Chapter 7

Musical Imagery in Clement of Alexandria and Origen: the Greek Musical World Revised and Accepted

Francesco Pelosi

Music has a very special place in the Christian literature of the first centuries. The Church Fathers' works include countless references to music, which range from observations on practical topics, such as instructions for an appropriate Christian musical culture, to notions concerning theoretical issues, such as the role of music for intellectual and spiritual training. For the sake of clarity, Christian references to music can be broadly grouped under four categories: 1) the theory and practice of liturgical song; 2) the role of music in Christian education; 3) the criticism of pagan musical culture; 4) the use of musical notions and images for exegetical and apologetic purposes.[1] While the first topic is mainly (albeit not exclusively) of interest to historians of music, the other themes deserve serious consideration by scholars of early Christian thought, as well as by anyone interested in the relationship between music and philosophy in Antiquity. An overall and detailed study of the above-mentioned topics in the works of the first Christian writers is still missing, though the importance of the references to music in ancient Christian literature has not passed unnoticed by scholars. In this chapter I shall address some of these many references, by analysing topics that mainly pertain to the third and the fourth aforementioned points. At the centre of my analysis there are some musical images and notions in Clement of Alexandria's and Origen's works, whose treatments of musical topics provide some prime examples of the important role of music in early Christian thought. In analysing this musical imagery, my main aim will be to throw light on its Greek background – that is, the music theory and the philosophical thought on music that developed in Greece from the early Classical age onwards. This pagan legacy shapes Clement's and Origen's musical imagery: as I shall show, important clues as to Clement's and Origen's attitude towards pagan culture, as well as their apologetic and exegetical strategies, emerge from their references to music, which represent an important and underexplored part of the intellectual enterprise through which these Christian writers build up a new philosophical and theological identity.

[1] For this classification, together with an assessment of its usefulness and limits, see McKinnon 1987, 1-11, which provides the most exhaustive collection of Christian references to music. Other important studies on musical topics in the writings of early Christian authors are Gérold 1931, Skeris 1976 (with a special focus on the figure of Orpheus), Stapert 2007 (with comparisons between pagan musical culture and the musical thought of early Christianity) and Kramarz 2016, 359-402 (particularly, on Christian writers' stances towards the ethical view of music). On music in early Christian worship, see Kraeling-Mowry 1957, Gelineau 1962, Smith 1962 and Foley 1996. On the Christian attitude towards dance and pantomime specifically, see Bermond 2001 and Webb 2008a.

Broadly speaking, the patristic attitude towards pagan music is characterised by condemnation. The contexts, practices and instruments of ancient Greek musical culture are the target of harsh criticism. Oddly enough, this contentious attitude is not generally linked to the definition of the practice of Christian musical culture, as one would expect,[2] but is rather part of a broad theoretical development leading to the complex Christian stance on pagan culture. From this point of view, the Christian criticism of myths, notions and figures associated with the world of Greek music is an important part of the debate between Christianity and paganism. It is all the more interesting when it implies the adoption, in a suitably revised form, of those very aspects that are eyed suspiciously and criticised – as we shall see, in particular, in relation to Clement. Despite the fact that the Christian attitude towards pagan music is generally critical, many ideas and notions characterising the Greek musical tradition enter Christian literature and significantly contribute to defining the identity of Christian life and thought. First of all, many Christian authors embrace and develop the idea – a mainstream one throughout Antiquity, rooted in Pythagorean and Platonic theories – that music can promote intellectual and spiritual amelioration, as both an ethical tool and an auxiliary science on the road to knowledge.[3] Moreover, they explore at length the use of musical notions and images for exegetical and apologetic purposes: notions such as *harmonia*, *symphōnia* and *epōidē* – just to mention a few – as well as many musical instruments and musical myths borrowed from pagan culture, appear, in an adequately reinterpreted form, in the description and explanation of crucial aspects of Christian doctrine. Far from playing a merely decorative role, these references to music are based on a deep knowledge of the musical culture they stem from and play an important role in the philosophical and theological contexts they appear in. In view of this, it is hardly an overstatement to say that the use of musical notions and images is a significant part of the strategies deployed by early Christian thinkers in order to establish a strong Christian identity on firm philosophical foundations. The intellectual endeavour through which Christians constructed distinct philosophical doctrines, by means of a complex relationship of continuity and discontinuity with Hellenic thought, has been described in detail (Karamanolis 2013, Boys-Stones 2001). An analysis of musical notions in early Christians works, in relation to the Greek culture they come from, can contribute a further piece to this puzzle, while at the same time widening our knowledge of the relationship between music and philosophy in the early centuries of the Common Era.

[2] One emblematic case is the criticism of pagan instruments, which is not related to the practice of psalmody and sacred music, that is *a cappella* performances (with the notable exception of Joan. Chrys. *In Ep. I* ad *Tim. Hom*. 14.3-4: an exception that proves the rule, see McKinnon 1987, 3-4). On the Jewish and Christian criticism of instrumental music, see Kraeling-Mowry 1957, 315.

[3] Just to limit ourselves to the two authors dealt with in this chapter, the ethical role of music is acknowledged by Clement in *Paed*. 2.4 (see below, pp. 143-4), while the idea that music, as one of the sciences preparatory to philosophy, has a place in the study propaedeutic to Christianity is expressed by Origen in his *Letter to Gregory* (*Ep. ad Greg.* 1).

The chapter consists of two parts of unequal length: the first and longer one is devoted to the analysis of some musical images in Clement's *Exhortation to the Greeks*, while the second part focuses on Origen's use of the image of a well-tuned instrument as an expression of the deep consistency between all parts of Scripture. As I am primarily interested in the impact of the Greek reflection about music on Christian thought and in its adaptation, I shall dwell at length on Clement's *Exhortation to the Greeks*. This text figures prominently among the apologetic works imbued with Hellenic notions (including many musical notions) and offers a unique vantage point on the Christian appropriation of Greek musical imagery. As we shall see, Clement's definition of the Word as the New Song, far from being only a rhetorical device, is used to express the supremacy of Christ's message, against the competing view of Hellenic culture. Interestingly, this operation is conducted through methods and notions that characterise the Greek, and especially Platonic, use of musical images in philosophical contexts, so that Clement's use of musical images provides a new angle on his Platonism. Clement's illustration of the cosmological function of the New Song gives further evidence that he aligns himself with a well-established philosophical tradition of exploitation of musical notions for philosophical purposes (from the Pythagoreans to Philo), when he uses musical notions to illustrate crucial aspects of Christian thought. The second part of the chapter offers an incursion into the field of Origen's musical analogies that raises some significant questions on both the general topic of musical imagery in Christian literature and the specific issue of the role played by musical notions in biblical exegesis, within the framework of Origen's philosophical theology. Origen's use of the image of a well-tuned instrument to explain the inner concord of the Scriptures provides some important insights into central aspects of Origen's thought, such as his hermeneutic approach to the sacred texts and his attitude toward pagan philosophy.

1. Clement

Among Christian writers, Clement of Alexandria stands out as the first to pay special attention to music, by discussing a broad spectrum of topics – from musical practices to the philosophical implications of some key musical notions – which lead to the core of his attitude towards pagan culture and his theoretical commitment to demonstrating the superiority of Christianity.

In the *Paedagogus*, which provides guidelines for leading an appropriate Christian life, the whole fourth chapter of the second book is devoted to defining the music that Christians should allow at banquets. By adopting a moralising view on music, which echoes the Greek (especially Platonic)

criticism of some musical practices and elements,[4] Clement offers believers some instructions for identifying a musical culture that is suited to the Christian lifestyle. Moreover, through an allegorical reading of *Psalm* 150, opposing the peaceful music of the divine Logos to the warrior music of the instruments that inflame passions and encourage fighting (*Paed*. 2.4.41-42), Clement suggests that at the basis of the new Christian musical culture there lies an innovative way of conceiving music and its role in human life, in the light of the divine dimension associated with it. Hence, despite the fact that the focus of *Paed*. 2.4 is relatively narrow, insofar as it specifically concerns musical practices in social contexts, a distinctive feature of Clement's approach to music emerges in these pages: the adoption of some characteristic aspects of Greek musical culture – such as its ethical perspective on music – and their adaptation within a competing view of music and of its relationship with philosophy.

This approach characterises extensive passages of the *Exhortation to the Greeks* (*Protrepticus*) and some scattered references to music in the *Stromata*, and represents an interesting and understudied aspect of Clement's complex attitude to Greek culture. The main features of this attitude are widely known. Clement plays a pivotal role in the cultural debate, which developed in Alexandria from the second century onwards, about whether and to what extent Christians must strike a compromise with pagan culture. His contribution to this debate tends to mitigate the Christian mistrust of pagan culture in general, and in particular of Greek philosophy and sciences (including music). Fully conversant with Greek literature and philosophy, and committed to addressing well-educated people imbued with Greek culture, Clement frequently resorts to topics and literal quotations borrowed from Hellenic sources. Far from being only a rhetorical and persuasive device, this lively and constant debate with the pagan literary and philosophical sources highly contributes to shaping Clement's own thought, through an approach that implies both the criticism and adoption of elements from the pagan world.[5] As I shall illustrate, Clement's use of musical notions and images, simultaneously characterised by a break and a degree of continuity with pagan musical culture, plays a noteworthy role in defining his stance towards Greek culture and his view of the relationship between Christianity and pagan philosophy.

[4] Among the most striking similarities with Plato's thought on music, it is worth mentioning Clement's selection of instruments, with the rejection of the *aulos* and the acceptance of the *syrinx* for shepherds (*Paed*. 2.4.41, cf. Pl. *Resp*. 399c-d), the banishment of all visual and auditory stimuli that may have negative effects on the soul (*Paed*. 2.4.41.3; a cornerstone in Plato's reflection on the educational role of music; for some observations concerning the negative impact of both visual and auditory stimuli, in the same vein as *Paed*. 2.4.41.3, see Pl. *Resp*. 401b-d), and his disapproval of those *harmoniai* which do not have an edifying moral impact (*Paed*. 2.4.44.5, cf. Pl. *Resp*. 398d-e).

[5] On Clement's attitude to Hellenic culture, see Van den Hoek 2005, 72-5, 80. For the related and fundamental topic of Clement's thought on the relationship between philosophy and Christian theology, see Osborn 1957, Lilla 1971, Osborne 2010, 271-81, Boys-Stones 2001, 189-94. For Clement's role in dispelling the distrust harboured by the second-century Christian community in Alexandria towards the sciences, and music in particular, see Gérold 1931, 88-9.

At the centre of my analysis there are the musical images and notions used in the first chapter of the *Exhortation to the Greeks*. Through this work – a key text in the apologetic and parenetic literature of early Christianity – Clement appeals to non-Christians cultured Greeks with the aim of persuading them that the acquisitions of pagan culture need to be revised (that is, emended or completed) in the light of Christ's message. The role played by musical topics within this strategy is remarkable, as we shall see in the following paragraph. In exploring this rich musical imagery, my main aim is to illustrate the Greek musical landscape from which the images and notions that Clement employs come from, so that his use of musical topics can be fully evaluated against the background of his general strategy of criticism and adaptation of Greek culture.[6] In particular, I shall concentrate on two pairs of images that are introduced and widely exploited by Clement in the first chapter of this work: a) Christ as Orpheus and the Word as the New Song; b) the cosmic harmony and man as a musical instrument.

1.1 Christ-Orpheus and the New Song

In the Christian tradition the figure of Orpheus appears both in literary passages and in iconographical sources.[7] In Clement's *Exhortation* it is at the centre of one of the most powerful 'musical' representations of Christ: the image of Christ as Orpheus. As a first step in the analysis of this complex and intriguing analogy, it is important to point out that, in describing Christ by means of a figure drawn from the Greek mythological repertoire, Clement widely exploited Orpheus' musical traits:[8] in *Protr*. 1.4.1 Orpheus' musical power – in particular his ability to tame wild animals – is used analogically to describe and explain Christ's power. The image is introduced by a rich musical section, aimed at outlining a sophisticated comparison between the "old" (pagan) music and the "new" (Christian) music, that is Christ's redeeming Word. In this preparatory section some crucial views on Greek musical culture emerge and the foundations are laid for the subsequent development of the Christ-Orpheus image. Before getting to the core of the analogy between Christ and Orpheus, let us analyse how this powerful image is fashioned.

[6] A detailed study of the links between Clement's references to music and ancient Greek musical culture is provided by Cosgrove 2006; however, Cosgrove professedly focuses on Clement's treatment of "actual" music, that is musical practices and the notion of heavenly music, and deals with Clement's use of musical images only insofar as it casts some light on these aspects (256 n.3). The role of the musical notions and images in Clement's apologetic strategy is emphasised by Costache 2014, 36-7.

[7] Christian representations of Orpheus appear, for example, in the catacombs of St. Peter and Marcellinus, and the catacombs of St. Domitilla in Rome. On the Christian iconography of Orpheus and its relationship with the literary sources, see Skeris 1976, 146-56, and Roessli 2014 and 2008.

[8] Later Christian writers were to develop the comparison between Orpheus and Christ on the basis of another aspect of the myth: Orpheus' descent into the underworld. See Irwin 1982, 55-6, Jourdan 2010, 81.

References to music are used from the very beginning of the *Exhortation*. The work opens with an astonishing immersion in Greek musical mythology, where four mythical musicians – Amphion, Arion, Orpheus and Eunomos – and their musical marvels burst onto the scene (*Protr*. 1.1.1). Orpheus is not in the foreground here: the spotlight is on Eunomos, the Locrian musician credited with an extraordinary duet with a cicada. As the story goes, Eunomos was playing the *kithara* and singing at the Pythian games, when one of the strings of his instrument snapped; at that moment, a miracle happened: a cicada flew on the crossbar of the instrument and replaced the missing string with its voice.[9] Traditionally, the core of the story had been the praise of the extraordinary power of Eunomos, able to enchant the cicada and elicit its help. In Clement's version, however, the values conveyed by the traditional account are completely overturned, through a refined shift of the emphasis from the extraordinary ability of the musician to the differences between the cicada's song and Eunomos' song, and the superiority of the former over the latter. Eunomos delivers his performance in the heat of the day, surrounded by the cicadas' song. The competition between Eunomos' song and the cicadas' chorus takes place as a contest within the contest: the cicada's song, addressed to God and not governed by any laws (*autonomon ōidēn*, is better than Eunomos' songs/laws (*tōn Eunomou … nomōn*), as Clement highlights (*Protr*. 1.1.2-3). In underscoring the differences between the two songs, Clement clearly suggests a new perspective on the marvellous event. According to him, in emphasising Eunomos' musical skills and the cicada's impossibility to resist the power of his music, the Greeks have completely misunderstood the meaning of the story. In particular, what has escaped the Greeks is the fact that both the cicada's actions – flying and singing – were performed purposely (*hekōn ephiptatai kai aidei hekōn*), not under the influence of Eunomos' music. In Clement's view, the relationship between Eunomos and the cicada is completely reversed: far from being enchanted by Eunomos' song, the cicada spontaneously puts its song at Eunomos' service, obeying its own rule (*autonomos*). Significantly, Clement points out that it was Eunomos who attuned himself to the cicada's song (*tou tettigos tōi aismati harmosamenos ho ōidos*): in a sense, it is Eunomos who is charmed by the cicada's song, not the other way round.

As has been noted, Clement's revised interpretation of Eunomos' story gives us some insight into his strategy of appropriation and exploitation of the pagan background: Greek philosophy – Eunomos' song – acquires full meaning when it is attuned to, and perfected by, God's Word (Stapert 2007, 51). It should also be noted that the transformation of the pagan myth of Eunomos into the Christian parable of the cicada occurs through some interesting twisting of the meanings originally conveyed by the story, according to an operation of "turning upside-down Greek values" that has been identified as characteristic of Clement's strategy in this work (Van den Hoek 2005, 74-6 and

[9] *Protr*. 1.1.2-3. Cf. Anon. *Anth. Pal*. 9.584, Paul. Silent. *Anth. Pal*. 6.54, Conon *ap*. Phot. *Bibl.* 186.131b, Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 175.2.

92). Let us focus on what I regard as the central variation in Clement's version of the story: the fact that at the basis of the cicada's act there is a spontaneous impulse, instead of some kind of enchantment, as is implied in the traditional version of the myth. This point is raised again, at the end of the story, and expressed as a more general criticism of the Greek belief in the effects of music on animals: "how in the world is it that you have given credence to worthless legends, imagining brute beasts to be enchanted by music"? (*Protr*. 1.2.1, transl. Butterworth). What Clement impugns here is a significant aspect of Greek thought on the pervasive and magic power of musical sounds: the conviction, often expressed in myth, that even animals and inanimate objects are moved by music. The four musicians mentioned at the very outset of the *Exhortation* embody these beliefs on the musical conditioning of animals and things, as their deeds concern the musical enchantment of animals and objects (by means of music, Amphion moved the stones forming the walls of Thebes; Arion, a dolphin; Orpheus, animals and trees; and Eunomos, the cicada).[10] It would be rash, however, to conclude that Clement rejects Greek thought on the fascinating power of music and its symbols. As his reading of Eunomos' story shows, a completely different interpretation of the Hellenic musical imagery can be given: a reading that transforms the Greek musical world into a valuable repository of images and notions for expressing Christian content. This is exactly the kind of operation that Clement performs in the following pages of the first chapter, where he embraces the fundamental Greek idea that music is a powerful instrument of persuasion, including the conviction that it has some sort of magical power, but then reinterprets it in the light of the Christian message.[11]

With a plot twist, which foreshadows the comparison of Christ to Orpheus, Clement presents Christ in the guise of Eunomos. At *Protr*. 1.2.3-4 Christ is called "this Eunomos of mine" (ὁ Εὔνομος ὁ ἐμὸς): that is, a Eunomos who does not sing the *nomos* of Therpander, nor the *nomos* of Capion, nor a Phrygian, Lydian or Doric *nomos* – in short, who does not sing old songs, but "the eternal *nomos* of the new harmony" (τῆς καινῆς ἁρμονίας τὸν ἀίδιον νόμον). Thus, the creation of the Christ-Eunomos image occurs through a double move: on one hand, the rehabilitation of Eunomos as an extraordinary musician – a move which probably implies the recovery of the positive etymological meaning of the name Eunomos, "good *nomos*" (Lugaresi 2001, 252); on the other, the replacement of the musical tradition to which the figure of Eunomos belongs with completely different content. The *nomos* of Christ-Eunomos is good insofar as it is different from the traditional *nomoi* of the Greeks: it

[10] On these four figures and the prominent role of Eunomos in *Protr*. 1.1, see Halton 1983, 178-80, 193-4 and Stapert 2007, 49-51.

[11] It is telling that Clement accepts the idea that music enchants animals and conditions their behaviour in a passage of the *Paedagogus* where he rejects those instruments that are more suitable for animals than for men, and, among men, for those who are more unreasonable (*Paed*. 2.4.41.1-2). The crucial aim in the first pages of the *Exhortation* is not to deny the enchanting power of music, nor to question the idea that it has an impact on the natural world, but rather to contend that the fountainhead of this power is the *Logos*. In fact, as we shall see, Clement recovers the idea of the enchanting power of music and of its effect on animals, by saying that the New Song (that is, the *Logos*) fascinates the most terrible brutes: human beings (see below, p. 149).

is the New Song of the heavenly Word (*logos ouranios*). This passage presents the first definition of Christ in musical terms and the first occurrence of the notion of New Song (*āisma kainon*), which is key to the first book of the *Exhortation* (see below, pp. 149-56). Before analysing this notion, let us explore Clement's overturning of the values traditionally linked to the musical myth, in order to see how this strategy leads to the analogy of Christ as Orpheus.

A crucial move in this project is the unmasking of the deceptive and coercive use that mythical musicians make of their musical powers. The idea that the musical deeds of those famous musicians have an illusory quality to them already emerged from Clement's re-reading of Eunomos' story, but in that case the emphasis was on the misleading interpretation of the event as it is given in the myth (*ho mythos bouletai*). However, at 1.3.1 the criticism is openly levelled at the musicians' use of their musical powers: the Thracian, the Theban and the Methymnian – that is, Orpheus, Amphion and Arion – are "impostors" (*apatēloi*) and their music is an excuse to outrage human life, by leading men to idolatry and limiting human freedom. The magical power of this deceiving music performed by the three mythical musicians is strongly emphasised here: we are told that they used sorcery (*goēteiai*) and that they enslaved men by means of songs and enchantements (*ōidais kai epōidais*). It is worth noting that the beguiling character of one of these musicians – significantly, Orpheus – is particularly emphasised, albeit in somewhat ambiguous terms: at the beginning of the work, Orpheus is introduced as *sophistēs* – with the term bearing the double meaning of "skilful" (in his art) and "cheat".[12] Then Orpheus, who in a few pages will soar to represent Christ, is here described as an impostor, whose music makes men slaves, by acting as a sort of magic spell.

As has been convincingly argued, this criticism is but the first step in a strategy which includes – after the condemnation of some of Orpheus' traits, as these emerge from the Greek tradition – an operation of "transposition" and "appropriation" of those very traits, in order to apply them to Christ.[13] As we shall see, both the image of a fascinating musician and the notion of a music that acts as magic are fully exploited in Clement's definition of Christ in musical terms: Clement's response to the pagan world of musical deceitfulness and dangerous enchantments is not a silent word, nor a music without allure, but rather the charming song of the *Logos*.

Interestingly, Orpheus' redemption and his transformation into Christ have their starting point in an aspect which is strongly called into question at the outset of the *Exhortation*: the impact of

[12] See Halton 1983, 179-80; Roessli 2002, 506 and n. 2. Among those passages that might have suggested to Clement the definition of Orpheus as a sophist, Eur. *Rh*. 924 and Pl. *Prt*. 315a-b, 316d are usually mentioned. The misleading character of certain kinds of music also emerges at *Paed*. 2.4.40.2, where Clement speaks of "those who are surrounded by the sounds of the instruments of deceit" (τοῖς τῆς ἀπάτης ὀργάνοις περιψοφούμενοι).

[13] A description of Clement's reworking of the figure of Orpheus as consisting of three steps – opposition, transposition and appropriation – has been set out by Jourdan in her extensive and detailed analysis of the Christian reception of the Orpheus myth (2010, see also Jourdan 2008). Cf. the alternative interpretations of Skeris (1976, 146) and Roessli (2002, 506-7), which emphasise respectively the ambivalence of the figure of Orpheus and his negative traits in Clement's *Exhortation*.

music on animals and inanimate things. After having stressed the difference between the Greek mythical musicians and Christ (*Protr*. 1.3.1), Clement praises Christ's capacity to tame "the most intractable beasts, men" (*Protr*. 1.4.1: τὰ ἀργαλεώτατα θηρία, τοὺς ἀνθρώπους). In Clement's rereading of the Orpheus myth, each animal comes to exemplify human characters: birds are unstable men, snakes are deceptive men, lions are passionate men, pigs are pleasure-loving men and wolves are rapacious men. Even inanimate things, like stones, correspond to human types – specifically, to "men without reason" (*hoi aphrones*) – while a further category includes those who are so sunken in ignorance that they are more insensible than stones. All these "most savage beasts, and all such stones the heavenly song of itself transformed into men of gentleness" (*Protr*. 1.4.3, transl. Butterworth). The New Song makes men out of wild beasts and stones, by giving them the truest life. The musical enchantment of Greek mythology becomes a humanising act: listening to Christ-Orpheus' Word means letting human wildness be charmed away (*Protr*. 1.4.3-4). Those who do not undergo this musical redemption are described through another evocative image, as "those serpents whose ears are closed to the enchanters".[14]

Two points are worth emphasising in this description of Christ as Orpheus. First, Christ-Orpheus' musical power is analogous to the one ascribed to the mythical Greek musicians: it can move beasts and stones, and does so by enchantment, but – and this is the second relevant point – the content of Christ-Orpheus' song completely reshapes the meaning of this charming power. Instead of the deceptive and enslaving elements of Orpheus' music, the song of Christ conveys the truthful content of the *Logos* and, in captivating the listener, actually makes him free.[15] At the basis of the image of Christ-Orpheus at 1.3.2-1.4.4 there lies the idea of a music that conquers, without enslaving; a music that frees, thanks to its fascinating content of truth.[16] This leads us to the theme of the Word as the New Song.

---

[14] *Protr*. 10.105.4-106.1: "With good reason, therefore, have you been likened to those serpents whose ears are closed to the enchanters. 'For their hearth,' the Scripture says, 'is after the likeness of the serpent, even like an adder that is deaf and stoppeth her ears, who will not give heed to the voice of charmers.' But as for you, let your wildness be charmed away…" (transl. Butterworth. Ἆρα οὖν εἰκότως ὡμοίωσθε τοῖς ὄφεσιν ἐκείνοις, οἷς τὰ ὦτα πρὸς τοὺς κατεπάδοντας ἀποκέκλεισται. "Θυμὸς γὰρ αὐτοῖς," φησὶν ἡ γραφή, "κατὰ τὴν ὁμοίωσιν τοῦ ὄφεως, ὡσεὶ ἀσπίδος κωφῆς καὶ βυούσης τὰ ὦτα αὐτῆς, ἥτις οὐκ εἰσακούσεται φωνῆς ἐπᾳδόντων." Ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς γε κατεπάσθητε τὴν ἀγριότητα…). The image of the deaf serpent, which is drawn from *Ps.* 58.4-5, expressly quoted by Clement, also occurs in *Strom*. 7.16.102.3. On the closure of the ears that hinders moral and spiritual transformation, see *Protr*. 10.89.3. On the taming action of the *Logos*, see *Paed*. 3.12.99.2 and the definition of the *Logos* as "all-taming" (πανδαμάτωρ) in the *Hymn to Christ the Saviour* (l. 12), at the end of the *Paedagogus*.

[15] Cf. *Protr*. 1.5.4, where the expression "truthful music" (ἀληθεῖ…μουσικῇ) describes David's music, and *Protr*. 1.4.1, where the New Song is characterised as being "in consonance with truth" (συνῳδὸς ἀληθείας).

[16] From this perspective, the sharp distinction that Skeris (1976, 152, 155) observes in *Protr*. 1.1 between the figure of Orpheus as founder of the mysteries and as mythical singer – the former being rejected by Clement, while the latter is used in the comparison to Christ – does not seem entirely convincing to me. On one hand, Clement does not distinguish between the form and content of Orpheus' music when describing Orpheus' deceptiveness at 1.3.1; on the other hand (and most importantly for us), the content of Orpheus' music is exactly what determines the forms and limits of its effects (just as the revolutionary content of Christ-Orpheus' music is what determines its exceptional effects).

As we have seen, the notion first emerges at *Protr*. 1.2.4, where it describes Christ-Eunomos' song, in opposition to the traditional Greek *nomoi*. Although the concept of a New Song occurs in many passages of the Old Testament, Clement's analysis of this notion greatly contributes to extending the expressive power of the concept, by emphasising in particular its enchanting potential and the special temporal dimension of newness/eternity that characterises it.[17] It is worth noting that, immediately after having stressed the originality of the New Song, Clement describes it through a quotation from the old pagan world (*Protr*. 1.2.4). The effects of the New Song are compared to those of the drug poured into wine by Helen in *Od*. 4.221: "Soother of grief and wrath, that bids all ills be forgotten". The quotation is not surprising in itself, for it is characteristic of Clement's rhetorical strategy to resort to Greek literature as a means to introduce a new and crucial concept of the Christian message, in order to emphasise its originality.[18] Nonetheless, it is worth paying special attention here to the notion that the Homeric quotation introduces: the concept of *pharmakon*. A "drug" has been added both to Helen's wine and to the New Song, but the *pharmakon* of Christ's Word is "truthful".[19] As the notion of enchantment, the idea that the New Song acts as a *pharmakon* stresses its "compelling" character and confirms that, in describing it, Clement widely resorts to the Greek tradition on the psychagogic and therapeutic effects of music. This is further confirmed by the insistence on the idea that the Word is a form of enchantment, which reappears later on in the work – at 11.115.1-2, where the exhortation is to trust in "God's enchantment" (*tēi epōidēi tou theou*) – and by the comparison of the fascinating power of God's voice, expressed by the Scriptures, to the Sirens' call, in a passage of the *Stromata* (2.2.9.6-7).[20]

As both the image of Christ-Orpheus and the notion of a New Song illustrate, Clement's adaptation of the Greek musical landscape to the Christian scenario is based on a refined elaboration and appropriation of some ambiguous, and potentially negative, elements characterising the Hellenic thought on music: in particular, the rich imagery concerning the overwhelming power of music. In describing Christ and his Word by means of the alluring impact of music – a cornerstone in Greek speculation on music – Clement is claiming for the Christian message those very seductive aspects

[17] Another original aspect of Clement's treatment of the notion is the identification of the New Song with Christ, whereas other Christian writers simply consider it to be the song addressed to God by man (Lugaresi 2011, 261 n. 3). For some occurrences of the notion of New Song in the Old Testament (ᾆσμα καινόν, ᾠδὴν καινὴν in the Septuagint), see, e.g., *Ps*. 32.3 (quoted by Clement in *Paed*. 2.4.43.3), 39.4, 95.1, 97.1-3, 143.9-10, 149,1. In the *Exhortation*, the notion also appears at 1.4.4, 1.6.1, 1.6.3, 1.6.5, 1.7.3. For an attempt to identify the source of Clement's concept of New Song, see Brigham 1962.

[18] See Irwin 1982, 53, Van den Hoek 1996.

[19] "There is a sweet and genuine medicine of persuasion blended with this song" (transl. Butterworth, γλυκύ τι καὶ ἀληθινὸν φάρμακον πειθοῦς ἐγκέκραται τῷ ᾄσματι).

[20] See also *Strom*. 6.11.89-90, where Clement says that it is possible to order the *ēthos* and enchant our desires (*katepaidontes hēmōn to epithymētikon*) thorough music. Regarding the Sirens, the complexity of Clement's operation in comparing the fascination of their song to the appeal of God's voice in *Strom.* 2.2.9.6-7 becomes evident in the light of *Protr*. 12.118.2-4, where the Sirens' song comes to exemplify the allure of vulgar music, by contrast to God's song.

that characterise the competing view of Hellenic culture, turning the weapons of pagan culture against it, as it were, according to an apologetic strategy that has been highlighted by scholars in relation to other fields of early Christian thought (Karamanolis 2013, 127). This strategy is designed to "tame" the ambiguous elements of the culture that has to be defeated and to put them at the service of a new doctrinal content, in order to compete with the culture in question on an equal footing. It seems to me that some remarkable similarities are to be found here with Plato's sophisticated strategy of endowing the philosophical word with "magical" and "musical" powers in order to overcome various seductive forms of expression, including music. In many passages of his work, Plato deals at length with the seductive power of the musical culture of his own day, which represents a serious threat to his educational projects. He is well aware that the allure of poetry and music, and their power to condition behaviour, must be overcome by employing analogous means: that is, a *logos* endowed with the enchanting and persuasive power traditionally ascribed to music and poetry. Notions such as *epōidē* ("enchantment") and *pharmakon* ("drug") – just to mention two concepts that find direct parallels in Clement's treatment – are fully exploited by Plato in order to describe the capacity of the philosophical *logos* to condition human behaviour.[21]

In the framework of this comparison between Plato's and Clement's strategies, I would now like to focus on another image set out in the *Exhortation* as a representation of the New Song. At *Protr*. 1.2.3 the "heavenly Word" is described as "the true champion, who is being crowned upon the stage of the whole world".[22] The image of a contest between the old and the New Song on a cosmic stage, powerfully evoked in a few words, echoes those Platonic passages where the philosophical word competes against the poetic word for the education of citizens in the ideal city.[23] As in Plato's reflection, the negative allure of bad music must be overcome by another kind of music: the New Song of Christ in Clement, the "musical" word of the legislator-philosopher in Plato.[24]

In Clement's reflection, however, the opposition between pagan and Christian music is distinctly outlined in terms of old *versus* new, and the song of Christ is invariably characterised by the quality of newness: a quality that Plato would hardly have stressed as the principal quality of the

[21] Cf., e.g., *Phd*. 77d-78a, *Men*. 79e-80b, *Resp*. 595a-b, *Tht*. 148e-151d; see Pelosi 2010, 26-8 and 2015.
[22] Transl. Butterworth, ὁ γνήσιος ἀγωνιστὴς ἐπὶ τῷ παντὸς κόσμου θεάτρῳ στεφανούμενος. The definition of the *Logos* as "the genuine competitor" recalls the definition of the cicada as Eunomos' "ally in the contest" (συναγωνιστήν) at *Protr*. 1.1.3: that is, the role played by the cicada, in the traditional interpretation of the story, where the true competitor is Eunomos. As the cicada is the real competitor in the myth, when rightly interpreted, on account of the fact that its song appeals to God, so Christ/Eunomos is the true competitor on the stage of the world, because his song is the Word. On the dramatic dimension of the *Logos* in Clement, see Lugaresi 2008, 489-509 and 2011, 251-4.
[23] See Pl. *Resp*. 398a-b, and esp. *Leg.* 817b6-c1: "So we are poets like yourselves, composing in the same *genre*, and your competitors as artists and actors in the finest drama, which true law alone has the natural power to 'produce' to perfection (of that we're quite confident)" (transl. Saunders).
[24] Obviously, the parallels I have drawn here must be considered within the framework of Clement's Platonism, on which, see Lilla 1971, Butterworth 1916, Van den Hoek 2005, 77-8. More generally, on Platonism and Christian thought, see Waszink 1957 and Boys-Stones 2001, 151-202.

"music" of philosophy, since according to his conservative view of music newness carries a decidedly negative meaning. In order to better appreciate how Clement describes the newness of Christ's song and the strategies it implies, let us return to the first occurrence of the notion of New Song at *Protr*. 1.2.4. In introducing the concept, Clement presents an idea that is as fascinating as it is puzzling: Christ's song is new, while being eternal. The antithetic concept expressed by the phrase "the eternal *nomos* of the new harmony" (τῆς καινῆς ἁρμονίας τὸν ἀίδιον νόμον) is not explained here, but Clement returns to the issue later on in the text. At 1.6.3 Clement seems to be aware that the quality of newness, so keenly highlighted by him as a distinctive feature of God's Song, might be misunderstood; he therefore devotes a paragraph to explaining how the newness of the divine song must be properly grasped. The "redeeming song" (τὸ ᾆσμα … τὸ σωτήριον) is not new in the same sense as a tool or a house can be new; in a way, it is eternal because, as the Scriptures say, Christ (the Song) was generated "before the morning star" (*Ps*. 109.3) and "in the beginning was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (*Io.* 1:1). The newness depends on the truthfulness of the content conveyed by this song (*Protr*. 1.6.3: "But error is old, and truth appears to be a new thing"): Christ's song is new because it is the truthful word of the incarnated Christ and it is eternal, at the same time, because it is the song of the *Logos*, which is the pre-existing *nomos*.[25] Behind this sharp definition of the sense in which the newness of Christ's song must be understood, we can see another sophisticated operation at work, which consists in turning upside down the central values in the Greek intellectual tradition about music: Clement redeems the notion of newness, generally viewed with suspicion by the Greek champions of the ethical view of music (especially Plato).

1.2 The cosmic harmony and man as an instrument

In expressing its enchanting and salvific power, the New Song also accomplishes a cosmological function: in *Protr*. 1.5.1-4 – a passage packed with technical musical notions and evocative images – Clement describes at length how the Word-song has harmonised the opposite elements of the universe. Like the other passages analysed so far, this account is imbued with notions drawn from Greek musical culture. To begin with some terminological remarks, we can note that, in describing how the *aisma kainon* organised the universe melodiously and tuned the dissonance of the elements,

[25] See Halton 1983, 193, Van den Hoek 2005, 75-6, Costache 2014, 47-9. Cf. *Protr*. 1.7.3: "This is the New Song, namely, the manifestation which has but now shined forth among us, of Him who was in the beginning, the pre-existent Word" (transl. Butterworth, τοῦτό ἐστι τὸ ᾆσμα τὸ καινόν, ἡ ἐπιφάνεια ἡ νῦν ἐκλάμψασα ἐν ἡμῖν τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντος καὶ προόντος λόγου). On the idea that as far as God is concerned, the present amounts to eternity, see *Protr*. 9.84.3-6, where Clement explains the expression "if today we hear His voice" by borrowing the Platonic image of time as an image of eternity and saying that today is "an image of the everlasting age". The double temporal nature of the *Logos*' song is further emphasised at *Strom*. 7.16.102.3 (*tou kainōs men legomenou, archaiotatou…aismatos*).

so as to bring the whole cosmos in harmony with it (*Protr*. 1.5.1), Clement uses notions such as *emmelōs*, *diaphōnia*, *symphōnia* and *harmonia*, which are fundamental terms in the vocabulary of Greek music theorists. Furthermore, he uses other concepts, whose musical nuances are less evident to us but were probably easily detectable by the learned reader to whom the work was addressed: for example, *enteinō* and *aniēmi*, which in the Greek sources describe the tension and slackening of the strings, and *malassō*, which is used both in ethical passages on music and in technical accounts to mean the slackening of the strings and the psychological effects produced by certain kind of music.[26] Besides revealing Clement's acquaintance with the technical vocabulary of ancient Greek music, this impressive use of technical musical notions offers some hints as to Clement's use of concepts and paradigms typical of Greek philosophical and musical writings. In particular, *Protr*. 1.5.1-4 bears traces of two closely related ideas that are widely attested in the Greek sources: the notion that the structure of the universe is based on the same proportional relationships as those underlying musical phenomena and the well-known concept of heavenly music.[27] The relationship between the cosmic order and musical structures is a crucial aspect of the intersection between music and philosophy throughout the history of Greek thought on music, from the Pythagoreans to Aristides Quintilianus. The Greek influence aside, in his conception of a cosmological action of the *Logos* resulting in the harmony of the universe, Clement finds an antecedent in Philo, whose speculation on the cosmological function of the *Logos* and notion of universal harmony (see Lévy's chapter in this volume) are clearly echoed in Clement's theory. One example of the layering of influences in *Protr*. 1.5.1-4 is offered by the passage where Clement describes the *Logos*-song as "stretched from the centre to the circumference and from the extremities to the centre" (ἀπὸ τῶν μέσων ἐπὶ τὰ πέρατα καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄκρων ἐπὶ τὰ μέσα διαταθέν), in such a way as to harmonise the whole universe (*Protr*. 1.5.2). As has been noted, the passage presents literal analogies with Philo *De Plant*. 9, where musical notions, though, do not appear. At the same time, it is reminiscent of the most famous account in Greek philosophical literature combining music and cosmology: the creation of the world soul in Plato's *Timaeus*, where notions drawn from music theory play a pivotal role. In particular, *Protr*. 1.5.2 closely recalls the passage where Plato describes how the world soul, after its creation, is

[26] For a detailed analysis of the Greek music theory at the basis of the passage, see Raffa 2017. Clement's good command of the most technical aspects of Greek musical culture is also testified by other passages, such as *Strom*. 6.11.88.1, where he speaks of *harmoniai* and *genē*, quoting Aristoxenus. Evidence of Clement's familiarity with Greek musical and poetic forms also comes from the Classical-style composition he provides, at the end of the *Paedagogus*: the *Hymn to Christ the Saviour*.

[27] These notions emerge elsewhere in Clement's work. The idea that the study of music concerns harmonic proportions, together with the observation that astronomy studies divine entities and their *symphōnia*, is featured at *Strom*. 6.10.80.2-3. The notion of heavenly music appears at *Strom*. 5.6.34.9, where Clement says that the sun imparts the light to the planets, "according to a sort of divine music" (κατὰ τινα θείαν μουσικήν). On the notion of heavenly music in Clement, see Cosgrove 2006, 276-82.

woven "from the centre to the extremity of the heavens" (ἐκ μέσου πρὸς τὸν ἔσχατον οὐρανὸν), so as to envelope the whole body of the cosmos (*Ti*. 36e2-3).

Without entering the specific debate concerning the possible background to this passage,[28] it is important to note that Clement's approach here, based on establishing relations among different fields – the *cosmological* role of the *Logos*-song is closely linked to its *ethical*, *psychological* and *soteriological* effects – by way of musical notions recalls a method of investigation well-attested in the Greek sources, where music is often at the centre of enquiries that draw connections between different domains. The closest parallel to Clement, both in time and space, is the work of Ptolemy, whose harmonic investigations include attempts at explaining how the fundamental principles governing the musical field are also essential in other domains – such as that of human souls and the movements of the heavens – and provide clues as to the relation between cosmology, astronomy, ethics and psychology (*Harm*. book 3).

However, despite the massive use of notions and forms of conceptualisation drawn from the Greek world, Clement once again marks his distance from Hellenic musical culture, by specifying in a conclusive remark that the song by which the *Logos* accomplished its cosmological plan is "not in accordance with Thracian music", (οὐ κατὰ τὴν Θρᾴκιον μουσικήν), but "in accordance with the fatherly purpose of God" (κατὰ δὲ τὴν πάτριον τοῦ θεοῦ βούλησιν), like the music emulated by David.[29] In this underlying of the differences between the Greek musical culture and the new music of Christianity, at the end of an account that heavily relies on notions borrowed from the pagan world, we have further confirmation of Clement's overall strategy in the *Exhortation*, which is characterised by a complex balance of criticism, manipulation and appropriation of the Hellenic legacy.

The recurring theme of the opposition between the old pagan music and the new Christian song also characterises the last image I shall explore: the representation of man as an instrument in God's hands, which Clement illustrates immediately after his description of cosmic harmony. At *Protr*. 1.5.3 we are told that God's *Logos* "scorned those lifeless instruments of lyre and harp" (λύραν μὲν καὶ κιθάραν, τὰ ἄψυχα ὄργανα, ὑπεριδών). Instead of using them, the *Logos* harmonised the world with the microcosm – that is man, including both body and soul – by the power of the Holy Spirit, and played this many-voiced instrument. The representation of man as an instrument in the *Logos*' hands is followed by a quotation, whose source is unknown – "For thou art my harp and my

[28] The literal analogies between *Protr*. 1.5.2 and Philo *De Plant*. 9 have been highlighted by Lilla 1971, 209-11 and Van Winden 1978, 208-9. Costache 2014, 38 n. 62 (*contra* Stapert 2007, 52-3) warns against the risk of exclusively emphasising Plato's influence on Clement's musical cosmology, while overlooking the influence of Philo. On music in Platonic cosmology, see Petrucci's and Demulder's essays in this volume.

[29] This "Thracian music" clearly recalls Orpheus' music. For the hypothesis that David acts as a *trait d'union* in Clement's comparison between Orpheus and Christ, see Irwin 1982, 55, 59.

pipe and my temple"[30] – and by Clement's interpretation of it. Finally, the concept of the man-instrument is combined with the crucial idea that mankind was created in God's own image: the Lord fashioned man "a beautiful, breathing instrument, after His own image" (καλὸν ὁ κύριος ὄργανον ἔμπνουν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐξειργάσατο κατ' εἰκόνα τὴν ἑαυτοῦ), and "He Himself is an all-harmonious instrument of God, melodious and holy" (αὐτὸς ὄργανόν ἐστι τοῦ θεοῦ παναρμόνιον, ἐμμελὲς καὶ ἅγιον, *Protr*. 1.5.4). The opposition between the traditional musical scenario and the new musical world introduced by the *Logos* is expressed in this passage through the effective contrast between the "lifeless instruments" (*apsycha organa*) and the "breathing instrument" (*organon empnoun*), that is man – with *empnoun* carrying the double meaning of "alive" and "with the breath in it", as in the case of a wind instrument.[31] In spite of this contrast, pagan themes, together with Christian concepts, contribute to shaping the image of the man-instrument in this passage. In particular, the Christian criticism of organology is combined here with the idea, widespread in ancient Greek sources, that the constitution of the human being (the soul, the body, or both) has some analogies with musical structures, and with the related analogy between man and cosmos (the so-called microcosm/macrocosm theory), via music. Let us delve more deeply into Clement's reception of these themes.

Clement's dismissal of the Greek organological scenario at the beginning of the passage leads us to a fundamental and complex strand of the Christian thought on music: the analysis of musical instruments. This analysis includes both a fierce criticism of pagan instruments and an allegorical interpretation of instruments, of the sort which features prominently in the *Psalms*.[32] A Clementine passage in which these two strands and their interplay clearly emerge is *Paed*. 2.4.41.4-42.3, where an allegorical reading of *Ps*. 150.3-5 is provided (Lugaresi 2011, 249). As Clement explains, when the *Psalm* says "praise God with the *psaltērion*" and "praise him with the *kithara*", what these two instruments stand for, respectively, are the tongue and the mouth; and when the *Psalm* says "praise him with the strings and *organon*", what *organon* and strings mean, respectively, is the human body

[30] According to Butterworth (1919, n. *ad loc*.), it may come from an early Christian hymn; however, the notion may have been inspired by passages such as *Ps.* 56.8-9 and especially 1 *Cor*. 6.19, where the image of man as a temple of the Holy Spirit appears.

[31] See Skeris 1976, 131. The idea that the *Logos* creates "living instruments", by making men the truest instruments of all, subtly recalls the idea, introduced in the description of Christ as Orpheus, that the *Logos*-song animates inanimate things, like stones, bringing them to (the true) life. See *Protr*. 1.4.4: "See how mighty is the new song! It has made men out of stones and men out of wild beasts. They who were otherwise dead, who had no share in the real and true life, revived when they but heard the song" (transl. Butterworth). The musical instrument as a representation of the saved man also appears at *Strom*. 6.11.88.3, where redeemed humanity is portrayed as a *kithara*, "played for faith by the Word" (κρουόμενος εἰς πίστιν τῷ λόγῳ) – the latter being significantly depicted, through another musical image, as Apollon *mousēgetēs*. On man as a wind instrument in the hands of God, cf. *Gen*. 2.7, where God blows into man to give him life, as though he were a wind instrument.

[32] It is interesting to note Clement's remarkable role in the history of the Christian approach to organology, as one of the first apologists to grasp the importance of providing an allegorical interpretation of instruments, as shown by *Paed*. 2.4.41: see Gérold 1931, X, 125-6, 130.

and its nerves, through which it has received a harmonious tension. As in *Protr*. 1.5.3, the image evoked here is that of the man-instrument and its expressive power is used to mark the difference with the Greek organological scenario: man is a "peaceful instrument" (*eirēnikon ... organon*), whereas the Greek instruments, largely used in war to inflame passions, are "warlike instruments" (*polemika organa*).[33] Greek musical culture is apparently dismissed here, along with its warrior instruments. However, the image of the man-instrument outlined in these passages bears traces of the Greek doctrines of the musical structure of the world, both as a microcosm and as a macrocosm – a doctrine which characterises the history of Greek thought on music, from the earliest evidence to the latest writings.[34] Plato's contribution to this area is remarkable and can be summarised in two main themes, both providing some clues concerning the background to Clement's imagery: first, Plato's investigation of the close affinity between the structure of the world soul and the constitution of the human rational soul, on account of their both being created according to harmonic proportions (*Ti.* 35a-36d, 41d-42a); second, his frequent use of musical images and notions (such as the strings of an instrument and their tension) in ethical and psychological analyses, as a representation of the different components of the soul.[35] As in the case of the other musical images used in *Protr*. 1.1, an investigation of the Greek images, notions and theories which might have influenced Clement in his use of the man-instrument image in the *Exhortation* provides further evidence that Greek musical culture and philosophical thought on music constitute an essential, if controversial, point of reference for the construction of Clement's rich musical imagery.

2. Origen

Musical images and notions abound in Origen's work too. In some cases, there are evident analogies with Clement's musical imagery. At *Cels*. 5.33, for example, a 'musical' representation of Christ appears: Christ is presented in the guise of a chorus-leader (*chorostatēs*), guiding the whole world (Skeris 1976, 83); again, at *Cels*. 8.67, Origen introduces the notion of heavenly music through the

[33] *Paed*. 2.4.42.1-2. The Greek instruments mentioned here by Clement, are the *salpinx*, the *syrinx*, the *pēktis*, the *lyra*, the *aulos*, the *keras*, the *tympanon* and the *kymbalos*.

[34] The earliest appearance of a theory entailing the idea that music is in the human body – in particular, the concept that harmonic ratios are at the basis of the development of a viable embryo – within the framework of a microcosm-macrocosm doctrine, is to be found in the Hippocratic treatise *On Regimen*, probably dating from the late fifth/early fourth century BC (see Pelosi 2016). For late occurrences of similar notions, see Ptol. *Harm*. 3.4.95.11-16 and Aristid. Quint. *De mus*. 3.18.117.18-118.28, 3.23.124.5-26.

[35] See, e.g., the harmonisation of the spirited and the rational elements of the soul, as though they were two strings of an instrument, at *Resp*. 411a-412a, and 441e-442a, and the definition of justice as the harmony between the notes of a musical scale at *Resp*. 443c-e. The analogy between the nerves of the human body and the strings of an instrument used by Clement in his allegorical reading of *Ps*. 150, at *Paed*. 2.4.41.4-42.3, is foreshadowed by Plato in *Phd.* 98c-d and *Ti*. 74b, where the tension and relaxation of the nerves is described through the verbs used to describe in technical terms the tightening and the slackening of the strings (*epiteinō* and *aniēmi*).

image of the divine choir (*theios choros*): the choir of the planets and the stars raising a hymn of praise to God, together with just men. Further parallels concern the notion of enchantment, which Origen uses to define the taming effect of God (*apo tōn tou theou epōidōn*) on "human beasts", as well as the effect of the Scriptures on evil, and the Scriptures themselves (*Philoc*. 12). Instrumental allegories are also employed: for example, in the *Homilies on Joshua* Origen compares the words of the Apostles and the Evangelists to the sound of the trumpet, by borrowing the powerful image of the Gospel as a trumpet introduced by Clement in *Protr*. 11.116.2-3.[36]

In the following pages, I shall focus on a musical image, and the concepts related to it, in order to illustrate a crucial point in Origen's hermeneutic approach to the Scriptures: the inner concord and unity of the scriptural message. The Scriptures are compared to a well-harmonised musical instrument, or, more precisely, to the consonant layout that characterises the instrument's arrangement. As I shall show, the crucial concept at the basis of the comparison is the notion of concord (*symphōnia*). This is a key concept in Greek musical theory and practice: usually defined as the perfect combination of two different sounds – whether played simultaneously or in succession – *symphōnia* represents a fundamental principle for melodic structures; as such, it lies at the centre of theoretical analyses and performances. But the great import of this notion in the Greek sources goes well beyond the musical field, in the strict sense. Thanks to the particular acoustic impression that it produces and the mathematical expression by which it is described, *symphōnia* has remarkable philosophical implications, especially as far as the relationship between multiplicity and unity is concerned: not surprisingly, it is widely employed by ancient Greek philosophers in the description and explanation of various phenomena, as well as in argumentative passages (Pelosi 2014). In approaching Origen's use of *symphōnia* to express some key aspects of his theology and hermeneutics, it is important to bear in mind that he is writing in the wake of this Greek tradition, which fully exploits the expressive power of the musical concept to investigate some crucial philosophical issues. From this perspective, it is possible to fully appreciate how Origen borrows and further expands the argumentative potential of the term *symphōnia*, whose philosophical implications are as interesting as its technical meaning in music theory.

2.1 The Scriptures as a well-tuned instrument and their inner consonance

The notion of *symphōnia* is introduced in the first paragraph of the sixth chapter of the *Philocalia*, where the point at issue is the exegesis of the term "peace-maker" (*eirēnopoios*), which appears in

[36] *Hom. Jes. Nav.* 7.1, where the *tubae ductiles* – in Rufinus' translation – represent the "praedicationis magnificam coelestemque doctrinam".

Matth. 5:9.[37] As a third meaning of the word – the first two are not illustrated – Origen mentions the exegete of sacred texts, namely the one who establishes "the concord and the pax of the Scriptures" (συμφωνίαν καὶ τὴν εἰρήνην τούτων), by demonstrating that what might seem like a contradiction, actually is not. At the end of the paragraph, the musical notion is expanded: the Scriptures sound like a *diaphōnia* "to those who have not ears to hear", but, in point of fact, they possess *symphōnia*.[38]

In the second paragraph, the musical analogy expressing the intrinsic cohesion of all parts of the Scriptures becomes more detailed and the image of the instrument is introduced. The Scriptures are compared to instruments such as the *psaltērion* or the *kithara*, which are made up of different strings, each producing different sounds that seems to have no similarity to one another; owing to this apparent dissimilarity, the strings seem "discordant" (*asymphonoi*) "to one who is not acquainted with music" (*tōi amousōi*). Analogously, those who are not able to hear God's harmony in the Scriptures think that the Old Testament is at variance with the New, that the Prophets are at variance with the Law, that the Evangelists are at variance with one another, and that each Apostle is at variance with the Gospel, with himself, and with the other Apostles. On the contrary, "one who has been educated in God's music… will produce the sound of God's music, which has taught him to pluck the strings at the appropriate time":[39] the strings of the Law and the strings of the Evangelists, which are in *symphōnia*; the strings of the Prophets and the strings of the Apostles, which produce the same sound, and the strings of the Evangelists that are in concord with those of the Apostles. This "musical" exegete "knows that the Scriptures, as a whole, are God's only musical instrument, perfect and harmonised" (ἓν γὰρ οἶδεν τὸ τέλειον καὶ ἡρμοσμένον ὄργανον τοῦ θεοῦ εἶναι πᾶσαν τὴν γραφήν): an instrument "that produces one saving melody out of different sounds" (μίαν ἀποτελοῦν ἐκ διαφόρων φθόφφων σωτήριον τοῖς μανθάνειν ἐθέλουσι φωνήν).

---

[37] The *Philocalia* is an anthology of excerpts from Origen's writings, whose composition has been ascribed, not uncontroversially, to the Cappadocians Fathers Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus (Harl 1983, 19-41; McLynn 2004, 32-33). *Phil*. 6.1-2 derives from the second book of Origen's *Commentary on Matthew*. The use of the notion of *symphōnia* in *Phil*. 6.1-2 has resonance with other passages of Origen's work: e.g., *Comm. in Matth*. 14.1, where the concept of *symphōnia*, meaning both agreement and musical concord, is analysed through examples drawn from the Scriptures (Skeris 1976, 85-8, 140); *Comm. in Io*. 10.42.290, where Origen criticises the Gnostics and Marcionites for not respecting the *symphōnia* of the Scriptures, and *Phil*. 8.3, where the notion of *symphōnia* appears in the description of the process by which man passes from being multiple – i.e. being separate from God, as a sinner – to being one with/in God. Clement too exploits the concept of *symphōnia* to some extent: e.g., at *Protr*. 9.88.3, to describe the unity of the Christians under the guidance of the *Logos* (significantly represented in musical terms as a "chorus leader" χορηγός); and *Strom*. 6.11.88.5 and 6.15.125.2-3, where *symphōnia* illustrates the inner cohesion of Scripture, analogously to *Philoc*. 6.1-2.

[38] ...δόξαν μὲν ἐχόντων διαφωνίας τοῖς μὴ ἔχουσιν ὦτα εἰς τὸ ἀκούειν, τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς συμφωνότητα. συμφωνότης is a *hapax*, clearly implying the opposite of διαφωνία; an alternative explanation is that συμφωνότητα derives from a mistaken reading of a form of συμφωνέω (Harl 1983, 316 n. 2). "To those who have not ears to hear" recalls *Lc.* 8.8 ("Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear"). It is interesting to note that, while ears must be well open in order to grasp the *symphōnia* of the Scriptures, Origen recommends that we keep them closed to "the sounds of the theatres and the indecent songs" of the actual music (*In Gen. Hom.* 3.5). On Origen's attitude to spectacles, see Lugaresi 2003, 658-61; on his criticism of dance, Bermond 2001, 131-8.

[39] ὁ πεπαιδευμένος τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μουσικήν…ἀποτελέσει φθόγγον μουσικῆς θεοῦ, ἀπὸ ταύτης μαθὼν ἐν καιρῷ κρούειν χορδὰς.

As this summary of the passage shows, the comparison between a well-tuned instrument and the Scriptures is essentially based on their both being made up of parts, whose hidden relationship creates a *symphōnia*. The key aspect in the organological illustration is the inner arrangement of the musical instrument: that is, the reciprocal relationships between its strings. It is important to note that, in *Philoc*. 6.2, this focus on the notion of *symphōnia* serves a twofold purpose: firstly, it expresses the intrinsic coherence of the Scriptures;[40] second, it makes the hermeneutic point that a learned approach to the sacred texts is needed.[41] As a bridge between these two aspects, there is the implied idea that the *symphōnia* of the Scriptures, while essential, is far from obvious.

Regarding the first point, by comparing the Scriptures as a whole to the arrangement of an instrument, characterised by the *symphōnia* between different sounds, Origen does not only suggest that the Scriptures possess an inner coherence, beneath the surface of their apparent (multiple and even inconsistent) meanings, but also defines certain features of their deep consistency: as a *symphōnia*, the Scriptures possess a unity that comes from a differentiated multiplicity, and it is within this very unity that each element finds its inmost meaning. Furthermore, the analogy suggests that the key to grasping the consistency of the Scriptures lies within the Scriptures themselves, as it is the very arrangement of an instrument that explains its *symphōnia*. This leads us to the second previously aforementioned point: the fundamental work of the exegete in bringing to light the *symphōnia* embedded in the Scriptures.

At the very outset of the paragraph, the hidden nature of musical *symphōnia* is highlighted: the relationship between the different sounds is not self-evident and escapes the *amousos*, "who does not understand the *logos* underlying the musical consonance" (μὴ ἐπισταμένῳ λόγον μουσικῆς συμφωνίας). The lack of an "epistemic" approach is equally stressed with regard to "those who do not know how to hear God's harmony in the sacred Scriptures" (οἱ μὴ ἐπιστάμενοι ἀκούειν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ταῖς ἱεραῖς γραφαῖς ἁρμονίας). These remarks clearly suggest that perceiving the *symphōnia* produced by both a musical instrument and the Scriptures requires some sort of preparation. Just as perception of musical *symphōnia* requires a capacity to grasp unapparent analogies within the perfect system represented by the arrangement of the instrument, in order to understand the consistent Scriptural message we must interpret the Scriptures with the Scriptures, by connecting apparently unrelated passages and concepts.[42]

[40] On the various terms Origen uses to underscore the inner consistency of the Scriptures, including *harmonia* and *symphōnia*, see Ramelli 2011, 349-50.
[41] Cf. *Cels*. 3.74 and 7.11, where the need for a skilful exegete is also emphasised.
[42] The need to grasp the similarity between sounds, beyond their apparent dissimilarity, in order to perceive the inner consonance of an instrument, can be compared to the need to study the similarity between words (the *homoiai phōnai*) or concepts, which is an essential step on the path to the spiritual meaning of the Scriptures, in Origen hermeneutics (Harl 1983, 141-2; Ramelli 2011, 350). Another interesting image designed to express the idea that the key to interpret the

The "musical" preparation of the exegete is all the more important since he plays an active role in making the inner concord of the Scriptures resonate for others. Within the analogy of *Philoc*. 6.2, this active role is emphasised by the verb ἀποτελεῖν, which is thrice repeated to indicate the *production* of a sound (Harl 1983, 312). More specifically, the verb is used to define the activity of the exegete in the sentence "he will produce a note of God's music" (ἀποτελέσει φθόγγον μουσικῆς θεοῦ), where his role as a "performer" is further stressed by the idea that from this divine music he has learned to "pluck the strings" (*krouein chordas*) of the biblical books at the appropriate time. Hence, besides being a "peace-maker", the exegete turns out to be a "*symphōnia*-maker", for he is able to perceive the consonance that lies behind the apparent inconsistency of the Scriptures and make it resound.[43]

At this point, some conclusions can be drawn on the general import of the musical image featured at *Philoc*. 6.1-2 within Origen's thought. The hermeneutic point made through that musical image captures some fundamental aspects of Origen's approach to the sacred texts, namely his belief in the deep consistency and unity of the scriptural message and in the need for a skilful interpreter, able to make this cohesion clearly emerge. These aspects play a crucial role in Origen's construction of a philosophical theology, and in his endeavour to advocate the philosophical respectability of Christian teaching, as demonstrated by his dogmatic and apologetic works: the treatise *On First Principles* and *Against Celsus*.

Hermeneutic topics are at the centre of the fourth book of *On First Principles*, which stands out as a rich summary of Origen's exegetical approach and as a fundamental piece of early Christian hermeneutics.[44] Origen stresses the deep cohesion of the Old and New Testaments, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and argues for the need to seek out the deepest meaning of the Scriptures beneath the surface of their literal – sometimes incoherent – meaning. Origen thus argues that the sacred texts, from which all theological and philosophical knowledge derives, have an inner coherence and intelligibility. As suggested by the comparison with a well-harmonised instrument at *Philoc*. 6.1-2, the harmony of the Scriptures is presented here as an intrinsic feature, which does not depend on our capacity to grasp it, as it is the result of the Scriptures' being pervaded by divine inspiration through and through.[45] As in *Philoc*. 6.1-2, where the musical analogy implies the idea that the key to grasping the *symphōnia* of the Scriptures lies within the Scriptures themselves, in the

---

Bible lies within the Bible itself is featured at *Philoc*. 2.3, where the Bible is compared to a house consisting of many locked rooms, whose keys are placed randomly before the doors.

[43] On the link between peace and consonance/harmony, see also Clem. Al. *Strom*. 4.6.40, where the notion of "understanding the world's harmony through its contradictions" is mentioned as one of the meanings of "peace-maker".

[44] On the place of the hermeneutic treatment of *Princ*. 4 in the overall structure of the work, see Behr 2017, xlvi-liv.

[45] *Princ*. 4.1.7. The idea that the Holy Spirit extends throughout the entire body of the Scriptures – *per omne corpus eis extenditur*, διατείνουσα εἰς πάσαν αὐτήν – can easily be translated in the musical terms used in *Philoc*. 6.1-2, as the extension throughout an entire system is exactly what defines the best *symphōnia*, that is the octave, whose name in Greek musical theory is διὰ πασῶν (χορδῶν) - lit. "through all (the chords)".

treatise *On First Principles* Origen stresses that the sacred texts themselves teach us how understand their content (*Princ*. 4.2.4).

From an apologetic point of view, the crucial idea conveyed by the notion of scriptural *symphōnia* – i.e. that the Scriptures are characterised by a deep harmony, which can be fully grasped through a correct hermeneutical approach – is central to Origen's response to the pagan attack on Christianity. In his most important apologetic work – the *Against Celsus* – Origen undermines Celsus' criticism, which emphasises the untrustworthy and inconsistent character of the scriptural content, by underlining Celsus' defective approach to the sacred texts, incapable of attaining their true meaning. In this counter-attack, designed to dispel the charges of inconsistency and vindicate the intellectual legitimacy of Christianity, a fundamental part is played by allegory: an exegetical technique with a long history in the Hellenic philosophical tradition, adopted and reinterpreted by Origen in the light of his view of the Scriptures as a coherent and self-consistent whole (Ramelli 2011). Within the analysis set out in this chapter, it is notable that where Origen explicitly lays claim to the Christian to interpret the sacred texts allegorically in search of the truest meaning of the Scriptures, he once again resorts to musical vocabulary: at *Cels*. 4.17, reacting to Celsus' attack on the allegorical readings of Scripture, Origen affirms the Christians' right to give a "consistent explanation which harmonizes and agrees (συναδούσης καὶ συμφωνούσης) in all respects with the Scriptures inspired by the divine Spirit dwelling in pure souls".[46] The notion of *symphōnia* – a concept adopted by Greek philosophers as one of the most powerful expressions of the unity and rationality underlying music and, by analogy, other phenomena – is for Origen a powerful means of affirming the wholeness and truthfulness of the Scriptures, not least against the charge of incoherence and irrationality levelled by pagan philosophers.

[46] Transl. Chadwick. Cf., at *Cels*. 4.51, Celsus' remark on Jewish and Christian allegories: "they connect with some amazing and utterly senseless folly ideas which cannot by any means be made to fit (ἁρμοσθῆναι)".