rule over them make them to howl ... And My name continually all the day is blasphemed (Isa. 52:5).¹²⁸

Within the general interpretation line of Ps 50[51] as David's confession after the events reported in 2Sam 11, Ps 50:6 ("only against you I have sinned") raises the problem of the difference between text and history.¹²⁹ Should David's sin against Uriah be negated? According to Didymus of Alexandria, the king was not obliged to follow human laws, but the pious king was obliged to follow divine laws.¹³⁰ Cyril of Alexandria gives a similar interpretation but offers a biblical basis (Job 34:18) for the king's "immunity".¹³¹ Compared with such unpleasant exegesis, the solutions of Eusebius of Caesarea and Theodoret were a little bit better: David did not intend to negate his sin against Uriah but referred to God's magnificence recorded in 2Sam 12:7f.¹³² According to Augustine, David bears in mind that only God is without any sin.¹³³

3.3. *Contradiction between the Bible and Life*

In ancient philology on Homer issues of the encyclopedia of non-theological sciences are also topics of critique, e.g. zoological inconsistencies.¹³⁴ I did not find examples of this kind in Biblical exegesis, but sometimes realities of human life are decisive. In the Midrash Tehillim is said:

Another comment on *Neither wilt thou suffer Thy merciful one to see the pit* (Ps 16:10). Since the Holy One, blessed be He, calls Himself „merciful“, as is said *For I am merciful, saith the Lord* (Jer 3:12), how could David presume to call himself merciful, as when he said: *Keep my soul, for I am merciful* (Ps 86:2)? R. Huna explained in the name of R. Alexandri: A man who remains silent even when hearing himself reviled is called "merciful," and because David heard himself reviled and remained silent, he was right in calling himself "merciful."¹³⁵

Ps 21[22]:3 is a challenge also for exegetes who do not underline the Christological interpretation of this Psalm.

¹²⁸ *The Midrash on Psalms Translated*, 287.

¹²⁹ Also the author of the Targum of Psalms is aware of this problem. He writes "before you" instead of "against you" (STEC, *Targum of Psalms*, 106).

¹³⁰ Didymus the Blind, *In Ps.*, PG 39:1397a.

¹³¹ Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PG 69:1069b. Cyril refers also on the formula *ἐνώπιον σου/χυρίου* which is common to Ps 50:6 and 2Reg 11:27.

¹³² Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:437d; Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1241bc.

¹³³ Augustine, *En. Ps.*, CCSL 38:605.

¹³⁴ Ptolemaios VIII. is said to have made a conjecture in *Od.* 5:72: It is not adequate to mention violets when dealing with the humid meadows of Calypso (PFEIFFER, *Geschichte*, 260).

¹³⁵ *The Midrash on Psalms Translated*, 201.

O my God, I will cry by day, and you will not listen, and by night, and it becomes no folly for me.

In this verse we have to read a punctuation mark (μεθ' ὑποστιγμῆς), then it is not said that God will not listen, but it expresses the certainty of God's hearing. The comments are short; I try to understand: the words καὶ νυκτός are a parenthesis; and the second wording repeats the first: Got does not listen, when it becomes a folly for me; otherwise, he listens indeed.¹³⁶

Also Ps 33[34]:20[21] presents a problem concerning this issue. There it reads "The Lord keeps all the bones (of the righteous); not one of them will be broken". In the literal sense this sentence is not true, as we can see with regard to the fate of the martyrs. Basilus of Caesarea explains: In the Bible terms of the parts of the external body are used in order to name the parts of the inner man. In the church are members who can bear the weakness of other members. As in the body the parts are connected with one another by nerves and bonds so in the church are bonds of love and peace, the unity of the spiritual bones.¹³⁷ According to Cyril of Alexandria the Lord keeps the spiritual bones of his saints within the persecutions of wicked men.¹³⁸ Theodoret interprets the text as follows: As the bones held up the body, so the soul by λογισμοί (thoughts) earns salvation.¹³⁹

All these issues are not only to be settled in the course of explaining a given text, but also in deciding between divergent textual traditions. Variants of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion can be justified if they are in accordance with the divine message, or with reality in general, or with history,¹⁴⁰ or with the context,¹⁴¹ or if they can create new relations between Biblical sentences.¹⁴² I give just one example. Commenting on Ps 54[55]:16 Eusebius of Caesarea states that Aquila's translation Ἐπάξει θάνατον ἐπ' αὐτούς (it will transmit death upon them) is better (ὀρθότερον) than the translation of the Septuagint (Ἐλθέτω θάνατος ἐπ' αὐτούς – death should come upon them) because it is clear that it is the wicked deeds of men which cause death.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:204d; In Ps.-Athanasius, *In Ps.*, PG 27:132c.

¹³⁷ Basilus of Caesarea, *Hom. Ps.* 33.13, PG 29:381c–384c.

¹³⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PG 69:893b; cf. already Didymus of Alexandria, *In Ps.*, PG 39:1329c.

¹³⁹ Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1108c.

¹⁴⁰ The variants Εὐλαβείσθωσαν (Symmachus) and ὑποσταλήσονται (Aquila) for σαλευθήτωσαν (LXX) In Ps. 32:8 are to be justified because of the missionary success of the apostles (Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1097b).

¹⁴¹ Theodor of Mopsuestia, *In Ps.*, PG 66:653b.

¹⁴² The variant "rock" instead of "empowerment" in Ps 30:3 enables to create a connection to Matt 7:24 (Theodoret, *In Ps.*, PG 80:1077c).

¹⁴³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *In Ps.*, PG 23:481d.

4. Conclusion

In my view the examples given here underline the fruitfulness of comparing ancient Christian exegesis with its Greco-Roman counterpart, the philology on Homer. In this respect, such research can be useful for the reconstruction of ancient Judaism and Christianity. But with regard to the well-known hermeneutical differences between ancient and modern Christian exegesis,¹⁴⁴ we should ask in general why it is useful at all to read ancient Christian commentaries on Biblical books. This study offers two answers.

1. Sometimes ancient Christian exegetes offer special interpretations which can, if suitably adapted, be introduced into our modern discussion as well, e.g. Theodor's referring of Ps 54[55] to the pre-Maccabean period and Diodor's referring of Ps 46[47] to the Maccabean victories.

2. Sometimes the general horizon of this exegesis in moral and historical criticism is also decisive for intellectually attentive readers of the Septuagint in our days. The answers of ancient Christian authors sometimes are odd but the questions are more important.

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¹⁴⁴ Differences between ancient and modern Christian exegesis are not only implied by the well-known general hermeneutics of the Bible as divine and inspired word of God being without error and contradictions even in marginal details. Other reasons are valid as well: 1. There are differences between some parts of ancient and modern exegesis concerning the metaphoric character of a term. Therefore we have to ask: Is there any coherence between christological exegesis and non-metaphoric interpretation of the “worm”? 2. There are differences concerning the strength of relation between the inscription and the content of the Psalm, c.g. the strict referring of the ἡμῖν (In Ps. 46:4) to the sons of Kore. In modern times we read this ἡμῖν as general reference to Israel, as it has been in ancient Jewish exegesis, and we presuppose the secondary character of the inscriptions. Ancient exegesis had to find other solutions.

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