

Dear reader

This is an author produced version of an article published in *Studia Liturgica*. This article has been peer-reviewed and copy-edited but does not include the final publisher's layout including the journal pagination.

Citation for the published article:

Buchinger, Harald

"Towards the Origins of Paschal Baptism: The Contribution of Origen"

Studia Liturgica, 2005, Vol. 35, Issue 1: 12-31

Access to the published version may require subscription.

Published with permission from: Sage Publications Ltd

Thank you for supporting Green Open Access.

Your IxTheo team

SL 35 (2005) 000-00

Towards the Origins of Paschal Baptism: The Contribution of Origen

by

Harald Buchinger*

For a long time it was taken for granted that Easter was – not only theologically but also historically – the most primitive baptismal date in the early church; it is only in recent times that this general consensus has been subjected to critical revision.¹ The fact that there is an observable common theory and practice in almost all of the *oikoumene* at the end of the fourth century does not necessarily mean that these derive from a universal and unbroken tradition going back to earliest times.² On the contrary, there are only two sure pieces of

* Harald Buchinger, Dr. theol., is Assistant at Vienna University, Institute of Liturgical Studies. This paper was presented in the Early Liturgical History seminar at the 2004 meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy, and the author wishes to express his indebtedness to those who contributed to the stimulating discussion, as well as his gratitude to John Nicholson for the English translation.

¹ See above all Paul F. Bradshaw, “‘Diem baptismi sollemniorem’: Initiation and Easter in Christian Antiquity” in *EYAIOTHMMA*, ed. E. Carr et al. (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo 1993) 41–51 = *Living Water, Sealing Spirit. Readings on Christian Initiation*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1995) 137–47; for a critical assessment of the question see also Hansjörg Auf der Maur, *Feiern im Rhythmus der Zeit. I: Herrenfeste in Woche und Jahr* (Regensburg: Pustet 1983) 72f.; idem, *Die Osterfeier in der alten Kirche* (Münster: LIT 2003) 107; Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (2d ed., Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1991) 33–37.

² See also the cautious definition of the relations between Pascha and baptism by Anton Baumstark, *Nocturna laus. Typen frühchristlicher Vigilienfeier und ihr Fortleben vor allem*

evidence documenting the practice of paschal baptism in the pre-Constantinian church.

For early-third-century Rome, the *Commentary on Daniel* attributed to Hippolytus designates Passover as “opportune day” (see Dan 13:15) for baptism;³ at roughly the same time in North Africa Tertullian refers to Passover as “the day of most solemnity for baptism” (*diem baptismo sollemniorem*).⁴ The evidence from the first three and a half centuries is thus limited to only a few regions of the West, and even in those regions the preference for Easter is by no means to be seen as an exclusive norm. All other attempts to see ritual links between Pascha and initiation in the earliest Christian literature are purely hypothetical.⁵ Furthermore,

im römischen und monastischen Ritus. (Münster: Aschendorff 1957) 30: “Wann und wo jene Verbindung zuerst vollzogen wurde, ob sie überhaupt sich von einem einzelnen überragenden Zentrum der altchristlichen Welt aus verbreitete oder unabhängig an verschiedenen Stellen derselben erfolgte, sind Fragen, die sich jedem Versuche einer noch so vermutungsweisen Beantwortung entziehen.”

³ Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 1.16; see in addition also II.2 below.

⁴ Tertullian, *De baptismo* 19.1.

⁵ Even a maximalist interpretation of the references in Melito and above all in Pseudo-Hippolytus does not point towards the practice of Easter baptism: “Le fonti, infatti, parlano bensì del *battesimo*, ma mai, neppure velatamente, dell’*amministrazione del battesimo*. ... La cosa non obbliga, secondo noi, ad ammettere un *legame rituale* tra l’amministrazione del battesimo e la veglia pasquale, come non obbligano a far ciò le ancor più numerose allusioni al battesimo che si riscontrano in Ps-Barnaba, in Ignazio, nel *Dialogo* di Giustino ecc.” (Raniero Cantalamessa, *L’omelia “In S. Pascha” dello Pseudo-Ippolito di Roma. Ricerche sulla teologia dell’Asia minore nella seconda metà del II secolo* [Milan: Vita e pensiero 1967] 285f., italics in original). On Pseudo-Hippolytus see also Giuseppe Visonà, *Pseudo Ippolito, In sanctum Pascha. Studio – edizione – commento* (Milano: Vita e pensiero 1988) 151–54.

the silence of the sources from other areas is all the more conspicuous when a further significant piece of negative evidence is taken into account: “One place where a preference for paschal baptism certainly appears to have been unknown before the middle of the fourth century is in the patriarchate of Alexandria.”⁶

In view of the development of a new sensitivity to the origins of paschal baptism, it is worthwhile following up the respective references in Origen. If we do so, we see – on the one hand – that this Alexandrian contemporary of Hippolytus and Tertullian confirms the critical point of view that the ritual association of Pascha and baptism was not very widespread all that early, but also – on the other hand – that Origen does make important contributions towards establishing theological links between them.

It should at this point be emphasized that the surviving works from the Alexandrian period of Origen do not contain any reference to the Pascha⁷ and that it would thus also be fruitless to look there for any association between Pascha and initiation.⁸ This association is,

⁶ Bradshaw, “*Diem baptismo sollemniorem*,” 43.

⁷ In view of the fact that the comprehensive excursus on the Pascha in the *Commentary on John* 10.13–19 § 67–118, written a significant time after 230 in Caesarea, seems to have been Origen’s first systematic study of the subject, it is very likely that the lack of statements from his Alexandrian period is probably no mere accident, the fragmentary corpus of extant works by Origen notwithstanding; for a diachronic investigation see Harald Buchinger, “Zur Entfaltung des origeneischen Paschaverständnisses: Caesareensischer Kontext und alexandrinischer Hintergrund” in *Origeniana Octava*, ed. Lorenzo Perrone (Louvain: Peeters 2003) 567–78.

⁸ On the celebration and interpretation of initiation in Origen, see the most detailed account to date, Hansjörg Auf der Maur & Joop Waldram, “*Illuminatio verbi divini – confessio fidei – gratia baptismi. Wort, Glaube und Sakrament in Katechumenat und Tauf liturgie bei Origenes*”

however, an essential feature of *Peri Pascha*, a work written after Origen moved to Caesarea. It not only contains hidden references to the process of initiation and other theologoumena linked to the theology of baptism, but also several passages in which Origen is quite clearly talking about core elements in the baptismal rite. My intention in the present article is (I.) to present both the clear relations between Pascha and initiation as well as the somewhat vaguer hints at their association, and subsequently (II.) to endeavor to establish how significant these observations are for the question of the origins of paschal baptism.

I. Pascha and Initiation in Origen's *Peri Pascha*

1. *Pascha, Exodus, and Initiation: Baptism as a Key to the Understanding of Pascha*

The first book of Origen's *Peri Pascha* consists in essence of a detailed commentary on the Passover law in Exodus 12:1–11.⁹ After the introduction has, on the one hand,

in *Fides Sacramenti. Sacramentum Fidei*, ed. Hansjörg Auf der Maur et al. (Assen: Van Gorkum 1981) 41–95; for a brief synthesis see also Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation. Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1999) 56–59, and most recently Pier Angelo Gramaglia, “Battesimo” in *Origene. Dizionario. La cultura, il pensiero, le opere*, ed. Adele Monaci Castagno (Rome: Città Nuova 2000) 45–48.

⁹ Origen's work *Peri Pascha* was found in 1941 amongst the Tura papyri and was first edited in its entirety in 1979; see Octave Guéraud & Pierre Nautin, *Origène, Sur la Pâque. Traité inédit publié d'après un papyrus de Toura* (Paris: Beauchesne 1979). In addition to the excellent commentary which accompanies this editio princeps are, inter alia, the annotations to the Italian translation by Giuseppe Sgherri, *Origene, Sulla Pasqua. Il papiro di Tura* (Turin: Paoline 1989), which are indispensable for the study of the document. Readers in the English-speaking world have had the work made available to them in the translation and commentary by Robert J. Daly, *Origen, Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue of Origen*

established the translation of the word *πάσχα* *διάβασις* and, on the other, paved the interpretative way for the allegorical actualization of the Passover law, the verse-by-verse commentary starts with a programmatic presentation of Exodus 12:1–2 in which Origen turns his attention not only to the philological but also to the hermeneutical foundation of the introduction. At this conspicuous point at the beginning of the work it becomes clear that baptism is the theological key to the understanding of Pascha.

- § 10 “*The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt. This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you.*” quotation of the lemma Exod. 12:1–2
- 11 God says to Moses and Aaron that this month is the *beginning of months* and is also *the first month of the year* paraphrase

with Heraclides and His Fellow Bishops on the Father, the Son, and the Soul (New York: Paulist Press 1992), from which as a rule all the quotations in the present article are taken, even when not acknowledged each time as such. Paragraph numbers correspond to those in the new edition by Bernd Witte, *Die Schrift des Origenes “Über das Passa.” Textausgabe und Kommentar*, Altenberge: Oros 1993; for users of older editions, papyrus page and line are added in parentheses (P) after. For one further commentary see the Harvard dissertation of Ruth Anne Clements, “Peri Pascha: Passover and the Displacement of Jewish Interpretation Within Origen’s Exegesis,” Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1997; the first materially speaking exhaustive examination of the theme in Origen’s work as a whole is offered by my own Ph.D. dissertation, published as *Pascha bei Origenes* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia 2004). For a broader discussion of the texts presented here and more extensive documentation of sources and literature, see vol. I, ad loc., and vol. II, chs. 2.8.4.3 (pp. 807-9: “Tauffeier am Pascha?”) and 2.9.4.1 (pp. 868-88: “Dimensionen des Exodus-Kerygmas 1: Pascha, *διάβασις* und Initiation”). The second book of Origen’s *Peri Pascha* has a different formal structure from the first and what it has to say is also said with different perspectives in mind; as there is, however, no mention whatsoever of baptism in the second book, any presentation of the numerous difficulties associated with it has been considered superfluous to the present article.

- for them when they leave Egypt.
As far as the history goes, this month is indeed the *first month*, and the Jews celebrate this festival each year *on the fourteenth of the first month* (see Exod 12:6; Num 9:3) by sacrificing a *lamb in each household* (Exod 12:3) according to the law given them through Moses.
- 12 But when Christ came *not to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfill them* (Matt 5:17), he showed us what the true Passover is, the true ‘passage’ (διάβασις) out of Egypt.
- 13 And for the one in the passage, *the beginning of months* is when the month of passing over out of Egypt comes around,
which is also the beginning of another birth for him – for a new way of life begins for the one who leaves behind the *darkness and comes to the light* (John 3:20f.) – to speak in a manner proper to the sacrament (σύμβολον)¹⁰ through water (see 1 Peter 3:20f.?) given those who have hoped in Christ (see 1 Cor 15:19), which is called the *washing of regeneration* (Titus 3:5). For what does rebirth signify if not the beginning of another birth?
- 14 One must enter into a perfect state of life and a perfect love in order to be able to hear, while still in this present world, the words: *This month is for you the beginning of months*.
- 15–17 For this is not said by God to the whole people, but only to Moses and Aaron. ... it is clear that it is not for the whole people that that month was then *the beginning of months*, but only for Moses and Aaron to whom it was spoken.
For it is necessary to have completely renounced creation and this world to understand that one has become almost other than what one was in order to be able to hear: *This month is for you the beginning of months: it is for you the first month of the year*.
- 18 For the fact that the perfect man has the beginning of another birth and becomes other than what he was, this is what the Apostle is teaching us when he says: *The old man in us was crucified with Christ* (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:19), and again: *If we have died with him we shall also live with him* (2 Tim 2:11; see Gal 2:19), and then speaking boldly of himself: *It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Gal 2:20);
- 19 these are the kinds of people who can, while still in the world, hear that *the first month and the beginning of months* has come to pass for them.”¹¹

historical-factual explanation

hermeneutical foundation of the allegorical exposition

application to the text being expounded (“a beginning of months”) and

sacramental specification: baptism as “the bath of regeneration”

the goal of the exposition: perfection, even in this world

claim to perfection and personalization in the light of the context (“The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron ...: for you ...”)

sacramental specification: baptismal apotaxis as expression of perfection

Christological enhancement of the exposition in the light of statements from the New Testament

reference back to the goal of the commentary and its point of departure

From a purely formal and methodical point of view, the exposition of Exodus 12:1–2

¹⁰ On the liturgical application of the term σύμβολον in Origen, see Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la « connaissance mystique »* (Paris: Desclée 1961) 227; idem, “Origène et la structure du sacrement,” *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 63 (1962) 81–104, here at 82.

¹¹ *Peri Pascha* 1.11–19 (P 3.32–6.29).

offers a “textbook example” of Origen’s exegetical procedure.¹² The commentary, after the quotation of the lemma, does indeed first of all clarify the historical situation and the extent of its factual significance¹³ before going on to propose an allegorical application which he concludes by actualizing for his readers; this rather pointed application in addition turns out to have a point of contact in the text being expounded, which personalizes the statement in a quite exclusive manner (“... to Moses and Aaron ...: for you”).

In respect of its content, on the other hand, the commentary on Exodus 12:1–2, referring as it does to the concept of Pascha as “passage,” which is expounded in the introduction, goes beyond the scope of an explanation of one single lemma;¹⁴ after the introduction has seen a fitting correspondence between the philological explanation of the term Πάσχα as διάβασις and the historical situation of Exodus 12,¹⁵ it is only in the

¹² See Clements, “Peri Pascha, ” 292, with reference to Karen Jo Torjesen, *Hermeneutical Procedure and Theological Method in Origen’s Exegesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter 1986).

¹³ That “the Jews celebrate this festival each year” is for Origen in accord with the literal sense of the biblical law “as far as history goes (ὅσον μὲν κατὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν).” The opposition to the spiritual sense is thus not temporal but hermeneutical, in opposition to the “true Passover” as the “true passage”; it corresponds to the opposition between “the Jews” and “us”, i.e., the Christians; see also note 16. On the problem of Origen’s hermeneutically rather than historically motivated assumption that his Jewish contemporaries celebrated the feast – even after the destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem – in accordance with the biblical law, see Buchinger, *Pascha bei Origenes* II, ch. 2.6.1.5 (pp. 678-81).

¹⁴ See *ibid.* I, ch. 1.13.1.2.2 (pp. 178-80): “Pascha und Initiation: Zur Argumentationsstruktur von PP 1,11–21.”

¹⁵ It is in view of the interpretation established in the introduction “that the Passover (πάσχα) means passage (διάβασις)” (*Peri Pascha* 1.4 [P 2.17f.]) that it is held “fitting that the law was

programmatic beginning of the exegetical part of the work that Origen draws upon this notion, thus giving this section special importance.¹⁶

The first allegorical explanation of the “true Pascha” leads on immediately to the theme of initiation; this sacramental specification is not just one casual exegesis among many others but rather a direct result of the fundamental understanding of Pascha as “passage.”¹⁷

given to them to celebrate the feast in this way ... <Ex 12>, when the Hebrew people came out of Egypt” (*Peri Pascha* 1.5 [P 2.19–33]).

¹⁶ We are also afforded an insight into the programmatic character of the commentary on Exod 12:1–2 by the fact that Origen once again expressly reflects upon the hermeneutical procedure which he has laid down in the introduction (see *Peri Pascha* 1.5–9 [P 2.19–3.31]) and supports it biblically with Matt 5:17; it is remarkable that this text does not define the function of Christ in relation to the Pascha historically or typologically, but hermeneutically: “he showed us (i.e., the Christians) what the true Passover is” (*Peri Pascha* 1.12 [P 4.14–19]).

¹⁷ Here the baptismal interpretation of the Pascha is immediately and exclusively developed out of the διάβασις-etymology; there is no longer any mention of the crossing of the Red Sea – as was the case in the introduction, where the motif is however introduced relatively independently from the Exodus, which merely forms its narrative context; see *Peri Pascha* 1.6 (P 2.35–3.8). This is why the baptismal typology of 1 Cor 10:1f., which Origen elsewhere designates as “rule of interpretation” (*intelligentiae regula*) of the Exodus and “rule which was delivered to us” (*tradita nobis regula*) (*Homily on Exodus* 5.1), does not in fact play a special role in Origen’s paschal theology, either here or elsewhere. Vice versa, it is also hardly anywhere the case that dealing with the Exodus (which is frequently understood in a baptismal sense) leads Origen on to talk about the Pascha; only the comparison made in the *Commentary on John* 6.44f. § 227–34, which talks of the Pascha after the crossing of the Jordan (see Josh 5:10) being celebrated “much more cheerfully than the one in Egypt” (§ 234)

Baptism proves to be key to Origen's paschal theology, even though he does not call the sacrament by its name but simply circumscribes it with a cluster of New Testament metaphors, allusions, and quotations.¹⁸ From the point of view of sacramental theology, it is significant that Origen first makes an existential claim, namely to a "new way of life" (καινή πολιτεία), before he makes this claim more concrete "in a manner proper to the sacrament ..."; it is clear from the continuation that this "new way of life" is to consist in a "perfect state of life" (τελεία πολιτεία), which Origen for his part equates with "perfect love" (τελεία

is intended to illustrate the superiority of baptism in the name of Joshua/Jesus over that done in the name of Moses (see 1 Cor 10:1–4). See Buchinger, *Pascha bei Origenes* II, ch. 2.9.4 (pp. 870-72: "Pascha, Exodus und Initiation").

¹⁸ The allusion to the light metaphor of John 3:20f. has associations with baptismal theology purely by virtue of its biblical context; the question as to whether, however, one may understand the allegorical interpretation of the Passover date as having to do with the illumination of humanity as in *Peri Pascha* 1.62 (indirect tradition in place of P 21.2–7: "Unless the perfect, true light [see John 1:9] rises over us and we see how it perfectly illumines our guiding intellect, we will not be able to sacrifice and eat the true Lamb") as a pointer to baptism must be left unanswered, particularly as Origen may have taken the thought from Philo (see *De congressu* 106) and as φωτίζειν does not seem to be documented as a terminus technicus for baptism in any other passage in Origen; see Joseph Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology. Its origins and early development* (Nijmegen: Dekker & Van de Vegt 1962) 173–76; G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon 1961) 1509 s.v. It should of course not be forgotten that the previous exposition, which results in the same formulation of the goal, namely that "we will be able to sacrifice the lamb and eat it" (*Peri Pascha* 1.57 [P 18.-2f.]), can be read as a metaphorical description of the catechumenal process; see below I.4.

ἀγάπη). But the condition for being “able to hear, while still in this present world, the words: ‘This month is *for you* the beginning of months,’” is in its turn the apotaxis of baptism in all its seriousness: “For it is necessary to have completely renounced (τελείως γὰρ ἀποτάξασθαι) creation and this world to understand that one has become almost other than what one was in order to be able to hear: ‘This month is *for you* the beginning of months ...’.”¹⁹ After the commentary on Exodus 12:1f. has described the reality of baptism first and foremost with the metaphor of “another birth” (ἐτέρα γένεσις),²⁰ Origen enhances this hitherto dominant thought

¹⁹ ΤΕΛΕΙΟΣ not easy to render consistently in translation, is a recurring word, which structures the development of the whole train of thought: first the goal is presented, namely that of attaining a “perfect way of life” and “perfect love” (*Peri Pascha* 1.14 [P 4.36f.]); what is subsequently demanded is a “perfect baptismal renunciation” (ibid. 1.17 [P 6.7]). The consequence, later, is that reference is simply made to “the perfect one” (ibid. 1.18 [P 6.15]; 1.20 [P 6.29]). Finally, examples drawn from scripture of “those made perfect” (τελειωθέντες; ibid. 1.21 [P 7.11]) are given. The interpretation of Exod 12:1f. thus confirms the “Bedeutung des Taufmysteriums in der Vollkommenheitslehre des Origenes” as emphasized by Hugo Rahner, “Taufe und geistliches Leben bei Origenes,” *Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik* 7 (1932) 205–23, here at 205 (and vice versa!). In *Contra Celsum* 8.22, by contrast, where Origen says of the “perfect one” that he carries out the Pascha understood as “crossing over” (διαβατήρια), he is not expressly referring to baptism.

²⁰ See *Peri Pascha* 1.13bis (P 4.23–25.34f.); 1.18 (P 6.15); also ibid. 1.17 (P 6.10); 1.18 (P 6.6f.); 1.20 (P 6.30); at the keypoints of the argument this metaphor is furthermore linked up with the terminology of perfection (see note 19) and/or with the lemma being expounded. The allegorization, bound up with initiation theology, of the “beginning” of Exod 12:2 as “rebirth” and the parallelism of Exodus and baptism are to be found in Origen also in a quite different context: Origen makes a connection between the mention of “Jesus having begun”

with Pauline statements which give expression to the christological dimension.²¹

2. Core Elements of the Initiation Rite: Apotaxis, Water-bath, and Anointing

When Origen sees the Pascha, understood as “passage” (διάβασις), made real in baptism, he describes it, following Titus 3:5, as “washing of regeneration,” but he does not go so far as to talk expressly about the water-rite.²² And the subsequent description of the goal of

(ἦν Ἰησοῦς ἀρχόμενος) in Luke 3:23, with his previously mentioned baptism: “For, when he has been baptized and has taken on the mystery of the second birth, he is said ‘to have begun.’ He did so that you could wipe away your former birth and be born in a second rebirth. The people of the Jews, as long as they were in Egypt, did not have any beginning of their months. But, when they went out of Egypt, God said to them, ‘this month, the beginning of months, will be for you the first of the months of the year’ [Exod 12:2]” (*Homily on Luke 28*; English translation by J. T. Lienhard, *Origen: Homilies on Luke* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press 1996] 116f.

²¹ There is not room in this paper to follow up the exceptional significance of Romans 6 for Origen’s understanding of baptism beyond the commentary on the passage (*Commentary on Romans 5.7–10*); however, the findings presented by Robert Schlarb, *Wir sind mit Christus begraben. Die Auslegung von Römer 6,1–11 im Frühchristentum bis Origenes* (Tübingen: Mohr 1990), demonstrate impressively that it was not only in the fourth century that the Pauline text with its particular metaphors came to have a formative influence on the baptismal theology of the early church. Texts such as *Commentary on Romans 5.8* also make it clear that the metaphors of Romans 6:3f. and John 3:3, 5 were anything but opposites for Origen.

²² On the baptismal water-rite in Origen, see Auf der Maur & Waldram, “Illuminatio verbi divini,” 79: “Zwar darf man nicht vergessen, dass im 3. Jh. der Begriff λούτρον [sic] einfach Terminus Technicus für die Taufe schlechthin sein kann und nicht mehr notwendig ein

perfection inherent in baptism as “complete renunciation of Creation and this world” likewise reveals its clear connection with the central baptismal apotaxis only to the initiated.²³ This only increases the value and importance of the unambiguity with which the commentary of *Peri Pascha* on Exodus 12.7 (which sadly only survives in fragmentary form) takes the paschal smearing of the lintels with blood as a reference to the ritual anointing of the body of the Christians:

- | | | |
|------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| § 73 | “... <i>And they shall take some of its blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the house in which they eat them</i> (Exod 12:7) | quotation of the lemma (Exod 12:6–7, partially reconstructed) |
| | ... <lacuna> ... which we sacrifice, | |
| 75 | and we anoint with blood our <i>houses</i> , which is to say, our bodies, which anointing is the faith (πίστις) we have in him, by which faith we have confidence (πιστεύομεν) in the destruction of the power of the <i>destroyer</i> (see Exod 12:23). | allegorical interpretation |
| 76 | And after we have been anointed, that is, after having believed (πιστεύσαι) in Christ, we are then ordered to move on to eating of Christ, as the following words show. | link to the next lemma |

eigentliches Bad voraussetzt. Doch macht Origenes in einer Homilie zu Exodus mit der Wendung: *descendis in aquam et evadis ... adscendis* [similarly on Exodus 5.5] deutlich, dass es sich hier offenbar um ein richtiges Hinuntersteigen in ein Bad und ein Heraufsteigen daraus handelt.”

²³ It is clear that it is not possible to infer the ordering of the baptismal ritual from the sequence followed in Origen’s commentary on Exodus 12.1f. On the terminological usage of ἀποτάσσεσθαι, on the question as to the real object of baptismal renunciation (which is in Origen nowhere to be found as a fixed formula), and on its relation to the baptismal confession (not mentioned here), see Auf der Maur & Waldram, “Illuminatio verbi divini,” 68–72, 76–78. While the “world” is the most frequently documented object of baptismal renunciation in Origen (ibid., 69f.), there are no parallels to the theologically not unproblematic notion of a renunciation of “Creation”; see the material presented in Hans Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage. Eine Untersuchung zu Gestalt und Geschichte der Taufe nach den altkirchlichen Tauf liturgien* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt 1959) 39–51.

*They are to eat the flesh the same night ...*²⁴

(Exod 12:8–9)

The motifs at the root of this interpretation of Exod 12:7 are traditional; from Justin and Melito onwards it was a commonplace of paschal theology to describe the paschal application of blood – unlike the Bible – as “anointing” (χρίειν) and to see it allegorically as referring to faith.²⁵ It is consequently far from surprising that Origen here repeatedly takes anointing as referring directly to faith in Christ.²⁶

Origen, however, is the first Christian author who does not simply introduce anointing as a word-symbol (the ritual performance of which remains at best a matter for speculation) but says quite expressly and unambiguously that “we have been anointed,” and that this anointing applies to “our ‘houses,’ which is to say, our bodies.” Given the restraint which is otherwise characteristic of Origen’s remarks on specific liturgical practices, and the consequent methodical difficulty inherent in recognizing certain links to real rites in his numerous metaphorical statements and allusions, this piece of evidence must be regarded as nothing short of sensational.²⁷ There is, admittedly, no direct reference to baptism in the

²⁴ *Peri Pascha* 1.73–76 (P 24.-6–25.-2).

²⁵ See Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 40.1; 111.3; Melito, *Peri Pascha* 67 (without any explicit connection to “faith”), etc. For a comprehensive presentation of the many different ways in which Christians have understood Exod 12:7, see Buchinger, *Pascha bei Origenes* II, ch. 2.4.1.3 / Ex 12,7 (pp. 483-88).

²⁶ *Peri Pascha* 1.75 (P 25.-12); 1.76 (P 25.-8—6). Of interest from the point of view of sacramental theology is the fact that the apotropaic effect described metaphorically in Exod 12:23 proceeds not from the anointing but from faith; see Auf der Maur & Waldram, “*Illuminatio verbi divini*,” 85, n. 237.

²⁷ The evidence of *Peri Pascha* 1.75f. (P 25.-14f. -8f) on the anointing of the body is all the more weighty when one considers that elsewhere Origen takes the allegorization (probably taken from Philo) of the door lintel and the two doorposts in the text under exposition Exod

12:7 as referring to the three Platonic powers of the soul; see *Fragm. Exod* 12.22 in the light of Philo, *Quaestiones in Exodum* 1.12. *Commentary on Matthew* Ser. 10 also offers a spiritualized allegorical interpretation of the houses in Exod 12:7: ... *unguent superlimina domorum animae suae*.

Quite apart from the paschal metaphors, it is often not clear in Origen – and in many other authors as well – where the word anointing is being used literally and where metaphorically; on this question in Origen see Auf der Maur & Waldram, “*Illuminatio verbi divini*,” 83–85, esp. n. 232. The reference in Origen’s *Peri Pascha* (written after his move to Caesarea) has additional liturgical-historical relevance when one considers that anointing might have been an essential point on which third-century Alexandrian and Palestinian baptismal practices differed; see Georg Kretschmar, “Die Geschichte des Taufgottesdienstes in der alten Kirche” in *Leiturgia. Handbuch des evangelischen Gottesdienstes. 5. Band: Der Taufgottesdienst*, ed. Karl Ferdinand Müller & Walter Blankenburg (Kassel: Stauda 1970) 1–348, here at 134f., and Paul F. Bradshaw, “Baptismal Practice in the Alexandrian Tradition: Eastern or Western?” in *Essays in Early Eastern Initiation*, ed. Paul F. Bradshaw (Bramcote: Grove Books 1988) 5–17 (= *Living Water, Sealing Spirit*, 82–100), here above all at 12–14, 15f. This is not the place to reproduce the vast bibliography on the question of post-baptismal anointing; it is well known that the earliest unequivocal evidence of this practice in Palestine cannot be verified before the later fourth century in the third mystagogy attributed to Cyril/John of Jerusalem. If we may understand Origen to be hinting at post-baptismal anointing, Palestinian – or at least Caesarean – use would differ significantly from the picture emerging from all other sources of Syrian origin before the end of the fourth century and thus testify to the liturgical diversity described by Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship. Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (2d ed., London: SPCK/New York: OUP 2002) 144–70, here above all at 146–53.

immediate context, but no other anointing than that of baptism comes into question as a ritual point of reference.²⁸ It remains an open question whether Origen is thinking of pre- or post-baptismal anointing,²⁹ but the direct link with a probable allusion to eucharistic communion could be considered a pointer towards post-baptismal anointing.

3. *The Final Stage of Christian Initiation: Allusions to a Baptismal Eucharist?*

Given Origen's general tendency to spiritualization in his understanding of the eucharist,³⁰ it is not always possible to distinguish clearly where he is referring specifically to the baptismal eucharist. His reference, however, to an actual anointing of the body in the above-quoted commentary on Exodus 12:7 gives us reasonable grounds for assuming that its immediate continuation is also a reference to a ritual practice and is not to be understood simply in a metaphorical sense. The somewhat clumsy formulation "we are then ordered to

²⁸ The repeated emphasis on "faith" and "believing" means that we would not be justified in thinking here of, for instance, an anointing in connection with the reconciliation of penitents, a topic which Origen possibly deals with elsewhere; on *Homilies on Leviticus* 2.4 & 8.11, see Auf der Maur & Waldram, "Illuminatio verbi divini," 84, and Reinhard Messner, "Feiern der Umkehr und Versöhnung" in Reinhard Messner & Reiner Kaczynski, *Sakramentliche Feiern I/2* (Regensburg: Pustet 1992) 9–240, here at 93. There is no evidence for anointing of the sick in Origen.

²⁹ See Auf der Maur & Waldram, "Illuminatio verbi divini," 83f.; to what is, relatively speaking, the clearest text – *omnes baptizati simus in aquis istis visibilibus et in chrismate visibili* (*Commentary on Romans* 5.8, a late work written in Caesarea) – see the caveat made by Bradshaw, "Baptismal Practice," 15.

³⁰ See Lothar Lies, *Wort und Eucharistie bei Origenes. Zur Spiritualisierungstendenz des Eucharistieverständnisses*, 2d ed., Innsbruck: Tyrolia 1982.

move on to eating of Christ”³¹ furthermore prompts us to think of a ritual call to the faithful to go up to communion;³² this would be the clearest pointer in Origen to a direct link between baptism and eucharist in the initiation celebration.³³

While it is true that Origen’s interpretation of the biblical prescriptions on the paschal meal is dominated by a general suggestion of communication with the *logos* in the medium of scripture,³⁴ this is generally, however, not to be understood in opposition, but as analogous, to

³¹ ΜΕΤΑ ΔΕ ΤΟ ΧΡΙΣΘῆΝΑΙ ἡμᾶς ... τότε καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν βρῶσιν ἔρχεσθαι κελεύομεθα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (*Peri Pascha* 1.76 [P 25.-8--4]). The almost terminological use of κελεύειν in later liturgies (see Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon* 741) cannot of course be assumed to be the case in this early period.

³² It is also a remarkable fact that Origen seems to have no difficulty in talking about “eating of Christ.” The train of thought in his exposition seems to take its cue rather more from the liturgical interpretation than from the biblical passage in question.

³³ See Auf der Maur & Waldram, “Illuminatio verbi divini,” 88f.

³⁴ Origen thus lays the theological foundation for the whole exposition of Exod 12:8f. with an almost syllogistic train of derivation: “If the lamb is Christ and Christ is the Logos, what is the flesh of the divine words if not the divine Scriptures?” (*Peri Pascha* 1.77 [indirect tradition in place of P 26.5–8]). The following is also true for the interpretation of Exod 12:10: “... we partake of the flesh of Christ, that is, of the divine scriptures ... [10 lines missing] ... of the true lamb, for the Apostle professes that the lamb of our Passover is Christ when he says: ‘For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed [1 Cor 5:7]’; his flesh and blood, as shown above, are the divine scriptures, eating which, we have Christ” (ibid. 1.95f. [P 33.1–23]). For a comprehensive treatment see Buchinger, *Pascha bei Origenes* II, ch. 2.9.3 (pp. 838-67: “Das Essen des Pascha als Metapher der Teilhabe am Logos”).

the eucharistic communion.³⁵ We again and again find no clear clue to Origen's precise understanding of how the communication with the *logos* described in Old Testament metaphors actually takes place. That is also true for the commentary on Exodus 12:11 in the work *Peri Pascha*, in which Origen unambiguously interprets the "girding of the loins" demanded by the Passover law as a call to sexual abstinence: "We are ordered, when we eat the Passover, to be pure of bodily sexual union, for this is what the girding of the loins means. Thus scripture teaches us to bind up the bodily source of seed and to repress inclinations to sexual relations when we partake of the flesh of Christ."³⁶ Given that the exposition of Exod 12: 8–10 has interpreted the paschal meal as participation in Christ the Word through the medium of scripture,³⁷ "partaking of the flesh of Christ" does not necessarily have to be interpreted eucharistically in the commentary on Exod 12:11; nor is there, however, any indication that Origen was intending to continue the previously dominant interpretation. As he nowhere else prescribes or even recommends sexual abstinence in connection with the study of scripture (something which would in any case not be a very practical possibility), the call made repeatedly and very expressly in this passage should very likely rather be seen as

³⁵ Evidence is legion; see Lies, *Wort und Eucharistie bei Origenes*, passim. The formulation in *Homily on Numbers* 16.9 with reference to John 6:53, 55: "It is said that we drink the blood of Christ not only in the sacramental rite but also when we receive his words" is a classic example.

³⁶ *Peri Pascha* 1.105 (P 35.36–36,9); see also *ibid* 1.108 (P 36,33–38): "And the married man who eats the Passover will also gird his loins; for 'blessed are they who have wives as if they did not have them,' said the Apostle" (1 Cor 7:29 in the version of the *Acta Pauli* 5; see François Bovon, "Une nouvelle citation des *Actes de Paul* chez Origène," *Apocrypha* 5 [1994] 113–17).

³⁷ See n. 34.

referring to the eucharist.³⁸

Even the parallel in the *Homily on Exodus* 11.7 on Exod. 19 does not bring with it anything approaching absolute clarity. Origen does, it is true, speak quite clearly of the (baptismal?) eucharist, once again using the paschal metaphor of “eating of the flesh of the lamb,” and formulates his call to abstinence as in *Peri Pascha* 1.108 (P 36.36–37.2), following 1 Cor 7:29–31;³⁹ it is not however unambiguously clear whether and how this call is to be situated in the context of the initiation process.

If there is anyone who has assembled to hear the word of God (*qui ad audiendum verbum Dei convenit*),⁴⁰ let him hear what God has ordered. After he has been sanctified he ought

³⁸ Henri Crouzel, *Virginité et mariage selon Origène* (Paris: Desclée 1962) 55f., identifies only eucharist and prayer as occasioning this requirement: “Si recevoir ainsi l’Eucharistie est sacrilège, prier est inconvenant” (ibid., 56). Only in the former case does Origen formulate the admonition as an order.

³⁹ The quotation from Paul establishes an exclusive link between the two contexts, for in all other cases where Origen quotes 1 Cor 7:29, he leaves out the passage about wives.

⁴⁰ Origen takes the motif of hearing the word of God in the first instance from the text under exposition (Exod 19); at the same time, however, his terminology for the catechumenate also lies behind it: so *Contra Celsum* 3.51 calls those aspiring to baptism “those who want to hear (ἀκούειν)” and “the hearers” (ἀκροαταί); the latter are a “class” (τάγμα). There is disagreement as to whether the “hearers” are in Origen to be considered a special group within the catechumens, the critical point being whether one understands the “sign that they have been purified” (σύμβολον τοῦ ἀποκεκαθάρθαι), which they have not yet received, as referring to baptism or whether it to be understood “als ein offizieller (vielleicht sogar rituel) Akt, wodurch die Katechumenen die Bestätigung ihrer Reinigung durch das Wort empfangen” (for arguments in favor, see Auf der Maur & Waldram, “Illuminatio verbi

to come to hear the word; he ought to wash his garments [see Exod 19:10f.]. For if you bring dirty garments to this place you too will hear: “Friend, how did you enter here, not having wedding garments?” [Matt 22:12] No one, therefore, can hear the word of God unless he has first been sanctified, that is, unless he is “holy in body and spirit” [1 Cor 7:34], unless he has washed his garments. For little later he shall go in to the wedding dinner, he shall eat from the flesh of the lamb, he shall drink the cup of salvation. Let no one go in to this dinner with dirty garments. ... For your garments were washed once when you came to the grace of baptism ... Hear, therefore, now also the kind of sanctification: “You shall not approach,” the text says, “your wife today and tomorrow, that on the third day you may hear the word of God” [see Exod 19:15]. This is what the Apostle also says: “It is good for a man not to touch a woman” [1 Cor 7:1]. Marriage, nevertheless, is a sound remedy for those who need its remedy for their weakness. But, nevertheless, let us hear the counsel of the Apostle: “Because the time is short, it remains that those who have wives be as those who do not ...” [1 Cor 7:29–31].⁴¹

4. *The Process-character of Initiation: Allusions to the Catechumenate*

For Origen, Christian initiation is not a single event, but rather a process which begins

divini,” 45–50; quotation is on 49f.). As a possible argument against, see *Commentary on John* 6.33 § 166, where “the washing through the water” (τὸ διὰ ὕδατος λουτρόν) is designated as a symbol of the soul’s purification” (σύμβολον ... καθαρσίου ψυχῆς). On the term “hearer,” see Alois Stenzel, *Die Taufe. Eine genetische Erklärung der Tauf liturgie* (Innsbruck: Rauch 1958) 138–40, and Kretschmar, “Die Geschichte des Taufgottesdienstes in der alten Kirche,” 67f., 76, with its reference inter alia to Tertullian, *De paenitentia* 6.15, 17.

⁴¹ English translation by Ronald Heine, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America 1982) 365f.

with the “hearing of the word” and leads to the eucharistic “participation in the flesh of the lamb.” It is possible that this process is also recognizably present as an allegorical sub-text of the commentary on Exod 12:3, where Origen gives an interpretation of the five days which pass between the “taking” of the paschal lamb on the tenth day of the first month, as prescribed by Exod 12:3, and its being slaughtered on the evening of the fourteenth day.⁴²

After a relatively detailed factual and historical explanation of “how the Hebrews perform the Passover,”⁴³ Origen moves towards his figurative exposition which he makes with reference to the “true Lamb, that is, Christ”:

§ 54	“And just as there the lamb is not sacrificed at the same time as its taking on <i>the tenth</i> , but on <i>the fourteenth</i> , five days later, so also here <i>when one has taken</i> (see Exod 12:3–5) the true Lamb; that is, Christ, one does not immediately sacrifice and eat him but after an interval of five days from his <i>taking</i> .	application of the procedure as prescribed by the law to the “true Lamb, that is, Christ”
55	For when someone hears about Christ and believes in him he has <i>taken</i> Christ, but he does not sacrifice or eat him before five days have gone by (see Exod 12.3, 6). For since there are five senses in the human being, unless Christ comes to each of them, He cannot be sacrificed and, after being roasted, be eaten (see Exod 12:8–9; Deut 16:7).	“to take” (Exod 12:3) = “to hear and to believe”: the beginning of the catechumenal process principle of the exposition: permeation of the senses (5 days = 5 senses ⁴⁴) during the catechumenal process
56	For it is when <i>he made clay with his spittle and anointed our eyes</i> (John 9:6–7) and made us <i>see clearly</i> (Mark 8:25), when He <i>opened the ears</i> (see Mark 7:33–35) of our heart so that <i>having ears</i> we can <i>hear</i> (see Matt 11:15; 13:19), when we smell his <i>good odor</i> (see Eph 5:2; 2 Cor 2:15), recognizing that his name is a <i>perfume poured out</i> (Song 1:3), and if, <i>having tasted</i> , we <i>see how good the Lord is</i> (see 1 Peter 2:3; Ps 33 [34]: 9) and if we touch him with the touch of which John speaks: <i>That</i>	opening of eyes and ears; smell taste sense of touch

⁴² In fundamental agreement, see Nautin’s commentary in the editio princeps, Guéraud & Nautin, *Origène, Sur la Pâque*, 125.

⁴³ *Peri Pascha* 1.51 (P 16.18f.).

⁴⁴ The interpretation of the number five as referring to the senses is a commonplace in the Alexandrian tradition: “Il cinque è « quasi sempre » riferito da Origene ai cinque sensi” (Sgherri, *Origene, Sulla Pasqua*, 86, n. 2 [with references]). In this stereotypical association, Origen is following Philo; see the evidence presented in Karl Staehle, *Die Zahlenmystik bei Philon von Alexandria* (Leipzig: Teubner 1931) 31f.

which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands concerning the word of life (1 John 1:1),
 then it is that we will be able to sacrifice the lamb and eat it and thus come out of Egypt.”⁴⁵

goal of the process: allegorical fulfillment of the paschal kerygma

“Hearing about Christ and believing in him” is the formal and actual beginning of the catechumen’s path, even if Origen’s “hearers” cannot with certainty be identified as a particular class of catechumens.⁴⁶ The permeation of all the five senses by Christ that is subsequently called for as a condition for the paschal celebration has a twofold significance. It is on the one hand to be understood as in the light of Origen’s teaching about the spiritual senses;⁴⁷ on the other hand, some of the biblical allusions and quotations evoke baptismal associations.⁴⁸

- Origen describes the opening of the eyes by Christ with the words of John 9:6, words

⁴⁵ *Peri Pascha* 1.54–57 (P 17.-5–19.2, partially restored from the indirect tradition).

⁴⁶ See n. 40.

⁴⁷ See Karl Rahner, “Le début d’une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 13 (1932) 113–45, and Christoph Marksches, “Innerer Mensch,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 18 (1998) 266–312, here at 290f. It should in this connection be noted that in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 1. 4.25f. and *Dialogue* 17–20 precisely the same scriptural passages are used as in *Peri Pascha* 1.56f (P 18.-14--2) (in addition to Song 1:3, see Matt 11:15; 2 Cor 2:15; Ps 33 [34]: 9 / 1 Peter 2:3; 1 John 1:1) in order to justify this teaching (without Song 1:3, see the same combination also in *Homily in Lev.* 3.7), and that they are elsewhere very frequently illustrated with allusions to a variety of these passages.

⁴⁸ For a detailed analysis in the light of the more ancient tradition and for further evidence, see Buchinger, *Pascha bei Origenes* II, ch. 2.9.4.1 (pp. 873-78).

which he elsewhere also interprets in connection with initiation.⁴⁹ It is very likely that it is the catechumenal process which is behind the systematic exposition of this verse, even in the *Commentary on John*. For in the extant fragment on this passage Origen makes an express comparison between the spittle of John 9:6 and the “beginning of the elements of the words of God’ with which we are nourished ‘like children with milk’; when, however, we ‘put away childish things’ and take ‘solid food’ [see Heb 5:12; 1 Cor 3:1f.; 13:11], we will throw off the ‘spittle’ and rise to Jesus with our vision unimpaired.”⁵⁰ The “elements” (στοιχεῖα) metaphorically described as “milk” (following Heb 5:12) refer when used elsewhere in Origen quite unambiguously to the instruction given to the catechumens.⁵¹

- In addition to numerous passages in which, as in *Peri Pascha* 1.56 (P 18.-15f.), Origen interprets Matt 11:15 as referring generally to the “ears of the heart,” he on one occasion gives his interpretation specific relevance by making it refer to the situation “even now, either when scriptures are read in church or when a word of explanation is brought forth to the people.” And when doing so, he directs the appeal, “he who has ears to hear, let him hear,” expressly to the catechumens; these “should not remain catechumens indefinitely ... but make haste to lay hold of the grace of God.”⁵²

⁴⁹ *Homily on Isaiah* 6.3 interprets the man born blind as referring to the “people of the Gentiles to whom the Savior gave the power to see when he anointed his eyes with his spittle ...”; immediately afterwards he interprets this anointing as being an “anointing with the Holy Spirit unto faith” (*quos spiritu unxit, ut crederent*); less specific is the interpretation unto faith in *Fragm. John* 92 on John 12:39f.

⁵⁰ *Fragm. John* 63.

⁵¹ See Auf der Maur & Waldram, “Illuminatio verbi divini,” 53f., on *Homily on Judges* 5.6, with further pieces of evidence *ibid.*, n. 58f.

⁵² *Homily on Joshua* 9.9.

- Origen does not attribute any clearly baptismal dimension to any of the biblical passages linked to the metaphor of smell.
- It is not quite clear how far-reaching the eucharistic associations of Ps 33 (34):9 actually are, as Origen often quotes the verse merely to support the teaching of the spiritual senses of the inner person. Elsewhere, however, he does relate it quite clearly to the eucharist; the fragmentary *Prologue to the Psalter* suggests that in the words of Ps 33 (34):9, David was alluding to the “holy food” (ἡ ἱερὰ τροφή); “maybe he was thereby preaching that he was to taste the body of Christ.”⁵³
- In Origen, there is never any clear connection between 1 John 1:1 and Christian initiation.

Even if the exposition cannot be said to be oriented in its entirety towards an allegorical description of the process of initiation from its beginning through to the baptismal eucharist, liturgically sensitive eyes may well recognize in it cryptic elements of a mystagogy of initiation.⁵⁴ These become clear particularly at the beginning of the passage; likewise, the final formulation of the goal, “that we will be able to sacrifice the lamb and eat it and thus come out of Egypt,” is a reference back to the programmatic discourse on the Pascha and the

⁵³ *Fragm. Ps* 1.11 (ed. Rietz 6); subsequently, there is even reference to the “body of Christ of the eucharist.” The homily on the manna pericope (Exod 16) closes with the appeal: “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet” (*Homily on Exodus* 7.8); in this context, however, there are no clear references to the liturgy of the eucharist.

⁵⁴ It goes without saying that Origen is only speaking metaphorically of the opening of eyes and ears; a ritual opening of the senses is not taken for granted until Ambrose of Milan (see *De mysteriis* 1.1.3; *De sacramentis* 1.2f.), apart from the sealing of forehead, ears, and nose as documented in the Sahidic line of tradition of *Traditio Apostolica* 20.8, in itself evidence not without problems: see Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, & L. Edward Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition. A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2002) 106, 111.

Exodus at the beginning of the work.

5. Interim Balance

Numerous elements of Origen's *Peri Pascha* can only be understood in the light of the celebration and interpretation of baptism, which is itself – if one takes the programmatic beginning of the commentary on Exod 12 as a starting point – an important tool for interpreting the Passover law. If one puts together the various allusions scattered around in the text, the result is an almost complete picture of the most important elements of the Christian rite of initiation and its theological interpretation.

Although not all the putative allusions to the catechumenate seem to be specific, the references to its beginning – to “hearing about Christ and believing in him” – and to its goal and end, which is itself elaborated upon with paschal metaphors, are sufficiently clear. For Origen, baptism, designated following Titus 3:5 as “washing of regeneration” and “rebirth,” is itself the sacramental “symbol” of the new way of life in which the Exodus and thus the Pascha as passage (διάβασις) come to fulfillment; Pauline baptismal theology takes this existential happening and links it up with the Christ-event. The central word-symbol, in which the complete renewal is expressed, is the baptismal apotaxis. For Origen, the ritual anointing of the body is, on the one hand, symbolic of belief in Christ; on the other hand, it is also metaphorically enriched by the apotropaic effect of the paschal application of blood. It can possibly be seen as post-baptismal anointing in a direct ritual connection with the baptismal eucharist. Origen seems to demand sexual abstinence as a condition for receiving the latter.

II. Towards the Origins of Paschal Baptism

1. Was the Paschal Celebration of Baptism Familiar to Origen?

As we have seen, Origen's *Peri Pascha* contains a number of allusions to the initiation process; they form a continuous thread which runs through the work and rises to the surface

of the text in a particularly conspicuous fashion at key points in his argument. Does this give us grounds to believe that baptisms took place at Easter in the community of which Origen was a member? In order to answer this question, we must first establish how far-reaching in their import these allusions and references actually are.

It must be remembered that the work *Peri Pascha* is not an Easter homily with a liturgical *Sitz im Leben* but a learned and scripturally conceived in-depth study of the Pascha. What actually prompted Origen to write it is a matter of speculation,⁵⁵ but there is certainly nothing in the tract to suggest any connection with the date of the feast of Easter.⁵⁶ For this reason, the numerous clear relations in the text between Pascha and initiation by no means imply that there is any ritual association of the baptismal celebration with the church's celebration of Easter.⁵⁷

Nor is this assumption supported by any of the numerous other passages where Origen

⁵⁵ Nautin, *Origène, Sur la Pâque*, 110f., is alone in propounding his thesis of a response to Hippolytus; controversy on Jewish exegesis (see Clements, "Peri Pascha") cannot be offered as an overall explanation for the composition of the work, even if it is supported by indicators in its introduction; see inter alia *Peri Pascha* 1.3 (P 1.32–2.4).

⁵⁶ The question as to who the addressees of the tractate were is one which can be asked independently of the question as to the occasion that prompted Origen to write it; the mere fact, however, of its exceptionally demanding character precludes the possibility of the first book of Origen's *Peri Pascha* having been written for catechumens, a theory to which Witte, *Die Schrift des Origenes "Über das Passa,"* 83, gave serious consideration.

⁵⁷ The allegorical interpretation of the "true Pascha" as baptism in the programmatic beginning of the work does indeed proceed from the biblical date indication, but this is a pure question of exegesis without any liturgical relevance. This is a procedure which can also make an appearance in quite a different context; see n. 20 above on *Homily on Luke 28*.

is writing about Pascha; on the contrary, the general silence on this point on the part of all relevant texts is made all the more eloquent by a more specific *argumentum e silentio*. In his homily on the crossing of the Jordan (see Jos 3) Origen consistently interprets the crossing of the river as an allegory of baptism. In the last part of the homily, he expressly asks the question, “And when do they come to the crossing of the Jordan?,” to which he gives the following answer: “I have noted that this also has been indicated, so that even the time might be distinguished, and with good reason. ‘On the tenth,’ it says, ‘of the first month’ [Jos 4:19].” Origen points out that “this is also the day on which the mystery of the lamb was prefigured in Egypt” [see Exod 12:3]. In what follows, however, he only makes a general association between the Egyptian Pascha and flight from the errors of the world, while seeing the crossing of the Jordan as the entry into the Promised Land;⁵⁸ the relation to a particular date in the light of baptismal theology is made exclusively on the metaphorical level of allegorical exegesis. If Easter had been well-known in Caesarea as a date for baptism, Origen would hardly have failed to point out the fact of correspondence between the biblical date associated with the allegorically expressed sacramental celebration of initiation and its actual liturgical celebration, even if Easter in third-century Palestine can be assumed to have been celebrated on a Sunday and not on 14 Nisan.

2. *Origen and the Origins of Paschal Baptism*

Although Origen does not provide evidence for the early practice of paschal baptism, he nevertheless made a decisive contribution towards the theological interpenetration of Passover and Christian initiation. This achievement is all the more remarkable since the association of Passover and baptism is ultimately extrinsic to both Hippolytus and Tertullian.

⁵⁸ *Homily on Joshua 4.4*; English translation by B. J. Bruce, *Homilies on Joshua*

(Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press 2002) 56.

There is nothing in Hippolytus's *Commentary on Daniel* 13:15–17 that establishes a substantial relation to Pascha as such. The exposition puts individual elements of the Susanna story together to make up an allegorical presentation of baptism, but the only substantial role played by Pascha in this context is that it provides the date for its celebration, but no more.⁵⁹ The paschal celebration of baptism is something which the text takes as a given, but for which it does not seek to account.

Tertullian admittedly goes more deeply into the correlation between Pascha and initiation, pointing out both the Christological dimension of baptism and also the correspondence in date between the passion and Pascha; Passover is “the day of most solemnity for baptism, for then was accomplished our Lord’s passion, and into it we are baptized.”⁶⁰ He does on the other hand establish a figurative relation to one detail from the Synoptic accounts of the preparation for the Last Supper: “With fairly good reason we could interpret it as a type, that when our Lord was about to keep his last Passover he sent his disciples to make ready, with the remark, ‘Ye shall meet a man carrying water’ [see Mark 14:3; Luke 22:10]. By the sign of water he indicated the place for the Passover to be celebrated.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ “‘As they watched a fit time’ [Dan 13.15]. What fit time but that of the Passover, at which the laver is prepared in the garden for those who burn and Susannah washes herself, and is presented as a pure bride to God?” (*Commentary on Daniel* 1.16; English translation from Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* [New York: Scribner’s 1885) 5:192).

⁶⁰ Behind the formulation “we are baptized into the Lord’s passion” lies the concept of Romans 6:3f., even though the text is not quoted verbatim here; on the general question of Romans 6 in Tertullian, see Schlarb, *Wir sind mit Christus begraben*, 81–97.

⁶¹ *De baptismo* 19.1; English translation by Ernest Evans, *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*

The scope of neither argument, however, goes beyond the Easter story as presented in the New Testament or the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper; the Pascha of the Old Testament is not given any further significance in the context of baptismal theology, even though Tertullian does go into its typological significance elsewhere.⁶² No link is established between the New Testament reality and its Old Testament point of reference; the Pascha is not dealt with in its original biblical sense, but in the analogous sense of Christian liturgical practice.

Origen, by contrast, does not merely make a link between baptism and the Easter feast and its Christian, New Testament substance; nor does his paschal theology of baptism link up simply in a general sense with the motifs of the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea.⁶³ What Origen does is rather to give baptism a foundation in the concept of πάσχα with its explanation as διάβασις,⁶⁴ while at the same time using the basic scriptural text of the Pesach

(London: SPCK 1964) 41.

⁶² See *Adversus Marcionem* 5.7.3: *Quare Pascha Christus, si non Pascha figura Christi per similitudinem sanguinis salutaris pecoris et Christi?* In *Adversus Iudaeos* 8.18, it is also the case that the analogy between the slaughtering of the lamb in the evening and the putting to death of Jesus by Israel goes further than just the date. In *Adversus Iudaeos* 10.18 and *Adversus Marcionem* 4.40.1, the relation is, however, limited to the date, even if there is very likely a wider typological concept underlying the statement.

⁶³ On the independence of an Exodus-typological baptismal theology from a strictly paschal one in Origen, see above n. 17; also n. 66.

⁶⁴ It is important to note that in the Alexandrian tradition it is difficult to distinguish the philological word-explanation from the allegorical explanation of biblical terms; the philological explanation is the immediate point of departure for the theological interpretation. In *Peri Pascha* 1.12f. (P 4.16–36), too, translation and historical significance in the history of

law as a basis for baptismal interpretations.

Even if not all the interpretative elements drawn upon in this connection are new,⁶⁵ Origen's intrinsic synthesis of Passover and initiation is, both in terms of form and method and in terms of matter and substance, of a density which had certainly never been known before him and has probably only rarely been equaled since. Although he admittedly does not take us any nearer to the ritual origins, he does help us to come significantly closer to the

Israel (see n. 15) provide the basis for the interpretation as applied to Christians.

Unfortunately, no study seems to have been made for Origen of the kind made for Philo by Lester L. Grabbe, *Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation. The Hebrew Names in Philo* (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1988); but see R. P. C. Hanson, "Interpretations of Hebrew Names in Origen," *Vigiliae Christianae* 10 (1956) 103–23.

By no means less ingenious than the opening baptismal interpretation of Exod 12:1f. at the beginning of the first book is the concluding explanation of the term *πάσχα* at the end of the second book of *Peri Pascha*. There the *ὑπέρρβασις*-etymology is made into the philological basis of an interpretation of the "Passover of the Lord" of Exod 12:11 as Christ harrowing hell and ascending into heaven. Formally and methodically, Origen follows the same principle in the latter case, first translating the foreign word, and then deriving from the noun a verb of the same root; the identification of the subject of the act in question then becomes a meaningful key to the allegorical interpretation. We can also observe Origen following the same formal procedure in *Contra Celsum* 8.22 (see n. 19 above), in which Origen applies the third Pascha-etymology known to him, *διαβατήρια*, to the Christians.

⁶⁵ On the baptismal interpretation of the paschal application of blood (Exod 12:7), see above, I.2; on the general background to Origen's paschal theology, see Buchinger, "Zur Entfaltung des origeneischen Paschaverständnisses." On the whole, Origen's paschal theology shows him up as an exceptionally original thinker.

theological origins of paschal baptism in the strict sense of the expression. Thus it seems quite clear that in certain crucial instances liturgical development followed theological speculation.⁶⁶ Whether, however, there is any direct link between the theory which he developed in the first half of the third century and the practice of the late fourth century is something which further investigations must endeavor to clarify,⁶⁷ even if it is to fear that

⁶⁶ This also is true of the concept of the *triduum* (see n. 67) and of the christological interpretation of the “Passover of the Lord” (Exod 12:11; see n. 64).

⁶⁷ Maxwell E. Johnson suggested that “Origen’s occasional use of Romans 6 in reference to Christian baptism played some role in the fourth-century rediscovery of this orientation in initiation theology and practice throughout the Christian East”: *Liturgy in Early Christian Egypt* (Cambridge: Grove Books 1995) 7–9, here at 7, n. 8; see also idem, “The Baptismal Rite and Anaphora in the Prayers of Sarapion of Thmuis: An Assessment of a Recent ‘Judicious Reassessment,’” *Worship* 73 (1999) 140–68, here at 144f. Furthermore, it would seem worthwhile to trace the influence of, for instance, the exegesis of Exodus in *Homily on Exodus* 5, where Origen makes a synthesis of an interpretation which takes its cue from 1 Cor 10 (see above, n. 17) with Romans 6 and develops the theory of a *triduum* (*Prima dies nobis passio Salvatoris est et secunda, qua descendit in infernum, tertia autem resurrectionis est dies*; see Exod 5:3), on the baptismal theology of the mystagogically rich golden age of patristic writing; on the latter see J. Daniélou, “Exodus,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 7 (1969) 22–44, here at 37–40; a number of references are also to be found in F. Ledegang, *Mysterium Ecclesiae. Images of the Church and its Members in Origen* (Leuven: Peeters 2001) 416–23. In this case, Origen could turn out to be something in the nature of a theological-historical middleman between the biblical foundation of baptismal theology and the liturgical practice of the post-Constantinian church. On the general subject of the reception of Origen’s paschal theology in the writings of the Latin Fathers, see inter alia my

most tradition lines will very likely prove impossible to trace.⁶⁸

contribution, “Zur Nachwirkung der Paschatheologie des Origenes: Sondierungen in der lateinischen Paschahomiletik bis zu Gregor dem Großen,” *Adamantius* 9 (2003) 128–69.

⁶⁸ It should not be forgotten that the lost writings of Origen include *VIII de Pascha omeliae*, which were still known to Jerome (*Ep.* 33.4.6), and furthermore that the corpus of literature on the subject brought forth by the early church was certainly significantly richer than the few extant documents which have survived the ravages of time and have been preserved for us today.