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THE STROMATEIS OF ORIGEN

At least three ancient writers produced books which they entitled *Stromateis*, thereby indicating the variegated nature of their work. These were Plutarch, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. Only Clement's *Stromateis* survive as a whole, and it is a question whether or not Plutarch really wrote the fragment ascribed to him; it consists of nothing but a typical doxographical selection¹. The work of Clement is far more important, and it has recently received the kind of analysis of which it is worthy in the detailed study by André Méhat². This scholar provides us with a point of departure for our discussions of Origen.

Nous savons que dix livres de *Stromates* ont été écrits par Origène. Qu'ils soient une continuation et une imitation de ceux de Clément, la chose n'est guère douteuse. Or, ils sont l'œuvre d'un écrivain qui connaissait les usages et les genres littéraires de son temps, qui possédait aussi nombre d'ouvrages que nous avons perdus; enfin qui avait sans doute connu Clément et se trouvait mieux placé que quiconque pour comprendre le but que son prédécesseur s'était proposé.

By viewing Origen as somehow the continuator of Clement's work, Méhat avoids treating Origen's *Stromateis* as merely exegetical. Instead, he insists—following Jerome—that the work was primarily intended to set forth a comparison between philosophy and Christian doctrine³. We shall bear Méhat's point in mind as we examine the contents of the fragments of the *Stromateis*.

First of all, we should consider a group of testimonies to the origin and nature of the work. Chronologically, the most important is the statement of Eusebius in his *Church History* (VI 24, 3). He is listing the works which Origen wrote before he left Alexandria in 230/231, and he says that he wrote those entitled *Stromateis*, ten in number, in the same city in the reign of Alexander, as is shown by the annotations in his own hand at the front of the tomes. Since the reign of Alexander lasted from 222 to 235, it is evident that Origen wrote the *Stromateis* at some point between 222 and 230. We do not have enough information to be sure that he wrote them, as René Cadiou suggested, toward the very beginning of Alexander's reign⁴. In any event, they probably belong to the period in which he was at work not only on commentaries but on the theological treatise *De principiis*. After he removed to Caesarea he still regarded the *Stromateis* as representative of his thought,

1. EUSEBIUS, *Praep. ev.* I 8, 1-12; H. DIELS, *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin, 1879), 579-83; cf. 156-58.

2. *Recherches sur les « Stromates » de Clément d'Alexandrie*

(Paris, 1966).

3. *Ibid.*, 104-6.

4. *La jeunesse d'Origène* (Paris, 1936), 249.

for in the thirteenth book of the *Commentary on John* he referred back to this earlier work ⁵.

Even more important than the question of the date is the question of the content of the *Stromateis*, not the content as known from the fragments but the content as intended by Origen. We must of course take seriously the statement of Jerome that "in imitation of Clement, Origen wrote ten *Stromateis*, comparing the views of Christians and philosophers with one another and confirming all the doctrines of our religion out of Plato and Aristotle, Numenius, and Cornutus" ⁶. This is an important testimony, and it seems to be related to the statement of Porphyry that Origen "was always involved with Plato and was occupied with the writings of Numenius and Cronius, Apollonphanes and Longinus and Moderatus, Nicomachus and the distinguished men among the Pythagoreans; he also used the books of Chaeremon the Stoic and Cornutus; and from them he learned the metaphorical method of the Greeks' mysteries and attached it to the Jewish writings" ⁷. (Porphyry was probably right in not mentioning Aristotle, for whom Origen had little esteem) ⁸.

But the *Stromateis* were no mere compilation of Christian and philosophical opinions. There was a definite thesis involved, at least in some of the ten books, and it was a thesis closely resembling the one set forth in the last book *De principiis*, where Origen explains the necessity of the allegorical method. We see this expressed in Jerome's statement that "especially in the fourth book *On the resurrection*, and in the exposition of the first Psalm, and in the *Stromateis*, Origen says that a twofold error is current in the church—ours and that of the heretics" ⁹. By "ours" Jerome must be referring to Origen's criticism of the "simpler believers," with whom Jerome was now associating himself. Origen's point must have been that the spiritual exegete falls into neither the crude literalism of the *simpliciores* nor the exaggerated allegorization of Gnostic heretics. His *Stromateis* were addressed, then, "to the perfect and to (his) pupils," as Jerome says ¹⁰. The books combined philosophy with scripture in order to reach the goal of exegetical theology.

We turn now to the extant fragments of Books I, III-VI, and IX-X.

BOOK I

The only fragment from this book is barely legible and occurs in "a text-critical work of the tenth century" published by E. von der Goltz ¹¹. It is concerned with *James* 2,13: "Judgment will be merciless for the one who has not effected mercy," but it is not possible to say what Origen had in mind when he discussed the verse ¹².

BOOK III

In his *Commentary on John* (XIII, 45) Origen explains that the "harvest for eternal life" of *John* 4, 36 refers to the state of mind of the true Christian; he has already made this point in the third book of the *Stromateis* when providing exegesis of *Matthew* 6, 4: "Your Father who sees will secretly reward you" ¹³.

5. *Ioh. comm.* XIII 14 (271-72 PREUSCHEN).

6. *Ep.* 70, 4 (CSEL 54, 706).

7. EUSEBIUS, *H. E.* VI 19, 8 (560, 11-17 SCHWARTZ).

8. Cf. H. CROUZEL, *Origène et la philosophie* (Paris, 1962), 31-35.

9. *C. Ioann. Hieros.* 25 (PL 23, 392A).

10. *C. Rufin.* I 18 (PL 23, 431C).

11. *Texte und Untersuchungen* XVII 4 (Leipzig, 1899), 46.

12. *James* 2, 13 is not among the passages from Origen cited by J. B. MAYOR, *The Epistle of St. James* (London, 1892), lxiif. (cf. J. H. ROPES, *The Epistle of St. James*, New York, 1915, 92-93). Presumably he would have quoted the verse in relation to predestination and in regard to *Romans* 9, 14-18, but in the relevant sections of *Rom. comm.* VII, 15-18 (PG 14, 1142A-52C) there is no use of James.

13. Cf. CADIOU, *op. cit.*, 250 n. 2.