

# “Exegetical Torture” in Early Christian Biblical Interpretation: The Case of Origen of Alexandria

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## Abstract

This essay engages Page duBois’s work on torture and truth to contextualize a curious logic in Origen of Alexandria’s exegetical method. That logic insisted on “torturing” (Greek, *basanos*) the text in the style of a forensic investigation. From Thucydides to Galen and Origen, this vocabulary of exegetical torture figured texts as uncooperative witnesses in a situation familiar to ancient readers from the courtroom and in their own households. This agonistic paradigm of torture and truth offers the best interpretative context in which to read Origen’s call for the *basanos* – a metaphor very much alive in his work and world. The study concludes by connecting exegesis and martyrology as discourses in early Christian literary culture, which share the same fundamentally agonistic rhetoric of cross-examination.

## Keywords

*basanos* – Galen of Pergamum – Origen of Alexandria – slavery – torture – truth.

Biblical interpretation requires much exertion and effort. Patristic authors like Origen of Alexandria (185-254) teaches this lesson by applying a striking set of metaphors. The metaphors evoke many fields of physical activity, such as

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athletics (*gymnazō*), the military (*ephodeuō*, lit. “inspection,” “review,” “spying”), exploration (*ereunaō*, lit. “tracking”), and manual labor (*ponos*).<sup>1</sup> In this mix, we find also the term for torture (*basanos*, lit. “touchstone”) being used by Origen frequently and widely (e.g., *Comm. Jo.* 6.92; 13.448; 20.31; 20.74; *Princ.* 4.2.3; 4.2.8; *Cels.* 3.38).<sup>2</sup> Origen’s *Commentary on John*, for example, instructs the ideal exegete as follows:

One must take no word of Jesus in an ordinary manner, and especially these words which his holy disciples considered worthy of being recorded. One must apply every test [*basanos*] even to the words assumed to be clear, and not despair that even concerning his word that is thought to be straightforward and simple, something worthy of that holy mouth will be discovered by those who seek correctly. (*Comm. Jo.* 20.323)<sup>3</sup>

By applying every “test,” what does Origen mean? *Basanos*, the flinty slate (touchstone) used to test the purity of gold by the streak it left on the stone when scraped against the metal, named the courtroom cross-examination by juridical torture, applied to slave witnesses, and promised to settle a forensic investigation.<sup>4</sup> Page duBois shows the curious association of torture and truth

1 Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (OECTS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 174–78 n. 56; Marguerite Harl, *Philocalie, 1-20: Sur les écritures/Origène; Introduction, texte, traduction et notes* (SC 302; Paris: Cerf, 1983), pp. 132–33; and Bernhard Neuschäfer, *Origenes als Philologe* (Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft, 18.1; Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1987), pp. 139–246.

2 Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 91. Origen often couples the root term *basanos* with *exetazein* (see idem, *Cels.* 7.10) – hence my use of the term *exegetical torture*.

3 Unless indicated otherwise, English translation of Origen’s *Comm. Jo.* is taken from Ronald E. Heine, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John/Origen* (FC 80 and 89; 2 vols.; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1989).

4 Scholars dispute whether the *basanos*-challenge in classical Athenian society functioned more as a dare (a rhetorical trope) than actual legal practice. In any event, the law and society in Roman culture required slave testimony in court to be under torture. On the *basanos*-challenge as only a dare, see Gerhard Thür, *Beweisführung vor den Schwurgerichtshöfen Athens: Die Proklesis zur Basanos* (Sitzungsberichte, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, 317; Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1977), pp. 287–319; idem, “The Role of the Witness in Athenian Law,” in Michael Gagarin and David Cohen (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 146–69; and Michael Gagarin, “The Torture of Slaves in Athenian Law,” *CP* 91 (1996), pp. 1–18. On the *basanos*-challenge as actual practice, see David C. Mirhady, “The Athenian Rationale for Torture,” in Virginia Hunter and Jonathan Edmondson (eds.), *Law*

in the term’s classical meaning.<sup>5</sup> Engaging this fascinating work of duBois, the present essay explores the connotations that Origen’s metaphor of *basanos* had in their ancient context of juridical torture. The findings reveal the deep implication and participation of Origen’s exegetical language in ancient Roman ideologies of violence and slavery.

One might object, however, that term *basanos* may have become conventionalized, that it was a “dead” (or otherwise flat) metaphor whose source domain of juridical torture no longer resonated in the minds of late ancient audiences.<sup>6</sup> In linguistic debate today, a metaphor is said to “die” when its expression has lost its evocative power to point to the imagery of its source domain. The language no longer speaks of one thing in terms that are suggestive of another. The expression thus ceases to be a metaphor at all, because the connotations of its derivation have become lost.<sup>7</sup> In response to this objection, I provide evidence that Origen’s argument depended on the evocative power of *basanos* to connote for his intended readers the graphic imagery of forensic torture (the juridical practice continued well into late antiquity). I want to be clear, however, that my argument does not depend on a dichotomous distinction between a “living” and a “dead” metaphor. Maintaining such a distinction obscures the complexity in the metaphor with which I am dealing. Rather than being a limited comparison of only two terms (*this* is like *that*), the general way linguists define metaphor, this one is more extended. It is a double metaphor,

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*and Social Status in Classical Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 53-74; P.A. Brunt, “Evidence Given under Torture in the Principate,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, romanistische Abteilung*, 97 (1980), pp. 256-65; Jane F. Gardner, “Slavery and Roman Law,” in Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Vol. 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 431. On the brutality of the torture involved, see Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 165-70.

5 Page duBois, *Torture and Truth* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 9-34.

6 The extent to which technical legal terms of cross-examination, such as *basanos* and *basanizein* when used more generally of testing and examining ideas, constitute “living” metaphors is a question raised by G.E.R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason and Experience: Studies in the Origin and Development of Greek Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 145, 252-54; idem, *Demystifying Mentalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 59-60.

7 See Gregory W. Dawes, *The Body in Question: Metaphor and Meaning in the Interpretation of Ephesians 5:21-33* (BibInt 30; Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 65-76, on defending the distinction between “living” and “dead” metaphors in biblical interpretation. See also David E. Cooper, *Metaphor* (Aristotelian Society Series, 5; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 118-39.

involving three terms: A touchstone is like a torture, and a torture, in turn, is like an ideal exegesis. All the different parts make up a metaphoric equation.<sup>8</sup>

If the linguistic debate leads to an impasse, the historical context of the metaphor's source domain opens up new ways to see the operations of early Christian biblical interpretation. The source domain of juridical torture, which Roman law and society *required* in slave testimony, illumines the importance of hierarchy in Origen's practice of exegesis. The hierarchy of meanings in the text necessitated a hierarchy of tasks before the exegete. *Basanos* belonged to the first stage of exegesis, the need to adjudicate between competing interpretations of the text. The ideal exegete first had to cross-examine ("torture") the body (*sōma*) of Scripture by questioning its literal meaning, in order to force out an answer to a simple, yes-or-no question: whether a different, allegorical meaning can be extracted from Scripture's "flesh." In the case of a "Yes," then the exegete moved to engage the text at higher levels with more sophisticated interpretative methods such as allegory. Origen's call to "torture" the text thus begins inquiry rather than ends it. Origen developed this exegetical tactic in the context of his conflict with rival interpretative communities. He aimed to keep open the debate against the Jews, the Marcionites, Gnostics, Valentinians, and followers of the pagan intellectual Celsus. Origen condemned these groups variously, but stereotyped them all as naively reading the testimony of Scripture at face value. For Origen, stopping one's exegesis at the surface meaning of the text fails to find the truth hidden inside a spiritual meaning that the Bible, like a slave witness, does not readily give up to the reader.

The following sections make clear the horrifying violence that early Christian exegetical methods shared with classical regimes of truth. The first section establishes the agonistic paradigm of torture and truth in Origen's advocacy of *basanos*. The widespread familiarity of this metaphor in the exegetical landscape from classical Athens to Roman late antiquity constitutes the second section of this essay. The final section then connects Origen's teachings on ideal exegesis to his exhortations on ideal death, the martyr's truth as sanctified also through torture's horrifying violence.

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8 Informing my theoretical approach to metaphor are Cornelia Müller, *Metaphors Dead and Alive, Sleeping and Waking: A Dynamic View* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), on the need to overcome the rigid dead/alive dichotomy of traditional linguistic theories; and Joseph Rykwert, *The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1996), pp. 373-74, on the complexities of a double metaphor.

### Torture and Truth: An Agonistic Reading Paradigm

The agonistic paradigm of torture and truth offers the best interpretative context in which to read Origen’s call for the *basanos*. Support for this thesis appears in the commentator’s self-presentation. Donning the *prosopōn* (“mask”) of a litigant, Origen stages the exegetical life in the drama of a courtroom cross-examination whose scrutiny leads only to one of two options – true or false. “Now we do not offer this as our opinion,” speaks Origen before the jury of his readers, “for matters of such magnitude need to be thoroughly examined [*pollēs basanou*] to see if they are so or not” (*Comm. Jo.* 13.332).<sup>9</sup> The yes-or-no answer (guilty or not guilty) aims to prove which of the multiple, conflicting biblical interpretations are true and which are false. In a contest over the Bible, Origen discredits his rivals (Marcion, Heracleon, Gnostics, Jews) as exegetical villains. These villains are bad interpreters precisely because they refuse to interrogate the biblical witness. Origen’s vocabulary of evidence thus expresses a legal objection about wrongly accepting the testimony of a slave witness “untested” by torture, despite mockery of his case by the opponents. “Although we are not unaware of the (possible) opinion, by those who hear the words, that this is a curious investigation [*zētēsis*] and a defense [*apologia*] incapable of convincing the hearer to appropriate it, we have ventured these remarks because we think it better to test all things [*to panta basanizein*] than to pass anything untested [*ti abasaniston*] that has been written” (*Comm. Jo.* 32.294). Against the accusations of exegetical villains who denounce his side as incapable of a defense, Origen issues the *basanos*-challenge to settle the truth. The process reverses the mockery back onto his opponents, branding *them* as the inept investigators. Origen welcomes the opportunity to “oppose the opinions of the majority by examining the account [*basanizōn ton logon*] more daringly [*tolmēroteron*]” (*Comm. Jo.* 6.291). Importantly, the rhetorical trope of the dare, an essential device in the drama of the *basanos*-challenge, is explicit.<sup>10</sup>

9 On the act of interpreting a text being similar to acting on a stage in the exegetical culture of late antiquity, see Heinrich von Staden, “Staging the Past, Staging Oneself: Galen on Hellenistic Exegetical Traditions,” in Christopher Gill, Tim Whitmarsh, and John Wilkins (eds.), *Galen and the World of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 132-56 (134-35).

10 For additional evidence of the combative language, daring even to offend, in Origen’s *basanos*-challenges to rival exegetes, see Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.229; 19.121-123; *Cels.* 4.61. Clement of Alexandria provides precursors for Origen’s exegetical method. On examining Scripture’s testimony on the model of a juridical inquiry (*zētēsis*), see Clem Alex. *Strom.* 8.1. On demanding critical proofs (*basanos*) for the truth, see Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 2.5.24.3. On not accepting words uncritically (*abasanistōs*), see Clem Alex. *Strom.* 3.4.25.7. On the

Origen's dare has a further, hermeneutical justification. "The Word," writes Origen, "wants to elude the majority who understand things literally"; for this reason, Jesus in the Gospels "hides the mystical meaning, but reveals a simpler meaning so that the words the Savior proclaims might be thought to be clear" when actually an unclear, allegorical meaning lies hidden within the literal words (*Comm. Jo.* 13,265). Moreover, Origen quotes an agraphon (otherwise unattested saying) of Jesus to support his case: "Be trustworthy money-changers" who "know how to separate out those coins which are counterfeit from the genuine ones" – in other words, a command to be experts in the touchstone practice of *basanos* that a jeweler uses to test metals and one that Origen connects now to the Pauline command in 1 Thess. 5:21 to "Prove all things" (*Comm. Jo.* 19.44). Origen thus shows full awareness of both the jeweler and the torturer senses of metaphor.

Further clues in Origen's language of *basanos* reveal his metaphor to access and activate its source domain of forensic slave torture. Origen applies *basanos* to the "bodily part" (*to sōmatikon*) of Scripture, whose outer "flesh" (*sarkos tēs graphēs*) the inquirer must break to extract the truths secreted in its "spiritual meaning" (*to pneumatikon*).<sup>11</sup> He writes:

The exact [*akribēs*] reader will hesitate, in regard to some passages, finding himself (*sic*) unable to decide without considerable investigation [*chōris pollēs basanou*] whether a particular incident, believed to be

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need not to read Scripture uncritically (*abasanistōs*) as an immature child would, see Clem. Alex. *Quis dives* 4.3.

- 11 On the somatic meaning of Scripture in Origen's hermeneutics, the main passage is Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.4. See John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Readings and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 47-80; idem, "Plato's Soul and the Body of the Text in Philo and Origen," in Jon Whitman (ed.), *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 101; Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 89-107; Elizabeth A. Dively Lauro, *The Soul and the Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis* (The Bible in Ancient Christianity, 3; Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 51-59; eadem, "The Anthropological Context of Origen's Two Higher Senses of Scriptural Meaning," in L. Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition/Origen e la tradizione alessandrina: Papers of the 8th Origen Congress* (BETL 164; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), pp. 613-24; Annewies van den Hoek, "The Concept of σώμα τῶν γραφῶν in Alexandrian Theology," in Gregory Nagy (ed.), *Greek Literature, Vol. 8: Greek Literature in the Roman Period and in Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 251-54; Karen Jo Torjesen, "Body, 'Soul,' and 'Spirit' in Origen's Exegesis," *ATR* 67 (1985), pp. 17-30; Peter W. Martens, "Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen," *J ECS* 16 (2008), pp. 283-317 (306); and Susanna Drake, "Origen's Veils: The Askēsis of Interpretation," *CH* 83 (2014), pp. 815-42 (825).

history, actually happened or not, and whether the literal meaning [*kata tēn lexin*] of a particular law is to be observed or not. Accordingly he (*sic*) who reads in an exact manner must, in obedience to the Saviour’s precept which says, “Search the Scriptures,” carefully investigate [*basanizein*] how far the literal meaning is true or how far it is impossible ... For our contention with regard to the whole of divine scripture is, that it all has a spiritual meaning [*to pneumatikon*], but not all a bodily meaning [*to sōmatikon*]; for the bodily meaning is often proved to be an impossibility. (Origen, *Princ.* 4.3.5)<sup>12</sup>

“Impossibilities” recorded in the “bodily form” of Scripture may be suitable for the multitude, Origen explains, but they signal to more skillful and inquiring readers the need to examine the truth for themselves, by “testing” (*basanos*) what has been written in order to find a meaning in the Scriptures more worthy of God (Origen, *Princ.* 4.2.9).<sup>13</sup>

Such examination of Scripture finds expression also in metaphors evoking other source domains, such as Levitical animal sacrifice and female war captives. The carnal (literal) parts of Scripture require “cutting” and “flaying” as they form only the fleshly parts of a domesticated animal needing to be butchered and cooked before proper consumption (interpretation). Origen explains:

[Leviticus] says, “And after they skin the whole burnt offering, they will separate it limb by limb. And the sons of Aaron the priest will place fire upon the altar and they will pile wood upon the fire; and the sons of Aaron the priest will place the separated limbs, the head and the fatty parts, and the wood which are upon the altar. But they will wash the internal organs and the feet with water, and the priest will place everything upon the altar; the sacrifice, the offering, is a pleasing odor to the Lord” [Lev. 1:6-9]. How the flesh of the Word of God might be skinned from what is called here “a calf,” and how it might be divided “limb by limb” by the priests [Lev. 1:4] is worth adverting to.

I myself think that the priest who removes the hide “of the calf” offered as “a whole burnt offering” and pulls away the skin with which its limbs

12 Unless otherwise indicated, English translation of Origen’s *Princ.* is taken from G.W. But-  
terworth, *Origen on First Principles* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973).

13 Calls for the *basanos* on the body of Scripture have precursors in Philo of Alexandria (*Names* 208-209); see Fearghus Ó Fearghail, “Philo and the Fathers: The Letter and the Spirit,” in Thomas Finn and Vincent Twomey (eds.), *Scriptural Interpretation in the Fathers: Letter and Spirit* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Four Court, 1995), pp. 46-57.

are covered is the one who removes the veil of the letter [2 Cor. 3:14] from the word of God and uncovers its interior parts which are members of spiritual understanding. He does not put these members of the Word which are known inwardly in some base place but in a high and holy one, that is, he places it "upon the altar" when he explains the divine mysteries not to unworthy men (*sic*) who are leading a base and earthly life but to those who are the altar of God, in whom the divine fire always burns and the flesh is always consumed. (*Hom. Lev. 1.4*)<sup>14</sup>

We see here the ideal exegete as priest who must butcher and roast the literal meaning of Scripture for proper consumption, a metaphor very much alive in Origen's telling.<sup>15</sup> The discursive practices of Origen's exegetical method enforce ancient gender norms of masculinity not only in the ritual action of the Levitical (male) priest but also that of a conquering soldier. Susanna Drake offers this excellent analysis:

In his first homily on Leviticus, Origen depicts the Christian exegete as one who penetrates to the deeper, spiritual meaning of the text, and the imagery of the Levitical priest preparing an animal for a burnt offering serves his purpose well .... The Christian exegete (represented by the priest in this case) carefully unveils the "spiritual intelligence" of the text by flaying the calf ....

In his seventh homily on Leviticus, Origen envisions the biblical text not as a sacrificial animal but as a woman whom the (male) spiritual exegete domesticates and takes as a bride. He uses the image of the female war captive in Deuteronomy 21 to illustrate the proper relationship between the text and reader .... Origen claims that this very thing has happened to him: he has gone out to war against his enemies and encountered there a woman with a beautiful figure. By this he means that he has encountered beautiful texts (like the Hebrew scriptures) among the

14 Unless otherwise indicated, English translation of Origen's *Hom. Lev.* is taken from Gary Wayne Barkley, *Homilies on Leviticus, 1-16/Origen* (FC 83; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990).

15 Related to this idea is Origen's metaphor of Scripture as an almond, whose outer shell (carnal sense) must be broken to get to the "concealed and hidden" nutritional core of truth (the psychic and spiritual messages). See Origen, *Homilia in Numeros* 9.7-8; Dively Lauro, "Anthropological Context," pp. 619-20. Such metaphors participate in a wider, Roman literary trope about masters needing to "consume" (obliterate the identity of) their slaves. On this trope, see Sandra R. Joshel, "Slavery and Roman Literary Culture," in Bradley and Cartledge (eds.), *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Vol. 1*, pp. 230-39.



enemies of the church (the Jews). Before he can take this beautiful text home, he must shave her head and manicure her nails .... Here the Christianization of a biblical text is imaged as the domestication of a female captive, as the forced removal of all features that might cause the text to be “unfaithful” to its Christological meaning ....

Origen construes the work of the Christian exegete as the domination and domestication of a feminized, Jewish text. In his interpretation of the Levitical sacrifices and the captive woman, the imagery of uncovering and undressing suits Origen’s purposes in describing the changed (and violent) encounter between the reader and the text.<sup>16</sup>

The exegete as soldier must capture and ravish the text as the warrior of ancient Israel must incapacitate and dominate his female war captive forcibly as a new bride – what moderns would call rape (Origen, *Hom. Lev.* 7.6.7).<sup>17</sup> The discursive productions aim to teach methods of “legitimate” violence against the text; the exegete must learn to dominate Scripture as a “body” marked as female, foreign, servile, and whose control and mastery God intended. The juridical torture of the slave witness, overlooked in previous studies of Origen, belongs to this mix.

The *basanos* metaphor, in particular, attends an explicitly Christological warrant in Origen’s thinking. Christ according to the hymn in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:7-8) had emptied himself into the form of a slave, the lowest of human flesh, humbling himself to the point of death on a cross (a typical slave punishment). “It does not seem absurd if he [Christ] took the form of a slave,” Origen explains, because “that form of the slave, that is, this flesh of ours, is sown in corruption that it might rise in incorruption ... sown a natural body that it might rise as a spiritual body” (*Comm. Rom.* 5.10.5).<sup>18</sup> By offering the kenosis (self-emptying) of Christ, his lowering of himself in cosmic rank, as

16 Drake, “Origen’s Veils,” pp. 831-33. Instead of being a manicure, however, I would interpret the paring of the nails (Deut. 21:21) as preparing the female captive as a spoil of war, incapacitating her from being able to resist by scratching or cutting against her new “husband’s” advances; see Susan Niditch, “The Traffic in Women: Exchange, Ritual Sacrifice, and War,” in Saul M. Olyan (ed.), *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 115-24 (119).

17 Drake, “Origen’s Veils,” p. 832.

18 English translation of Origen’s *Comm. Rom.* is taken from Thomas P. Scheck, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1-5/Origen* (FC 103; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001). The passage’s additional biblical references are to 1 Cor. 15:42-44. For further analysis, see Ernest Bammel, “Origen’s Exegesis of the Kenosis Hymn (Philippians 2:5-11),” in Gilles Dorival et Alain Le Boulluec (eds.), *Origeniana Sexta:*

the principal warrant for equating “flesh” and “slavery,” Origen clarifies his calls for the *basanos* on the bodily parts of Scripture. He awakens the verbal metaphor from any dormancy it may have had for his audience.<sup>19</sup> Origen thus places the reader in the ironic position of the crucifier, who must torture Scripture’s body. We shall return to this irony momentarily.

Seeing the deep implication of the *basanos* metaphor in the ancient ideologies of institutional slavery contextualizes Origen within the wider exegetical culture of late antiquity. In that exegetical culture, the root term *basanos* means the rigorous cross-examination of texts. This secondary usage, after the jeweler’s touchstone, follows a longstanding rhetorical tradition going back to Greek historiography.<sup>20</sup> Thucydides sets a precedent for later generations. His famous digression on method, for example, condemns the sloppiness of earlier inquirers who “neglected to test” (*abasanistōs*) every piece of testimony (Thuc. 1.20.1-2). This rhetorical move casts the craft of critical reading in the mold of a forensic investigation. Bodies of evidence are like the bodies of slaves, unwilling witnesses whose truth requires extraction by force. Thucydides thus draws his diction from the specific lexicon of evidence in Attic oratory for slaves “untested” by torture.<sup>21</sup>

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*Origène et la Bible/Origen and the Bible: Actes du Colloquium Origenianum sextum* (BETL 118; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1995), pp. 531-47 (542).

- 19 On metaphors being sleeping or waking, rather than dead or alive, see Müller, *Metaphors*, pp. 178-209.
- 20 When applied to heroes, citizens, and free people, *basanos* in Greek didactic poetry expressed the necessary testing of an individual’s merit. See Daniel B. Levine, “Symposium and the Polis,” in Thomas J. Figueira and Gregory Nagy (eds.), *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 195-96; David C. Mirhady, “The Athenian Rationale for Torture,” in Virginia Hunter and Jonathan Edmondson (eds.), *Law and Social Status in Classical Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 57-58. For similar ideas in biblical literature, see John Pairman Brown, “Proverb-Book, Gold-Economy, Alphabet,” *JBL* 100 (1981), pp. 169-91 (179-82).
- 21 See also Thucydides 6.53.2; and Antiphon 1.13. Jonas Grethlein, “The Rise of Greek Historiography and the Invention of Prose,” in Andrew Feldherr and Grant Hardy (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing, Volume 1: Beginnings to AD 600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 153-54; Simon Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), vol. 1, pp. 56-57; idem, *Thucydides* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 107; Edward Peters, *Torture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, expanded edn, 1985), p. 14; and Heinrich von Staden, “Physis and Technē in Greek Medicine,” in Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and William R. Newman (eds.), *The Artificial and the Natural: An Evolving Polarity* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 2007), pp. 30-31, with n. 39.

The metaphor expresses a number of active cultural assumptions. The first is the importance of forceful exertion when interpreting sources. The call for the *basanos* evokes a dramatic scene of disavowal. Being customarily offstage, such juridical torture displaces violence out of the courtroom – into chambers, and onto the bodies of slaves – where such “legitimate” violence becomes culturally unrecognizable as brutality. The brutality was invisible, producing little moral unease, because it was transmuted into so-called truth.<sup>22</sup> The second assumption follows naturally from the first: the site of truth always lies outside ordinary human experience, hidden in secret.<sup>23</sup> A third assumption holds that the accurate interpretation of sources is a contest (*agōnisma*) not for sport (Thuc. 1.22.4), but for providing subsequent generations with the truth (*alētheia*) that needs no further commentary.<sup>24</sup> The metaphor of forceful interrogation embedded in the root term *basanos* that treated a text as an object – a mere “body” – thus depended on the ideologies and institutions of ancient slavery for the power of its persuasion.<sup>25</sup>

### Widespread Familiarity of the Metaphor

Origen and his readers most likely encountered the logic of torture and truth from its commonplace appearance in courtroom speeches and declamation.<sup>26</sup> The term had wide usage in other genres, however. Plato, for example, advises

22 Victoria Wohl, *Law's Cosmos: Juridical Discourse in Athenian Forensic Oratory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 13, 66-112.

23 duBois, *Torture*, pp. 105-106.

24 Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 53-63.

25 On slaves reduced to mere “bodies” in ancient cultural understanding, see Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 9-38.

26 For a survey of the literature, see Thomas Zinsmaier, “Truth by Force? Evidence in and Roman Law,” in Eugenio Amato, Francesco Citti, and Bart Huelsenbeck (eds.), *Law and Ethics in Greek and Roman Declamation* (Law & Literature 10; Berlin: de Gruyter), pp. 201-216. While Roman law and declamation expressed ambivalence about testimony extracted under torture – wouldn't the witness say anything to stop the pain? (Quintilian, *Inst.* 5.4.1; *Digest of Justinian* 48.18.1.23-24) – I have found no such ambivalence in Origen's extant works. Origen apparently shared the widespread ideology in classical culture that deemed torture to be the best means to question a slave, due to its power to “break” a slave's inherent nature to lie. The logic of torture and truth did not necessarily lie in tension with the openly recognized ambivalence about torturing slaves in the courts. See also Bradley, *Slavery and Society*, pp. 167-70; S.J. Lawrence, “Putting Torture (and Valerius Maximus) to the Test,” *Classical Quarterly* 66 (2016), pp. 245-90; and J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New*

his reader to apply *basanos* to any doctrine before accepting it as true (*Ep.* 2.313c–d). The urgency to test the veracity or falsehood of doctrines appears also in the medical writer Hippocrates: “I will now set forth clearly how each of the foregoing questions ought to be investigated [*skopein*], and the tests to be applied [*basanizein*]” (*Airs, Waters, Places* 3).<sup>27</sup> Similarly, we find in the Cynic epistles this exhortation: “It is possible, through reasoned examination, to test [*lambanein exetazontas*] whether we think good thoughts, and to investigate [*basanizein*] whether our words correspond to our actions, and whether we are like those who live morally” (Ps.-Anacharisis, *Ep. Solon*).<sup>28</sup> On the critical method of cross-examining passages, Dionysius of Halicarnassus offers multiple case studies. He explains literary criticism to mean rigorously testing (*basanos*) passages in context and in comparison with other authors (*De Demosthene* 16 and 33; *Epistula ad Pompeium Geminum* 1.6),<sup>29</sup> as well as how such testing can find some to be spurious (*De Lysia* 12).<sup>30</sup> Applying the Latin equivalent (*quaestio*), Rome’s technical term for the juridical torture of slaves, Cicero defines academic research as *discovery*, “the opening up of things previously veiled,” in which perceiving and grasping of the truth, normally hidden, always requires force (*Academica posteriora*, II [*Lucullus*] 8.26). This same ideology of torture and truth shapes Philo of Alexandria’s presentation of Moses as the ultimate researcher. The Philonic Moses never allows matters to “escape the strict test of truth [*tēn akribē basanon tēs alētheias fugōn*], truth that can only be tested [*basanos*] by proofs founded on reason” (*On the Special Laws* 4.156-157).<sup>31</sup> Pagan priests of divination, in Philo’s view, merely guess at what is plausible, for they

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*Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), pp. 158-59, with further literature.

- 27 English translation is taken from W.H.S. Jones, *Hippocrates: An English Translation: Volume 1* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962).
- 28 English translation is taken from Ann M. McGuire in Abraham Malherbe (ed.), *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition* (SBLBS 12; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1977).
- 29 Note the explicitly juridical context of the term in his *Antiquitates romanae* 8.79.1. See also Jacobus van Wyk Cronjé, *Dionysius of Halicarnassus, “De Demosthene”: A Critical Appraisal of the “Status Quaestionis”* (Spudasmata 39; Zürich: Georg Olms, 1986), pp. 19-12.
- 30 Origen applies a similar term, *exetazō*, in an analogous way: “We would have to examine (*exetazontas*) that little book [*Kerygmata Petrou*, ‘The Preaching of Peter’] to see if it is genuine at all, or spurious, or a mixture” (*Comm. Jo.* 13.104). On this term’s meaning to prove by testing or scrutiny, especially of gold, see see “ἐξετάζω IV” in Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon: With a Supplement* (rev. Henry Stuart Jones; Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), p. 592.
- 31 Unless otherwise indicated, English translation of Philo’s writings is taken from F.H. Colson, *Philo, with an English Translation* (LCL; 10 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

fail to apply “any accurate touchstone by which the genuine can be tested and approved [*basanisthēsetai ta dokima*]” (*On the Special Laws* 1.61-62; cf. Philo, *Moses* 2.32.167). Such calls for a touchstone (*basanos*) to discover truth finds a philosophical application also in Plutarch’s exhortations to lay bare [*apogymnousthai*] otherwise hidden truths, to use a rigorous method of investigation [*exetaseōs tropou deitai*], and to cross-examine [*basanizein*] arguments with exact scrutiny (*Moralia* 645b–c; *Quaest. conv.* 3); similar exhortations recur in a symposium context (*Moralia* 574; *De fato* 11). The coupling of *basanizein* (“to torture”) and *exetasein* (“to do exegesis”; “to investigate” or “to cross-examine”) made the two terms practically synonyms in these discussions. All these examples demonstrate the widespread familiarity of the metaphor for ancient readers. The metaphor of *basanos* with its graphic imagery of forensic slave interrogation defined an exegetical methodology in Greek and Latin literary culture across the board, of which Thucydides was an important precedent.<sup>32</sup>

Representative of this phenomenon in the exegetical landscape of late antiquity is the physician Galen of Pergamum (129-216 CE), whom Origen had read and in whose work Thucydides appears as the most cited historian.<sup>33</sup> Throughout his medical commentaries and treatises Galen uses the term *basanos* frequently, and in decidedly agonistic contexts. *Exegesis*, what Galen calls the “unfolding” (*exaplōsis, exaploun*) of a text, must unfold enough to reveal a text’s internal anatomy, a cross-examination necessary because it corrects sophistries in popularly held interpretations about ancient authorities.<sup>34</sup> Galen fights against wrong opinions that abound, he admits, because the “most illustrious ancients” often left incomplete, obscure arguments unintelligible on a flat reading. Yet “the many” (*hoi polloi*) in their “laziness” do not even

32 For further examples, see Artemidorus, *Onirocritica* 1.74, advising readers against using his dream handbook “uncritically” (*abasanistōs*); Simplicius, *De caelo commentaria* 1.4.201, “But if it ever seems right to test out [*basanisaī*] the rest of the things this person has said, I will make the examination [*tēn exetasin*] on the basis of another starting point” (trans. Ian Mueller, *On Aristotle on the Heavens 1.3-4/Simplicius* [Ancient Commentaries on Aristotle; London: Bristol Classical, 2011]); and Lawrence Kim, *Homer between History and Fiction in Imperial Greek Literature* (Greek Culture in the Ancient World; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 184, 188.

33 Vivian Nutton, “Galen’s Library,” in Gill, Whitmarsh, and Wilkens (eds.), *Galen and the World of Knowledge*, pp. 25-26; R.M. Grant, “Paul, Galen, and Origen,” *JTS*, n.s., 34 (1984), pp. 533-36 (535).

34 Heinrich von Staden, “A Woman Does Not Become Ambidextrous’: Galen and the Culture of Scientific Commentary,” in Roy K. Gibson and Christina Shuttleworth Kraus (eds.), *The Classical Commentary: Histories, Practices, Theory* (Mnemosyne Suppl., 232; Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 109-139 (118).

“make an attempt” to understand such texts. Only “the few” (*oligoi*) can, after a rigorous and lengthy education, cultivate reading virtues that “test and prove” (*krinein kai basanizein*) bodies of work against empirical methods of scientific observation (*skopein*) rather than popular opinion (Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* 3.10.178-180).<sup>35</sup> Galen extends this exegetical principle even to his own body of work. In his work *On the Properties of Foodstuffs* (3.1), Galen compares animal species in a particular way and he tells his reader “to examine and judge” (*exetaze kai krine*) the thesis (*ho logos*) by putting it “to the test” (*basanize*) of the reader’s own experience (*hē peira*) (Galen, *De alimentorum facultatibus* 3.1).<sup>36</sup> Galen’s call for the *basanos* thus reduces a text (even his own) to a naked body whose information becomes “true” or “false” only after the reader has applied the forceful cross-examination of a juridical-style slave torture to its claims.

Such a forensic objectification of bodies becomes explicit in Galen’s surgical use of *basanos* to advocate for animal dissection and vivisection in settling medical disputes (Galen, *De semine* 1.16.25).<sup>37</sup> In this advocacy, Galen’s method of dissection aims to teach the body’s anatomy as a unity and coherent hierarchy. This is important for our study of Origen because Origen’s exegetical method of literal and allegorical readings of Scripture also advances a fundamental rhetoric of bodily unity – Scripture as “one body” of overlaying spiritual and fleshly meanings.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, this method taught a fundamental

35 English translation is taken from Arthur John Brock, *On the Natural Faculties/Galen* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916). An analogous distinction appears in Origen’s exegetical principles, but more accommodating to the *hoi polloi* (*Cels.* 4.71 and 6.2); J.N.B. See Carleton Paget, “The Christian Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Alexandrian Tradition,” in Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, Volume 1: From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages, Part 1: Antiquity* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), pp. 478-542 (512-13).

36 English translation is taken from Owen Powell, *On the Properties of Foodstuffs/Galen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See also Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* 2.6.103.

37 English translation is taken from Phillip de Lacy, *Galen on Semen* (Corpus medicorum Graecorum, 5.3.1; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992). See also Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* 3.2.146 and 3.8.169.

38 Dawson, *Christian Figural Readings*, pp. 65-80. Origen understands literal and allegorical meanings not to be polarities, but to interrelate hierarchically (Dively Lauro, “Anthropological Context,” pp. 618, 622). Being more ideological than procedural, Origen’s critique of literal exegesis targets not the practice wholesale (for Origen himself also does literal readings of Scripture in places), but the “heretical” interpretations and “deficient” doctrinal positions that happen to result from the practice (Martens, *Origen and Scripture*, p. 117).

principle on the art of good reading commonplace in ancient rhetorical education. Students must learn to read in a “layered” way, to study individual passages not merely in parts but within the multiplicity of meanings in the structure of the work as a whole.<sup>39</sup> By explaining nature’s teleology of the knee joint, for example, Galen engages this method personally. He exhorts his students to verify even Galen’s own claims about the body part, by viewing for themselves through dissection the joint’s structural connectedness to the whole:

Now if anyone reads this discussion as he (*sic*) would read an old wives’ tale [*mythos tis graos*], even what I have said will be of no use to him (*sic*), but if he (*sic*) is willing to inquire [*exetazein*] closely into all these statements and verify [*basanizein*] them accurately by what is to be seen in dissection [*anatomē*], I think he (*sic*) will admire Nature because not only the knee but in all other joints as well she has made the sizes and shapes of all the protuberances to correspond exactly to the concavities that receive them. (Galen, *De usu partium* 3.15)<sup>40</sup>

The passage illustrates the connection between Galen’s exegetical principles and his medical practices.<sup>41</sup> Both his anatomical demonstrations and his commentary exegesis resemble a criminal investigation, separating fact from

39 Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.20; see Hannah Fearly, “Reading the Imperial Revolution: Martial, *Epigrams* 10,” in A.J. Boyle and W.J. Bominik (eds.), *Flavian Rome: Culture, Image, Text* (Leiden, Brill, 2003), pp. 613-35 (615). To be sure, this ancient practice of interrogating a passage to see what it might yield within the context of an entire work sometimes presumed a text to possess not the truth but an expression demanding improvement by the reading community. For an excellent analysis of the social dynamics at work in this habit of turning a passage towards higher inquiry by the group, see William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 124-25.

40 English translation is taken from Margaret Tallmage May, *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (2 vols.; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968).

41 On these principles and practices, see Philip van der Eijk, “Exegesis, Explanation and Epistemology in Galen’s Commentaries on *Epidemics*, Books One and Two,” in Peter E. Pormann (ed.), *“Epidemics” in Context: Greek Commentaries on Hippocrates in the Arabic Tradition* (Scientia Graeco-Arabica, 8; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 25-47; von Staden, “Staging the Past,” pp. 132-56, and especially on Galen’s diagnosis of bad exegesis (pp. 134-35). On the centrality of dissection in Galen’s anatomical pedagogy and showpiece performances, see Susan P. Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 9-11, 17-18, 69-70, 153-54; eadem, *The Prince of Medicine: Galen in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 71-73, 145-63.

fiction (*mythos*).<sup>42</sup> Galen's call for the *basanos* advances an agonistic reading paradigm within which scrutiny can result only in one of two options – a simple yes-or-no answer extracted from an unwilling witness under torture – the forensic tactic of cross-examination by “refutation” (*anaskeuē*) and “confirmation” (*kataskeuē*) familiar to ancient audiences from the courtroom.<sup>43</sup>

### Sanctified Violence: The Art of Good Reading and the Discourse of Martyrdom

We now return to the apparent irony of Origen placing the exegete in the position of the crucifier who must torture Scripture's body. Fueling this idea, in part, was Origen's discourse of martyrdom that sanctified violence against the flesh.<sup>44</sup> The exegete “tests” (*basanizein*) the meaning of Scripture just as God tests (*basanizein*) and purifies one's faith in the “testimonial act” (*martyrion*). Origen's protreptic address to two educated Christians, named Ambrosius and Protoctenus (and other readers through them), urges the acceptance of martyrdom during the persecution under the emperor Maximinus Thrax (reigned 235-238) in the following words:

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- 42 See, on dissection, Maud W. Gleason, “Shock and Awe: The Performance Dimension of Galen's Anatomy Demonstrations,” in Gill, Whitmarsh, and Wilkens (eds.), *Galen and the World of Knowledge*, pp. 85-114 (106-108).
- 43 Regarding Galen's call for the *basanos* in an agonistic paradigm of forensic scrutiny involving only one of two options, whether true or false, see Galen, *De naturalibus facultatibus* 1.14.52, in reference to comparing the principles of rival medical sects; and see Galen, *In Hippocratis de natura hominis librum commentarii iii* (Ioannes Mewaldt [ed.], *Galenus In Hippocratis de natura hominis* [Corpus medicorum graecorum 5.9.1; Leipzig: Teubner, 1914], p. 78), in reference to doing exegesis on individual passages of text. On this forensic treatment of textual witnesses in early Christian literature culture, including Origen, see Rowan A. Greer and Margaret M. Mitchell, *The “Belly-Myther” of Endor: Interpretations of 1 Kingdoms 28 in the Early Church* (WGRW 16; Atlanta: SBL, 2007), pp. xci, xciv–cxxiii; Margaret M. Mitchell, “Patristic Rhetoric on Allegory: Origen and Eustathius Put 1 Samuel 28 on Trial,” *JR* 85 (2005), pp. 414-45; and eadem, *Paul, the Corinthians*, p. 91. Limiting the slave's testimony to give yes-or-no answers to questions goes back to Attic oratory; see Gagarin, “Torture of Slaves,” p. 4.
- 44 My thesis about Origen's discourse of martyrdom supporting ancient ideologies of violence thus contests the claims in Paul R. Kolbert, “Torture and Origen's Hermeneutics of Nonviolence,” *JAAR* 76 (2008), pp. 545-72. Kolbert attempts to argue that Origen's acceptance of martyrdom embodies a nonviolent mode of resistance to torture that usefully supports contemporary human rights campaigns.



... just as those who endure tortures and sufferings [*basanous kai ponous hypomeinantes*] demonstrate in martyrdom an excellence [*aretē*] more illustrious than those not tested in this way [*tōn mē in toutois exētasmenōn*], so also those who by using their great love of God have broken and torn apart such worldly bonds as those in addition to their love of the body and of life, and who have truly borne the Word of God, living and active, sharper than any two edged sword (Heb. 4:12) – these have been able to return like an eagle to the house of their master (cf. Prov. 23:5 LXX) by breaking apart such bonds and by fashioning wings for themselves. Therefore, just as it is right for those who have not been tested with tortures and sufferings [*tois mē exetastheisin en basanois kai ponois*] to yield the first places to those who have demonstrated their endurance in instruments of torture, in different sorts of racks, and in fire, so also the argument suggests ... (*Exhortatio ad martyrium* 15).<sup>45</sup>

Origen pairs the same two Greek words encountered throughout our study – *basanizein* and *exetasein* – as synonyms. As I mentioned previously, these synonyms formed part of a forensic lexicon going back to Thucydides that linked torture and truth. Origen envisaged truth to lie beyond public view, secreted and hidden, and to require torture for its extraction. He located “truth” in bodies figured as outsider and inferior – what he terms as servile “flesh.”

If Origen’s language supported the particular ideologies of violence associated with the juridical torture of slaves in ancient society and culture,<sup>46</sup> when we add punitive torture like Hell into the mix, the language becomes less ironic or awkward. Through such stories of eternal punishment, the reader already sees torture from the position of the judge.<sup>47</sup> Origen thus provides a great example of the flexibility with which ancient Christians could apply imagery of

45 English translation is taken from Rowan A. Greer, *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer; First Principles: Book IV; Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs; Homily XXVII on Numbers* (Classics of Western Spirituality; New York: Paulist, 1979). The link of *basanos kai exetasis* appears frequently; see, for example, Origen, *Exhortatio ad martyrium* 10 and 35 (with imagery of gold’s purification in a furnace).

46 For Origen, the inferior, “fleshly” body needs the destruction of *basanos* in order to enable the elevation of the soul. See Origen, *Exhortatio ad martyrium* 3, 34, and 37. For further examples of *basanos* as the touchstone of truth in Origen, see *Exhortatio ad martyrium* 24 and *Cels.* 6.44.

47 I thank Meghan Henning for this insight. See Henning, *Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell: “Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth” as Paideia in Matthew and the Early Church* (WUNT 2/382; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

torture and bodily suffering – actual or imagined – to a variety of situations, beyond the scope of crucifixion.

Indeed, Origen's sanctification of violence extends to a positive view of punishment generally. The ideal body results only from proper discipline of its flesh.<sup>48</sup> One must “kill the flesh” before the Lord, so Origen urges his reader, “[D]o not remove the hand of discipline from it [the flesh] just as that one [the apostle Paul] places the hand on his own flesh, that one who said, ‘I torture my body and subject it to slavery ...’” (*Hom. Lev.* 1.5).<sup>49</sup> Reinforcing this theological metaphor of “good” torture are occasional asides on the proper punishment of “our” household slaves in the daily life of Origen's educated readership, themselves being slaveholders. Just as a “wise and just” estate owner (what Romans called the *paterfamilias*) flogs his slaves suitably for their household crimes and even executes a slave “extremely hardened and far more depraved than the rest” – punishments that “raise up” the destroyed flesh as an example for the whole household – so also God punished Pharaoh for descending further into disobedience (Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 7.14.4).<sup>50</sup> Origen's somatic rhetoric of slaves naturalized their daily brutality and natal alienation; they were, in Origen's own words, “slaves of no birth” (*agenōv doulōn*; Origen, *On Prayer* 16.1). Such prejudice and stereotyping were commonplace among aristocratic Roman slaveholders generally.

48 Note the similarly positive view of the ideal body in Origen's rhetoric of asceticism; see Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), pp. 164–65.

49 On Origen's positive views on punishment, see Anders-Christian Lund Jacobsen, “Origen on the Human Body,” in Perrone (ed.), *Origeniana Octava*, pp. 649–56.

50 In *Princ.* 3.1.11, Origen employs a familiar Roman trope from the world of the villa: the indulgent master suffering a household of disobedient slaves spoiled from inadequate punishment. See also Pliny, *Ep.* 1.4.3–4; Roy K. Gibson and Ruth Morello, *Reading the Letters of Pliny the Younger: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 182. The simile of flogging slaves and children not for torture (*ouchi basanisai*) but for the purpose of training (*epi paideia*) appears in Origen, *Hom. Jer.* 12.3. In other places Origen distinguishes slave mastery from child rearing, as Romans did generally; see Peter Widdicombe, *The Fatherhood of God from Origen to Athanasius* (OTM; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 94–95; Matthew W.I. Dunn, “Origen Reconsidered as an Exegete of Scripture,” *TJT* 21 (2005), pp. 153–68 (157). On the Roman household practices, see Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge Studies in Population, Economy and Society in Past Time, 25; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 133–53.

## Conclusion

The exacting methods of exegesis that Origen of Alexandria exhorted his readers to exert upon Scripture offer an important case study in an overlooked legacy of biblical interpretation today. These methods corresponded to those in the wider exegetical landscape of late antiquity that included the physician Galen. A further correspondence also appears between exegesis and martyrology in ancient Christian literary culture. Both discursive practices shared the same metaphorical source domain of juridical torture (*basanos*).<sup>51</sup> The metaphor evoked in ancient audiences the forensic interrogation of a slave body, a method of testing widely believed to have the power to turn testimony into truth. From Thucydides to Galen and Origen, the metaphor of “exegetical torture” thus figured texts as uncooperative witnesses in a context familiar to ancient readers from the courtroom and in their own households. Origen may have differed from his non-Christian contemporaries by placing the ideal exegete within a lofty drama of salvation, to be sure, but the scenes in this part of the drama supported the mundane structures of violent domination commonplace in antiquity’s daily life. In terms of exegetical methodology, therefore, we find little evidence of a “pagan”/Christian cultural divide.

The agonistic metaphor of ideal biblical interpretation, still present in today’s scholarship and teaching, unfortunately has roots in an immoral legacy of torturing fellow human beings. Given this finding, we should continue the work of Page duBois to uncover the disturbingly unseen and invisible ways that slavery in classical antiquity has left its mark on Western culture.<sup>52</sup>

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51 I thus agree with Margaret M. Mitchell, “Christian Martyrdom and the ‘Dialect of the Holy Scriptures’: The Literal, the Allegorical, and the Martyrological,” *BibInt* 17 (2009), pp. 177-206.

52 duBois, *Slaves and Other Objects*, p. 220.