

Ronald E. Heine/John Behr (eds.): *The Philocalia of Origen. A New Translation with Annotations by Ronald E. Heine. The Greek Text of J. A. Robinson Prepared by John Behr.* Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press 2024. XVII, 412 p. £ 160.00/\$ 210.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-889321-9.

No modern scholar has done as much as Ronald E. Heine to make the writings of the prolific third-century theologian and exegete Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–c. 253) accessible to English readers. Over the course of his long and industrious career, Heine has translated numerous works of biblical exegesis by this prolific early third-century author, including his homilies on Genesis and Exodus and his commentaries on Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians and on the Gospels of Matthew and John.¹ Moreover, he has written books and curated collections of essays on Origen’s writings and intellectual milieu, most recently “Origen: An Introduction to his Life and Thoughts” and “The Oxford Handbook of Origen”.² The book under review adds to this impressive trove of *studia Origeniana* by presenting the first modern English translation of the *Philocalia*, an important florilegium of extracts from Origen’s writings compiled in the fourth century. Among the only extant works of the Alexandrian teacher to survive in the original Greek, the *Philocalia* has been translated into English only once before, over a century ago, in George Lewis’s “The Philocalia of Origen”.³ Heine’s welcome new translation provides readers with an up-to-date English rendering of this ancient selection of Origen’s writings, which promises to serve as “a convenient doorway into the vast production of his mind” (p. VIII).

- 1 Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus. Translated by R. E. Heine. Washington, DC 1982 (Fathers of the Church 71); Origen: The Commentary on the Gospel According to John. Translated by R. E. Heine. 2 vols. Washington, DC 1989–1993 (Fathers of the Church 80 and 89); R. E. Heine (ed.): The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians. Oxford- 2002 (Oxford Early Christian Studies), pp. 73–272; and The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St. Matthew. Translated with Introduction and Brief Annotations by R. E. Heine. 2 vols. Oxford 2018 (Oxford Early Christian Texts).
- 2 R. E. Heine: Origen: An Introduction to His Life and Thoughts. Eugene, OR 2019 (Cascade Companions); and R. E. Heine/K. J. Torjesen (eds.): The Oxford Handbook of Origen. Oxford 2022 (Oxford Handbooks).
- 3 The Philocalia of Origen: A Compilation of Selected Passages from Origen’s Works made by St. Gregory of Nazianzus and St. Basil of Cæsarea. Translated into English by G. Lewis. Edinburgh 1911.

The *Philocalia* (literally, “love of beauty”) comprises twenty-seven chapters, each of which provides an excerpt or multiple extracts from Origen’s works.⁴ This collection is particularly important because many of its selections are either lost entirely or extant only in Latin translations made by Rufinus of Aquileia and others. Heine’s introduction provides a list of these lost or translated excerpts (Table 1 on p. 2), but surprisingly it fails to offer a convenient, comprehensive list of contents of the *Philocalia* as a whole. Fortunately, interested readers can refer to a recent instrument of reference on the works of Origen that includes a useful inventory of this florilegium’s contents keyed to their modern critical editions.⁵ These include long selections from Origen’s speculative theological treatise “On First Principles” and his apologetic “Against Celsus”, as well as extracts from his biblical homilies and commentaries and an excerpt from one of his letters. The *Philocalia* was very popular among Greek-speaking audiences in the east. It survives in whole or in part in over sixty manuscripts dating between the tenth and the seventeenth centuries. In contrast, unlike so many of Origen’s other works, it was never translated into Latin and was thus unknown in the western tradition.

Three short texts preface the *Philocalia* in the manuscript tradition and provide some insight about its date and purpose. The first text is a short letter by Gregory of Nazianzus to Bishop Theodore of Tyana (epist. 115, translated on p. 3) dated to the early 380s, which presents the *Philocalia* as a gift from Gregory and the late Basil of Caesarea to Theodore. Although many of the topics treated in this florilegium would have been relevant to theological issues current in fourth-century Cappadocia, there is no proof that Gregory and Basil were, in fact, the compilers of the *Philocalia*. If they did play this role, however, then this collection was a product of the second half of the fourth century. The second text is a prologue, which identifies Gregory and Basil as the compilers of the florilegium and defends their orthodoxy with the claim that any doctrinal errors found therein were the result of tampering by heretics. This prologue may have been added as late as the sixth

4 As Heine notes on pp. 4–5, two excerpts in the *Philocalia* were not written by Origen. *Philocalia* 24 is an extract from Eusebius of Caesarea’s “The Preparation for the Gospel”, while *Philocalia* 23.22 derives from a Pseudo-Clementine work entitled “On the Travels”.

5 S. Fernández/A. Fürst (eds.): *Clavis Origenis*. Münster 2024 (Adamantina 30), pp. 243–247.

century, when Origen's teachings were condemned in the eastern church at the Fifth Ecumenical Council (553), or sometime thereafter. The third text is a table of contents of unknown date and authorship, which provides a summary of each chapter and its sources. Heine presents two translations of this text. He offers a close paraphrase of it as the table of contents to his book (pp. XV–XVII) and he presents literal translations of each discrete chapter summary as the headers to their respective chapters throughout the book.

What was the purpose of this florilegium? Heine's introduction explains that there are two schools of thought on this topic. Some believe that the *Philocalia* was apologetic in nature, serving not only as a guide for reading scripture but also as a refutation of contemporary criticism of Christianity. Others think that the work was written exclusively for a Christian audience with didactic intent. For his part, Heine finds meaning in what he perceives to be its bi-partite structure, which consists of two sets of chapters (Chapters 1–12 and 14–27, respectively) with a single chapter (Chapter 13) serving as a kind of hinge between them. The first section is about the proper reading of Scripture. The thirteenth chapter, the only letter of Origen in the collection, is “first and foremost about the importance of Scripture and the necessity of reading it correctly” (p. 8). The second section is more disparate in theme, but many of its components treat the perils and promises of philosophy for Christian readers. From this, Heine draws the modest conclusion that Gregory and Basil compiled the *Philocalia* “to aid fourth-century Cappadocian Christians in understanding Scripture” (p. 10).

The Greek text of the *Philocalia* appears on the facing pages of Heine's translation. John Behr prepared this text on the basis of the 1893 edition by J. Armitage Robinson,⁶ but he has made very few emendations to the Greek edition. Robinson's book was the first modern edition of any work by Origen and the first textual treatment of the *Philocalia* since the 1618 *editio princeps* by Johannes Tarinus. He consulted over fifty manuscript witnesses and established his Greek text on what he considered to be the most important manuscript exemplars, including a tenth-century copy in the Monastery of St. John the Divine on Patmos (Gr. 270) and an eleventh-century copy in the Library of St. Mark in Venice (Gr. 47). It was from Robinson's Greek edition that

6 Origen: *The Philocalia. The Text Revised with Critical Introduction and Indices* by J. A. Robinson. Cambridge 1893.

George Lewis made his 1911 translation, which was the only English version of the *Philocalia* available for over a century. The decision of Oxford University Press to print a very lightly updated version of Robinson's Greek edition of the *Philocalia* alongside Heine's new translation adds considerable value to this book.

In comparison to Lewis's 1911 translation, Heine's rendering is clearer, more idiomatic, and easier to follow. Two examples concerning the implications of God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart for the problem of free will illustrate the contrast between the two translations:

If God when He wishes takes away their stony hearts and puts in them hearts of flesh, so that His ordinances are kept and His commandments observed, the putting away of wickedness does not depend on ourselves.⁷

Avoiding evil is not in our power if God removes hearts of stone when He wishes and puts hearts of flesh in their place so that His ordinances are kept and His commandments are observed.⁸

Nearly all readers of the book of Exodus, both they who disbelieve and they who say they believe it, are disturbed at the frequently occurring words, "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh," and "I will harden the heart of Pharaoh."⁹

The statements, "The Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart," and "I will harden Pharaoh's heart," occur frequently in Exodus. They trouble nearly everyone who reads them, including those who claim to believe the story as well as those who do not."¹⁰

Likewise, Heine makes much clearer sense of long and complicated sentences that often sound tortured in Lewis's translation, as this example from Origen's *Commentaries on Hosea* demonstrate:

7 Orig. philok. 21.14 = Lewis (note 3), p. 151.

8 Orig. philok. 21.14 = Heine, p. 263.

9 Orig. philok. 27.1 = Lewis (note 3), p. 224.

10 Orig. philok. 27.1 = Heine, p. 373.

Inasmuch as the solecisms in Scripture, if literally taken, often confuse the reader, so that he suspects the text to be neither correct, nor in accord with propriety of reason; and this to such an extent, that some persons by way of correction, even venture to make alterations and substitute another meaning for that of the seemingly inconsistent passages, I fear something similar may befall the language of the passages before us; we are therefore bound to see what their hidden meaning is.¹¹

Since the awkward expressions in Scripture, especially those in the literal sense, often confuse ordinary people and cause them to think that the words have been written incorrectly or not in the way they should be, some consequently, on the pretense of correcting them, dare even to alter the inherent meaning in the words which seem to have been written inconsistently. Because something like this has occurred in this text involving the words before us, think with me about their meaning.¹²

Thanks to the laudable industry of Heine and Behr, scholars and students now have convenient access both to the Greek text of the *Philocalia* and to a modern translation into idiomatic English. While the price of this volume will keep it out of the hands of most individuals, Oxford University Press will soon publish an inexpensive softcover reader's edition of Heine's translation without the accompanying Greek text. The book under review is sure to draw attention to the *Philocalia* as a valuable "greatest hits" compendium of Origen's thought from the standpoint of its fourth-century compilers. It also provides a very rare example of the positive application and reception of the unalloyed Greek teachings of Origen among early Christian readers.

11 Orig. philok. 8.1 = Lewis (note 3), p. 45.

12 Orig. philok. 8.1 = Heine, p. 95.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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