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Agnethe Siquans, ed.

Origenes, Die Homilien zum Buch Levitikus

Origenes Werke mit deutscher Übersetzung 3

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The present monograph is part of the excellent series of German translations of Origen's work being edited by Alfons Fürst and Christoph Markschies. Nine prior volumes have already been published. Agnethe Siquans's contribution to the series is exemplary in its philological rigor, hermeneutical sensitivity, insights into Origen's cultural environment, and accuracy of translation. Moreover, the volume not only introduces and for the first time translates Origen's homilies on Leviticus into German, but it also annotates them in remarkable detail and depth. The publication of Siquans's work is a feast not only for the German-speaking community but also for the English-speaking world.

The volume opens with fifty-five dense pages of introduction that are divided into two main parts: "The Interpretation of the Book of Leviticus in Origen's Homilies" (3–43) and "The Development and Transmission of the Homilies on Leviticus" (44–58). An expert in biblical interpretation, Siquans initially points to the challenge Origen faced in explaining Leviticus, a book devoted to sacrificial ritual and thus at first sight totally unsuitable for Christian piety. Siquans shows how the hermeneutical principles that Origen had developed in *De principiis* helped him to salvage the text by distinguishing three levels of meaning: the literal meaning pertaining to the body and two spiritual meanings relating to the soul and the spirit, respectively. The Jews are identified with the first level and associated with a backward, carnal position, which is overcome by the spiritual, Christian meaning. Right from the beginning Siquans shows a critical attitude toward Origen's

rhetoric and alerts the reader that he "accuses" the Jews of literalism (7). In a subsequent section of the introduction devoted to "Origen and the Jewish Interpretation of the Book of Leviticus" (37–43), she further explains that "rabbinic scholars indeed interpreted the book of Leviticus also allegorically. Origen's accusation of their merely literal understanding is thus not correct" (41). Siquans's remarks derive from her own study of a variety of rabbinic midrashim and differ from the far more general observations of the English translator Gary Barkley, who relied merely on secondary literature and concluded that Origen's criticism of the Jews was rather more lenient.[1]

The next sections of the introduction draw attention to Paul, a central but often overlooked source of inspiration for Origen, as well as to his diverse methods of interpretation against the background of Philo of Alexandria and pagan hermeneutics and, finally, to the Septuagint as Origen's base text, visible even in Rufinus's Latin translation. Origen is shown to quote from memory so that his citations often vary a bit from the original and are not consistent. Siquans rightly concludes that the homilies on Leviticus are "biblically inspired through and through" ("durch und durch biblisch geprägt," 19).

The introductory section entitled "Themes" provides an overview that alerts the reader to the theological value of the homilies (19–37). Siquans introduces Origen's tripartite anthropology, his spiritual notion of sacrifice and priesthood, and his views of sin, purification, and holiness. The homilies on Leviticus thus emerge as a central platform of Origen's thought, where topics of primary concern are debated with a view to the biblical text, Jewish alternatives, and gnostic or other Christian approaches. Of special interest in this context is Siquans's emphasis on the social dimension of Christian sacrifice, which is not limited to an inner attitude before God but carries into society and implies concrete deeds. Ultimately, the prospect of martyrdom is part of Christian sacrifice. Furthermore, Siquans illuminates the public dimension of confession, which is regularly overlooked, and shows the different stages of exposure within the community, which can in extreme cases lead to expulsion. While dealing with theology, these sections thus move beyond the traditional image of Origen as a purely spiritual preacher and show the comprehensive knowledge of a real master of his works.

The second part of the introduction deals with the homilies themselves and pays special attention to fragments and echoes of their original Greek version, which is far less taken into consideration by the English translator. Siquans starts by placing the homilies into the latest part of Origen's career in Caesarea, relying like other scholars mostly on Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.36.1 (44–46). She then presents the Greek fragments from the *Pholicalia* and Procop of Gaza and offers an excellent assessment of Rufinus as a translator, who renders Origen's general meaning but omits and adds as he sees fit (46–52). At the end of his translation of Origen's *Commentary on Romans*, Rufinus mentions especially the homilies on Leviticus as a corpus that required him to supplement the

1. Gary Wayne Barkley, *Origen: Homilies on Leviticus* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1990), 11–13.

preacher's concise formulations (*Epil*. 1). The modern reader is thus alerted to the secondary nature of the Latin text of the homilies that is translated in the present volume. While this general insight is common knowledge, Siquans makes more efforts than others to recover the Greek dimension in her translation and annotations. On virtually every page she wonders whether particular formulations have derived from Origen's or Rufinus's pen. Her meticulous discussions provide the reader with invaluable tools and offer a paradigm for many other works of Origen that have been lost in the original.

As Siquans herself explains in one of the introductory sections, her translation aims at combining proximity to the original text with smoothness in the German translation (55). This she achieves admirably well. Her translations read extremely well and faithfully echo the Latin text. The first sentence may serve as an illustration. The phrase "sicut in nouissimis diebus uerbum Dei ex Maria carne uestitum processit in hunc mundum et aliud quidem erat, quod uidebatur in eo, aliud, quod intelligebatur" is rendered thus: "In den jüngsten Tagen kam das Wort Gottes in Fleisch gekleidet aus Maria in diese Welt, und das eine war das, was man sah, das andere das, was man unter ihm verstand" (60–61).

This translation is both literal and felicitously smooth. Its high quality stands out in comparison to the English translation, which is less accurate and less readable: "As 'in the Last Days,' the Word of God, which was clothed with the flesh of Mary, proceeded into this world. What was seen in him was one thing; what was understood was something else" (Barkley, 29). To begin with, Barkley has translated "in most recent days" in the theologically high register of "the Last Days" and put it into inverted commas, as a quotation of Acts 2:17. While Siquans also refers to the passage in Acts, she invites a comparison in a more open spirit. Next, the English translation "the Word of God, which was clothed with the flesh of Mary" does not closely reflect the Latin construction "ex Maria … processit." Finally, Siquans's simple "came" is preferable to Barkley's "proceeded," which might look at first sight more literal but carries other more formal connotations and in this case misses the dimension of coming out from Mary.

Finally, Siquans's annotations deserve special mention. While the English translation has minimal notes, which provide mostly biblical references and point to some secondary literature, Siquans has written extremely rich annotations that almost amount to a commentary. Like Lorenzo Perrone in his Italian translation of Origen's new homilies on Psalms, she regularly points to relevant passages in other of his works and often cites these at length.[2] In addition, Siquans's annotations show a fresh social awareness. Commenting on the use of salt, for example, she points to its preservative function in foodstuffs and then mentions its symbolic value for the covenant, explaining that "meals create community" (65). Finally, the annotations introduce a remarkable amount of rabbinic literature. Commenting on *man* and *soul*, for example, Siquans notes that also

2. Lorenzo Perrone, *Omelie sui Salmi: Codex Monacensis Graecus 314*, 2 vols. (Rome: Città nuova, 2020–2021).

rabbinic midrash investigates the meaning of these terms and offers various interpretations (66). The reader is treated to two references in rabbinic midrash and an article on the topic, which invites further study and comparison. Another example pertains to the method of interpreting Scripture through Scripture. In her note *ad loc*., Siquans stresses that this method is known in both Hellenistic and rabbinic hermeneutics. While the first dimension is known to students of Origen through Bernd Neuschäfer's work, which is quoted in the annotation, Günter Stemberger is rightly introduced as an expert on rabbinic literature who can help the reader appreciate Origen's Jewish neighbors in Caesarea (185).

Siquans' monumental work is thus most warmly recommended to any reader of Origen or institution devoted to the study and teaching of his works. It is hoped that it will be used not only by native German speakers but also by scholars in the English-speaking world.