

Research Article

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Patrons, Students, Intellectuals, and Martyrs: Women in Origen's Life and Eusebius' Biography

<https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2025-0037>

received January 03, 2025; accepted February 24, 2025

Abstract: This article examines Origen's interactions with women, shedding light on his perspectives regarding their roles within society and religious communities, while simultaneously addressing the challenges of using ancient rhetorical narratives as reliable historical sources. In early Christian accounts, women often appear on the margins, their roles and identities manipulated to align with the theological or political agendas of authors like Eusebius. Occasionally, their marginalization may have rendered them less subject to distortion, offering historians a unique lens for evaluating some of these sources. Origen's documented relationships with women reveal his notable openness to their participation in intellectual and spiritual matters. Women in his life – including patronesses, friends, students, and fellow Christians – played significant yet often overlooked roles that provide key insights into third-century Christian communities and Origen's personal development. While this study highlights the need for further investigation into the roles of women in Origen's life, it underscores their importance in understanding early Christianity's theological and cultural dynamics.

Keywords: Origen of Alexandria, early Christianity, women's history, biography, Eusebius of Caesarea

1 Introduction

While numerous patristic authors addressed the role of women in Christian and intellectual circles,¹ Origen remained mostly silent on the subject and never systematized his thoughts.

Consequently, there has been limited scholarly inquiry into Origen's views on women. Rather than focusing on what Origen writes about women and their roles, this article proposes a different historical angle to understanding Origen's perspective. Using the biographical information provided by Origen himself and his biographers, this study enquires about the roles that the women who crossed his path held in society and religious communities, and it sheds light on the relationships they formed with the Alexandrian theologian.

This research bridges the often-overlooked gap between theoretical and literary teachings (e.g. early Christian authors' expectations for women's behaviour in religious communities and/or their proposed gender norms) and social realities (how women actively lived, worked, and contributed to Christian communities).² By

¹ Numerous early Christian authors composed works to regulate women's behaviour in religious communities and society at large. These works are crucial piece of evidence to investigate the ways in which these authors created narratives to regulate women's gender norms. For instance, see Tertullian, *On the Veils of the Virgins*, the second and third book of Clement's, *Christ the Educator*; and Ambrose, *On the Virgins*.

² The question of how literary construction influences the ways in which historians of ancient Christianity reconstruct the lives and voices of women remains the subject of lively debate. Already in the '90s, scholars such as Claudia V. Camp and Elisabeth Clark

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analysing the women mentioned in Origen's biographical accounts and posthumous biographies,³ we can gain fresh insights into their relationships with the Alexandrian theologian. This approach shifts the focus from what early Christian male authors theorized about women to the actions and roles of the women who interacted with these figures. Nonetheless, the women presented in Origen's biographies, even when they were historical figures, are portrayed as literary characters.⁴ Their words, behaviours, and roles are rhetorically constructed, often to highlight the male protagonist of the story. However, as early as the 1990s, Glen Bowersock's pivotal study demonstrated that even fictional characters and narratives are valuable resources for historical reconstruction, as they often reflect the sociological and everyday realities of the author's time.⁵ As such, I believe that literary evidence is not necessarily poor historical evidence, as some scholars have suggested,⁶ insofar as one is critically aware that narratives about women's lives are mediated by a male perspective and should not be accepted at face value. However, as acutely observed by Julia Hillner in her biography of Helena, sources on women are almost never ego-documents, and even when such documents exist, one ought to read them as rhetorical constructions.⁷ For this reason, we must make do with the evidence we have and evaluate each piece of evidence on its own, reading against the grain. It is thus important to stress that this article's approach critically interrogates the sources and acknowledges that many conclusions remain speculative. Regardless, I argue that contextualizing this evidence within the social practices of the third century offers significant insights. It allows for the construction of a more nuanced understanding of women's lives in the early Christian era and their interactions with foundational figures of Christian theology, such as Origen of Alexandria. This approach also provides compelling case studies of women's roles in third-century Christian communities, further enriching our understanding of gender roles in Antiquity. In the last decades, studies on women and their roles in Christian communities of the first centuries have flourished.⁸

Following a brief overview of the scholarship on Origen and women, as well as a summary of the biographical sources on Origen's life, I examine the evidence regarding the women who interacted with him. The objective of this article is thus twofold. On the one hand, this research gleans new perspectives on women's roles within third-century Christian communities and society and on their roles in the lives of an early Christian theologian who is immensely influential in Christian theology. On the other hand, using the sparse biographical details provided by Origen and his biographers, I will offer some observations about Origen's views on women.

have delved into the topic, emphasizing the need to reflect on the unique characteristics of Biblical and Christian texts – peculiarities that set them apart from other historical sources. As Clark notes, “scholars of late ancient Christianity deal not with native informants, nor with masses of data amenable to statistical analysis, but with texts – and texts of a highly literary, rhetorical, and ideological nature” (Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 159). This should make any historian investigating the social history of Christianity acutely aware of the complexities inherent in these sources. For my part, while I acknowledge the intrinsic limitations of ancient Christian literary and theological sources, I also recognize the importance of moving beyond a purely historical deconstructionist approach – one that dismisses all evidence as mere literary fabrication, incapable of yielding historical insights. For further details, refer to Clark, “The Lady Vanishes;” Clark, “Thinking with Women;” and Camp, “Metaphor in Feminist Biblical Interpretation.” Petterson “Linguistic Turn”.

³ The sources for Origen's life will be discussed in greater detail in the following paragraph.

⁴ On the issue to consider when specifically looking at women's biographies, refer to Von Zimmermann and Von Zimmermann, *Frauenbiographik*.

⁵ Bowersock, *Fiction as History*.

⁶ Although her suggestions go probably furthest than what I consider helpful for historical and theological investigations, I still found extremely thought-provoking the very recent article by Fredriksen, “The Subject Vanishes.” She challenges scholars of early and late antique Christianity to outgrow pre-conceived categories which have dominated the field (like Jews, heretics and martyrs) as originating purely in biased narratives.

⁷ Hillner, *Helena*, 1–6.

⁸ Taylor-Ramelli, *Patterns of Women's Leadership*, and Børresen-Prinzivalli, *Lo sguardo delle donne*.

2 The Status of Research on Origen and Women: Challenges and Missed Opportunities

Only a few attempts have been made by scholars to study women and the feminine in Origen. Two contributions have been recently published on the topic.

First, Ilaria Ramelli has published an article exploring Origen's construction of gender.⁹ In this study, she brings additional arguments to support the conclusions, already reached in a previous article about women's status in the Cappadocian Fathers' writings,¹⁰ that Origen was supportive of women's ordination not only within the acknowledged female orders of the early church, like those of widows and deaconesses,¹¹ but also as priestly ministries. Although her analysis of the uses of *πρεσβύτεροι* and *πρεσβύτιδες* in Origen's *Commentary on John* 32, 132-133 is fascinating, the evidence remains slim, and the conclusions somewhat speculative. The argument is mostly grounded on the fact that Origen inspired subsequent theologians, especially Gregory of Nyssa, to support women's ministry. Although it is possible that Origen's doctrines could have led others down the path of acceptance of women's priestly ministry, it still says little about Origen's own opinion on such matter. If Origen is explicitly supportive of women's ordinations in female orders (deaconesses and widows) in various passages,¹² in other passages, Origen displays a quite firm opposition to women's ministry.¹³

Second, I have edited a special issue entitled *Gendered Allegories: Origen of Alexandria and the Representation of the Feminine in Patristic Literature* that collects six articles on various aspects of the metaphorical representations of women and the feminine in the works of the Alexandrian theologians.¹⁴ Whilst most contributions focus on the feminine as an intellectual category – that is, as a means of representing theological and philosophical ideas – two articles by Miriam DeCock and Maria Munkholt also address Origen's opinions about women's role in society. In particular, the first analyses how, to what extent and why Origen employed women's biblical utterance in his homilies; the second collects and discusses Origen's texts about women's teaching activities in and outside the church.¹⁵

Third, an interesting article has been published by Maren Nienhoff on the recently discovered *Homilies on Psalms*. She has explored how Origen used Jewish women to negotiate the boundaries of the Christian identity against competing narratives.¹⁶ Her analysis shows the extent to which women have been used as ethnic types to negotiate Christian identity in the third century, and thus are valued more as archetypes than historical women.

Among earlier publications, the most comprehensive work on Origen and women was the article by Emanuela Prinzivalli in 2013. In her article, she examined Origen's theological anthropology in light of his exegesis of Gen 1:26-27, thus illustrating how binary sexes are a post-lapsarian condition that will be eschatologically resolved in the angelic asexual condition. Particularly illuminating is her analysis of the Eve archetype, as the first woman represents the feminine as a theological category – that is, a symbolic representation of the deficient condition of humanity (in both men and women) compared to God. Furthermore, her study had the merit of indicating future lines of research on the interconnection between Origen's theological anthropology and his feminine imagery.¹⁷

A preliminary and comparative investigation of Origen's passages on women was conducted by Dante Gemmiti.¹⁸ He collected instances where Origen's reference to women and their role in Christian communities

⁹ Ramelli, "Constructions of Gender."

¹⁰ Ramelli, "Theosebia."

¹¹ For a thorough survey of the available evidence on the female orders in the first centuries of Christianity, refer to Madigan and Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church*.

¹² For instance, Origen, *Commentary to Romans* 10, 17, 1–2 and *Commentary on John* 32, 131–2.

¹³ *Homelies on Joshua* 3, 1 and *Homilies on Leviticus* 4, 8, 4

¹⁴ Cerioni, *Gendered Allegories*.

¹⁵ Respectively, DeCock, "The Pastoral Usefulness;" and Munkholt, "Teachers of Good Things."

¹⁶ Nienhoff, "Biblical Women."

¹⁷ Prinzivalli, "La donna, il femminile."

¹⁸ Gemmiti, *La donna*.

as mothers, brides, and virgins and compared them with those of other early Christian authors, especially Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria.

None of these previous contributions has, however, offered much information about the real women in Origen's life, nor used information about them provided by Origen's biographies to have a sense of how women's lives happened during Origen's lifetime. Exploring Origen's life is no easy task, and no scholars have attempted a systematic reconstruction of his life since Nautin's 1977 monograph.¹⁹ It is thus easily understood how tricky it can be to search for reliable information about women in Origen's life. One of the major difficulties is the scarcity of autobiographical information provided by Origen himself and the highly rhetorical – and often apologetic – tone of the posthumous biographical accounts.

Evidence of Origen's life can primarily be drawn from the limited autobiographical details he provides, particularly in his letters, especially the so-called *Autobiographical Letter*, the *Letter to Africanus*, and the *Letter to Gregory*.²⁰ The most comprehensive account of Origen's life comes from Eusebius' sixth book *The History of the Church*, where Origen is portrayed as a virtuous and triumphant example of Christian life. Eusebius' laudatory portrayal of Origen as a teacher to Christians across the empire, including members of the imperial family, should prompt scepticism about the accuracy of some details. Eusebius' use of biographies to advance specific theological and political agendas has been extensively studied by scholars.²¹ There is widespread agreement on the highly typological and strongly politically motivated nature of these works, as they were designed to portray the intellectual ideal of Christian political, universal, and triumphant power. Consequently, general scepticism and great caution are always required when analysing his writings.

In addition to Eusebius, more insights are available from the works of his spiritual disciples, such as Pamphilus of Caesarea's *Apology for Origen*, Gregory Thaumaturgus's *Panegyric to Origen*, Jerome's *On Illustrious Men* 61, and Palladius's *Lausiac History* 64.²² All these accounts should be approached with caution, as these biographies were all written with specific agendas during the Origenist controversies or in their periphery.

From these accounts, it emerges that Origen had close relationships with a few women beyond his immediate family, such as his mother and sisters. He related to at least one patroness, numerous female students (some of whom were renown martyrs), several women calligraphers, a woman named Tatiana, to whom he co-dedicated his *On Prayer*, and a certain Juliana, an educated woman who helped him obtain Symmachus' translation of the Bible, which he used in his *Hexapla*. In the following paragraphs, I will analyse each mention in greater detail.

3 Women in Origen's life

3.1 Origen's Mother: Women and Martyrdom

I hope the readers will forgive me the cliché, but an investigation on women in a man's life cannot but start with the mention of his mother. In the case of Origen, if we are to trust Eusebius' account, his mother was a

¹⁹ Natin, *Origene*. On the difficulties that someone brave enough to write such a study should face, refer to Urbano, "Difficulties in Writing."

²⁰ These letters are known to us via textual collections, respectively, Eusebius, HE 6, 19, 12–14, the thirteenth chapter of the *Philocalia* for the *Letter to Gregory* and the catenae on Daniel for the *Letter to Africanus*. Recently, the first critical edition of these works has been published, Fürst, *Briefe*.

²¹ For Eusebius' as a biographer, refer to Corke-Webster, "A Bishop's Biography." For his theological-political agenda also in relation to Origen's biography, refer to Lettieri, "Tempus Destruendi et Tempus Aedificandi."

²² For a discussion on the sources, refer to Urbano, "Difficulties in Writing;" and Monaci Castagno, *La biografia di Origene*.

volitive and devout Christian woman who, notably, remained unnamed. Her role in Origen's life, however, was momentous, as she prevented him from becoming a martyr at the age of 17.

Before proceeding with observations, it is important to underline that Eusebius' account of Origen's childhood adheres closely to traditional hagiographical tropes on saints' infancy. Origen is portrayed as the ideal child: precociously fluent in language and learned in Scripture from an early age. In other words, Eusebius' narrative aligns with the concept of the *puer maior sua aetate* that characterizes the childhoods of many saints.²³ However, amidst the flawless record of Origen's youth, one blemish stands out. When his father was arrested and martyred during the persecutions in Alexandria, Origen refrained from following in his footsteps and avoided martyrdom. This life-changing event is one of the few biographical details of Origen's life confirmed by his own account, as he references it briefly in his *Homilies on Ezekiel*.²⁴ Eusebius' account describes the event as follows:

In fact, he was not far at all from leaving this life, but for the fact that divine and heavenly providence, taking thought for the aid of many, placed an impediment in his way in the form of his mother. First, she begged him with words, telling him to spare her motherly feelings toward him, but when she saw him becoming more vehement after he learned that his father had been arrested and was being held in prison, and that he had become wholly fixed on martyrdom, she hid all his clothing, forcing him to remain at home.²⁵

The martyrdom of Origen's father, however, provides limited insight into his mother's response to the ordeal. In Origen's works, there are instances where he reflects on the expected roles of mothers in the face of their loved ones' martyrdom. In his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, Origen proposes a long exegesis of the mother of the seven martyrs from 2 Macc 7. Here, idealized motherhood is vividly depicted:

For the dews of true religion and the wind of holiness did not permit that fire of a mother's love, which flames up in most women under such heavy evils, to be kindled in her bowels.²⁶

Unlike this "most admirable and worthy of everlasting remembrance" woman (2 Macc 7:20), Origen's own mother succumbed to her maternal love and deceived him into remaining alive. As Miriam DeCock aptly observes in her study of women's speech in Origen's writings, the Maccabean mother's voice is somewhat muted in Origen's treatment, especially considering the insistence of the biblical texts on the mother's speech, while Origen preferred to focus on the sons' words.²⁷ Nevertheless, he explicitly praises her bravery in enduring her children's sufferings; something that his own mother apparently could not according to Eusebius.

Even in Eusebius' account, the portrayal of Origen's mother deviates significantly from the traditional tropes of motherhood and martyrdom common to early and late antique Christian narratives.²⁸ In Origen's time, and even more so in Eusebius', the ideal Christian mother was defined as one whose love for God transcended all her earthly ties, including those with her children. Early and late antique Christian hagiographies abound with examples of mothers who endured, and even rejoiced in, their children's martyrdom.²⁹

²³ Zocca, *Infanzia*, 117.

²⁴ Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel* 4, 8, 2: "It is no use to me that my father is a martyr, if I do not live well and bring honor to the nobility of my ancestry – that is, his witness and confession, by which he became renowned in Christ." For the translation, see Pearse's edition.

²⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 2, 4–5: ἡδη γέ τοι σμικρὸν ὅσον αὐτῷ καὶ τὰ τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ βίου ἀπαλλαγῆς οὐ πόρρω καθίστατο, μὴ οὐχὶ τῆς θείας καὶ οὐρανίου προνοίας εἰς τὴν πλείστων ὠφέλειαν διὰ τῆς αὐτοῦ μητρὸς ἐμποδῶν αὐτῷ τῆς προθυμίας ἐνστάσης. αὕτη γοῦν τὰ μὲν πρῶτα λόγοις ἱκετεύουσα, τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν μητρικῆς διαθέσεως φειδῶ λαβεῖν παρεκάλει, σφοδρότερον δ' ἐπιτείναντα θεασαμένη, ὅτε γνοὺς ἄλόντα τὸν πατέρα δεσμωτηρίῳ φυλάττεσθαι ὅλος ἐγίνετο τῆς περὶ τὸ μαρτύριον ὁρμῆς, τὴν πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ ἀποκρυψαμένη ἐσθῆτα οἶκοι μένειν ἀνάγκην ἐπῆγεν. For the Greek text, see Bardy's edition and for the translation, see Schott's edition.

²⁶ Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 26: ἡδεῖπιδειξαμένη πείσειν περιώνηθελετὸν υἱὸν καὶ χλευσάσατὸν τύραννον πολλοὺς τῷ υἱῷ ἐκίνει λόγους περὶ ὑπομονῆς. For the Greek text, see Koetschau's edition and for the translation, see Greer's edition.

²⁷ DeCock, "The Pastoral Usefulness."

²⁸ Nelson, "A Mother's Martyrdom;" Franchi, "Dalla Grande Madre alla Madre," 127–64.

²⁹ For instance, this is the cases of the *Martyrdom of Lucius, Montanus and their Companions* and *Martyrdom of Marianus and Iacobus*.

In Eusebius' *History of the Church*, two archetypal martyred mothers serve as counterpoints to Origen's mother. In book 5, he recounted the martyrdom of Blandina, a woman who, though not biologically a mother, assumed a maternal role by supporting young Ponticus during his tortures.³⁰ In book 8, Eusebius told the story of an unnamed Roman matron³¹ – later identified by John Chrysostom as Domina³² – who chose to sacrifice herself and her two daughters rather than allow their chastity to be violated by Roman soldiers. These examples, inspired by the Maccabean mother, shaped subsequent martyr narratives.³³

In addition to these examples, Eusebius mentions that several women among Origen's pupils faced martyrdom, explicitly naming two: Herais and Potamiaena. Both accounts are highly intriguing. The case of Herais is particularly notable, as Eusebius describes her martyrdom using the unique expression "baptism by fire."³⁴ Although Eusebius claims to quote Origen *verbatim*, this phrase does not appear in any of the surviving works attributed to Origen. The term likely alludes to a concept similar to the "baptism of blood," which Origen discusses also in his *Commentary on John* and *Homilies on Judges*.³⁵ This suggests that catechumens and non-baptized individuals – including women, as in Herais' case – who died refusing to renounce the name of Christ or endured torture in his name, received the sacrament of baptism by means of their faith. Eusebius provides a detailed description of Potamiaena's martyrdom in Chapter 5, pairing her story with the martyrdom of a man named Basilides, whom she converted to Christianity while imprisoned.³⁶ Like Herais, Potamiaena and her mother were executed by fire. Similarly to Domina and her daughters, they also died to protect their chastity from their captors. Across all these narratives, the women are consistently portrayed as courageously enduring their suffering, strenuously protecting their purity, and joyfully accepting their fate. In contrast to these martyred women, Origen's mother is depicted by Eusebius as an anti-heroic figure, embodying what early Christian male writers saw as the inherent weaknesses of the female sex. Of course, as such, she also fits a literary trope.

As a final note on this matter, I would like to propose another possible source for Eusebius' portrayal of Origen's mother; a source that shifts radically the possible "negative" influence of the mother on her son's virtue. While her character does not align with typical martyrial motherhood tropes, she resembles other Greco-Roman literary tropes. The depiction of Origen's mother as a figure who prevents her son from making a life-altering mistake is a motif found in many ancient biographies of illustrious intellectual men. A particularly striking parallel is Agricola's mother in Tacitus' *The Life of Cnæus Julius Agricola*,³⁷ where she dissuades the young Agricola from pursuing his passion for Greek philosophy, thus steering him away from a path deemed unsuitable for a Roman civic hero. However, this suggestion requires further investigation, as there is no traceable evidence, to my knowledge, that Eusebius was familiar with Tacitus.³⁸ Nonetheless, it is plausible that similar tropes on virtuous Roman matrons circulated beyond Tacitus' work and were part of a broader literary tradition.³⁹

Given this evidence, three observations on Origen's mother emerge, and these are not mutually exclusive. First, Eusebius' narrative preserves Origen's virtue and faith, as, without his mother's intervention, he would have died a martyr alongside his father. Second, Eusebius portrays Origen's mother on the examples of other illustrious mothers of philosophers and intellectuals. Third, should we grant some veracity to the information, the mother's deeply human desire to protect her son's life may indicate a reluctance among some early Christian women to fully embrace the martyrial maternal archetype proposed by early Christian male authors.⁴⁰

³⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 5, 1, 3–5, 2, 8.

³¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 8, 12, 3–5.

³² Chrysostom, *Homily on On Bernike, Prosdoke, and Domnina* (Migne, PG 50, 629–40).

³³ Franchi, "Dalla Grande Madre alla Madre," 130–41; Zocca, "Il modello dei sette fratelli."

³⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 4, 3: βάπτισμα [...] τὸ διὰ πυρὸς λαβοῦσα.

³⁵ Origen, *Homilies on Judges* 7, 2, 2 and *Commentary on John* 6, 43, 223.

³⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 5, 1–7.

³⁷ Tacitus, *The Life of Cnæus Julius Agricola* 4. I would like to hereby thank my colleague Christian Thruue Djurslev for bringing these similarities to my attention.

³⁸ For Eusebius' sources and their use, refer to Carriker, *The Library*.

³⁹ On the Roman matrons and womanhood's values, refer to Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*.

⁴⁰ On the difficulties of reconstructing motherhood and its perception by women in early Christianity, refer to Greeley, "Models of Devotion?."

3.2 Origen's Unnamed Patroness

After his father's martyrdom, Origen was the man of the house and needed to provide financially for his mother and siblings. On this occasion, Origen appeared to have no reservations about befriending a woman and accepting her financial support. In Eusebius' account, the woman who helped him after his father's martyrdom remains unnamed, but she is introduced as a figure of high regard: "he (Origen) was deemed worthy of God's divine economy and obtained the right hand of friendship and relief from a certain wealthy woman who was well respected for her way of life and in other respects."⁴¹ The Greek expression used by Eusebius to describe the connection between Origen and the wealthy woman – *τυγχάνει δεξιώσεως ὁμοῦ* – is otherwise unknown, offering little insight into the exact nature of their relationship. It seems to suggest a form of literary and financial patronage common in Antiquity, where patrons, often men, supported writers, much like it happens with Origen's later patron Ambrose. However, women also served as patrons.⁴² This role was already established in Roman society, with some wealthy women serving as patrons of the arts, and it was adopted also by Christian women, especially those, like widows, who had control over their wealth.⁴³ Origen's unnamed benefactor likely fell into this category. It seems that she took an interest in supporting young Christian teachers as, according to Eusebius, she also sponsored a young man named Paul, treating him as an adopted son. Eusebius' account continues by describing how Origen never mingled with Paul, as he was allegedly part of the Valentinian church. The young Origen refused to engage with his companion's heretical teachings and to pray with him. This portrayal of Origen resisting heresy in his youth aligns with hagiographical tropes, leaving us questioning the reliability of Eusebius' information. Regardless, Eusebius seems to have used this "orthodox vs heretic" narrative to posthumously defend Origen from his detractors. As for Origen's patroness, it is possible that Eusebius was suggesting that the woman herself, so fond of Paul to consider him a son, belonged to the Valentinian church, especially considering that various forms of Christianity coexisted at the time of Origen's youth in Alexandria. Yet, the woman's connection to a young Valentinian teacher might also reflect the tendency of writers like Eusebius to link Gnostic figures with women as a form of denigration.⁴⁴

This information leaves us little room to speculate on the position of this wealthy woman in Origen's life. However, studies on ancient patronage, such as Kim Haines-Eitzen's research,⁴⁵ show that women were indeed involved in literary production in various capacities. It is plausible that this unnamed woman was a patroness of the arts, a Christian woman interested in education and dedicated to financially supporting young teachers. Origen does not mention her in his writings; it could be because her support came early in his life or because he did not want to be associated with this woman and the Valentinian Paul. Yet, it is also possible that the story is a fabrication of Eusebius to reinforce his portrayal of Origen as an "heroic heresy-fighter."

⁴¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 2, 13: οἰκονομίας τῆς ἐκ θεοῦ καταξιοῦται καὶ τυγχάνει δεξιώσεως ὁμοῦ καὶ ἀναπαύσεως παρά τινι πλουσιωτάτῃ μὲν τὸν βίον καὶ τὰ ἄλλα περιφανεστάτῃ γυναικί. In his translation of Eusebius' work, Rufinus translates into the Latin as: *nec tamen ei defuit omnipotentis dei providentia. Ob insigne namque vel litterarum vel religionis studium a quadam nobili et locupletissima femina perfamiliariter foveri coepit*, which in English runs like 'Yet the providence of almighty God did not abandon him; because of his conspicuous interest in scholarship and religion he was befriended with great warmth by a woman of high station and vast wealth'. Refer to Eusebius, *History of the Church (Rufinus' Version)*, 236.

⁴² Osiek, "The Patronage of Women."

⁴³ Beyond the literary evidence in early and late antique Christian literature, there are now numerous legal and historical evidence that confirm the financial independence of widows according to imperial Roman laws, see Kuefler, "Merry Widows."

⁴⁴ Denzey Lewis, "Women in Gnosticism," Cerioni, *Revealing Women*; Burrus, *Making of a Heretic*.

⁴⁵ On women as literary patroness in early Christianity, refer to Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest*, 34–8.

3.3 Origen and Learned Women: Juliana, Students, and Women Calligraphists

It is also worth considering the role played in Origen's literary ventures by a woman named Juliana. She helped Origen to acquire Symmachus' biblical manuscript,⁴⁶ and Eusebius claims that she had received the manuscript from Symmachus himself:

“Origen indicates that he had gleaned these details along with another of Symmachus' interpretations of the writings from a certain Juliana, who, he says, had received the books from Symmachus himself.”⁴⁷

This opens a variety of possibilities about Juliana's identity and her connections to Symmachus. In antiquity, books and libraries were usually either inherited by family and friends or by students in the case of teachers.⁴⁸ Given her acquaintance with prominent intellectuals of her time – e.g. Symmachus and Origen – it seems plausible that Juliana could have been herself interested in intellectual endeavours. If so, this would place her among Origen's and/or Symmachus' students. Few more details about Juliana's characters are provided by Palladius in his *Lausiac History*:

Then there was a maiden, Juliana, in Caesarea of Cappadocia, said to be a most learned and trustworthy woman. She took in Origen the writer when he fled from the insurrection of pagans, and she kept him at her own expenses for two years and looked after him. This is what I found written in a very old book of verses, and it was written there in Origen's own hand: “I found this book among the things of Juliana the virgin in Caesarea, when I was hidden by her. She used to say that she had received it from Symmachus himself, the translator of the Jews”.⁴⁹

According to this later account of the fifth century, Juliana was from Caesarea in Cappadocia, she was learned and had the financial means to support Origen for two years. No husband is mentioned, but she had the possibility to host travellers in her house, so it is fair to suppose that she was a widow and/or an ordained virgin. By supporting Origen for two years, she would have been essentially acting as a patroness. Although intriguing, Palladius' information about Origen's travels does not align with what we know about Origen's life. It is established with a good degree of certainty that Origen wrote the *Hexapla* during the first years of his life in Alexandria, roughly in the first decade of the third century.⁵⁰ This is also the time when he needed Juliana to acquire Symmachus' books for him. The “pagan uprising” recalled by Palladius does not seem to refer to any specific event happening in Alexandria at the time, and there is no news of Origen's travel to/from Cappadocia in the first years of the third century.⁵¹ For these reasons, I am inclined to dismiss this account of Juliana as Origen's patroness as Palladius' fictitious rendition of Eusebius' information. It is indeed possible that Palladius was merging the unnamed patroness of book 6, 2, 13 with the Juliana character in book 6, 17, 1.

Even if we do not have the means to confirm Palladius' information about Juliana, Eusebius' news seems reliable. Indeed, the idea that a woman helped Origen tracing a biblical translation does not add much to Eusebius' agenda. It is still likely that Juliana was an educated woman who had intellectual exchange with Origen. This suggests that Origen had a certain openness to include women in his intellectual circle. As a teacher, Origen taught advanced subjects such as rhetoric, philosophy and biblical exegesis. If we are to believe Eusebius'

⁴⁶ Symmachus is one of the three translators of the LXX that Origen included in his *Hexapla*. Eusebius deemed Symmachus to be an Ebionite, but his claims has been discarded by almost all modern scholars, refer to Van der Meer, “Symmachus,” 471.z

⁴⁷ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 17, 1: ταῦτα δὲ ὁ Ὠριγένης μετὰ καὶ ἄλλων εἰς τὰς γραφὰς ἐρμηνειῶν τοῦ Συμμάχου σημαίνει παρὰ Ἰουλιανῆς τινος εἰληφέναι, ἣν καὶ φησιν παρ' αὐτοῦ Συμμάχου τὰς βίβλους διαδέξασθαι.

⁴⁸ Houston, *Inside Roman Libraries*, 30–1.

⁴⁹ Palladius, *Lausiac History* 64, 1–2: Ἰουλιανὴ τις πάλιν παρθένος ἐν Καισαρείᾳ τῆς Καππαδοκίας λογιστὴ ἐλέγετο καὶ πιστοτάτῃ· ἣτις Ὠριγένην τὸν συγγραφεὰ φεύγοντα τὴν ἐπανάστασιν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐδέξατο ἐπὶ δύο ἔτη ἰδίῳ ἀναλώμασι καὶ ὑπηρεσίᾳ ἀναπαύσασα τὸν ἄνδρα. Εὗρον δὲ ταῦτα ἐγὼ γεγραμμένα ἐν παλαιότατῳ βιβλίῳ στιχηρῷ, ἐν ᾧ ἐγγράπτο χειρὶ Ὠριγένους: «Τοῦτο τὸ βιβλίον εὗρον ἐγὼ παρὰ Ἰουλιανῆς τῇ παρθένῳ ἐν Καισαρείᾳ, κρυπτόμενος παρ' αὐτῇ»· ἣτις ἔλεγε παρ' αὐτοῦ Συμμάχου τοῦ ἐρμηνέως τῶν Ἰουδαίων αὐτὸ εἰληφέναι. For the Greek text, see Mohrmann's and Bartelink's edition, for the translation, see Meyer's edition.

⁵⁰ Trigg, *Origen*, 16.

⁵¹ However, Eusebius does report that Origen travelled to Caesarea in Cappadocia later in his life when he was summoned by bishop Firmilian, refer to Eusebius, *The History of Church* 6, 27, refer to DeCock and Djurslev, “Origen on the Move.”

account, he was the teacher of many women, such as the abovementioned martyrs Potimiaena and the Herais.⁵² Thus, Origen seems to believe that women should receive higher education as well as men.

Teaching women in his schools is also the reason that Eusebius' adduces for Origen's emasculation. This is indeed a longstanding debate among scholars, who have long evaluated both the information coming from Origen's own condemnation of castration⁵³ and later sources by Christian authors. Some scholars tend to believe that this was a fabricated rumour spread by Origen's detractors. For instance, Ilaria Ramelli has recently discussed this issue in her article on Origen's gender conception and reached this conclusion.⁵⁴ Others have rather believed that Origen committed this act of self-mutilation. For instance, Peter Brown claimed that Origen was hoping to transcend the boundaries between sexes and becoming a "human being exiled from either gender."⁵⁵ I would be more inclined to share Christoph Marksches' suspension of judgement and acknowledge that the sources simply do not give enough information.⁵⁶ Regardless of whether teaching women lead Origen to such an extreme act of continence, it is undeniable that he seems to believe in the importance of educating female pupils in his schools and having significant intellectual exchanges with women. To a certain extent, Origen's attitude towards learned women is confirmed by his portrayal of a young Mary in his *Homilies on Luke*. In his description of the angel Gabriel visiting her, Origen underlines that Mary "knew the Law; she was holy and had learned the writings of the prophets by meditating on them daily."⁵⁷ Although not definitive, this information suggests that Origen had a positive and supportive attitude towards women interested in pursuing knowledge and education.

A different case must be made for women to become teachers themselves, especially in public contexts and assemblies. Although Origen seems to accept women being ordained as deaconesses and widows in the church,⁵⁸ he seems inclined to follow the dictate of the Pauline letters and the Graeco-Roman custom, according to which women should not be allowed to speak in public.⁵⁹

Eusebius' account confirms also that women in Origenian circles were involved in literary production in many capacities, such as working as calligraphists. About Origen's writing habits, Eusebius writes the following:

More than seven shorthand writers were with him when he dictated, relieving each other on a schedule, and just as many scribes, along with maidens trained in calligraphy. Ambrose generously supplied what was required for all of them.⁶⁰

In a very interesting study on female scribes in Roman antiquity and early Christianity,⁶¹ Kim Haines-Eitzen notes that Eusebius' information about female calligraphers is extremely important and has often gone unacknowledged in both ancient and modern times. For instance, Jerome, who read Eusebius, reported in his *De viris illustribus* that Origen had "seven secretaries, paying their expenses, and an equal number of copyists," with no mention of women calligraphists.⁶² Despite being a rare example, Origen's case was not an isolated case of women being involved in the literary production process. Kim Haines-Eitzen makes an exhaustive list of cases where both slaves and freewomen were employed as scribes and calligraphists in the first centuries CE. However, she also highlights the originality of Eusebius' information, as this is one of the only two cases in which women calligraphists worked for a man, whilst the widespread praxis was that

⁵² Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 4, 3 and 6, 5, 1–5.

⁵³ Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 15, 3.

⁵⁴ Ramelli, "Constructions of Gender," 119.

⁵⁵ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 168–9.

⁵⁶ Marksches, "Kastration und Magenprobleme?."

⁵⁷ Origen, *Homilies on Luke* 6, 7: *Maria habebat quippe legis scientiam et erat sancta et prophetarum vaticinia cotidiana meditatione cognoverat.*

⁵⁸ In particular, refer to Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 10, 17, 1–2; Origen, *Homily on Isaiah* 6, 3.

⁵⁹ Munkholt, "Teachers of Good Things."

⁶⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 23, 2: ταχυγράφοι τε γὰρ αὐτῷ πλείους ἢ ἑπτὰ τὸν ἀριθμὸν παρήσαν ὑπαγορεύοντι, χρόνοις τεταγμένους ἀλλήλους ἀμείβοντες, βιβλιογράφοι τε οὐχ ἥττους ἅμα καὶ κόραις ἐπὶ τὸ καλλιγραφεῖν ἡσκημέναις· ὧν ἀπάντων τὴν δέουσαν τῶν ἐπιτηδείων ἄφθονον περιουσίαν ὁ Ἀμβρόσιος παρεστήσατο.

⁶¹ Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, 41–52.

⁶² Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 61, 3: *praebens ei septem et eo amplius notarios, eorumque expensas.*

women scribes worked for other women. What should we then conclude? It seems unlikely that Eusebius included this information with the purpose of highlighting Origen's inclusion of women in his intellectual circles, nor does this information serve any other specific purpose within Eusebius' agenda. He does not assign particular relevance to it but merely mentions it in passing. It seems far more likely that subsequent authors who reworked Eusebius' texts, such as Jerome, felt uneasy about this information and decided to omit it.

3.4 A Manful Woman: Tatiana

Origen's treatise *On Prayer* is the only work he explicitly dedicated to a woman, otherwise unknown, named Tatiana, alongside his friend and patron Ambrose. She is mentioned at the beginning and closing of the treatise, and Origen writes the following about her:

But I think, right pious and industrious Ambrosius, and right discreet and manful Tatiana, from whom I avow that womanly weakness has disappeared as truly as it had from Sarah of old, you are wondering to what purpose all this has been said in preface about things impossible for man becoming possible by the grace of God, when the subject prescribed for our discourse is Prayer.⁶³

Although brief, Origen provides the reader with few insights about Tatiana. The reference to Sarah could be interpreted in several ways.

First, it seems likely that Tatiana was not a young woman but a mature one, like Abraham's wife in the Genesis narrative. It was fairly common for women who had reached an advanced age to embrace a life of ascetism and prayer, thus the assumption is fairly plausible.⁶⁴

Second, the mention of Sarah may indicate that Tatiana was leading an ascetic life characterized by continence and virtue, qualities that Origen deem Sarah to allegorically represent.⁶⁵ Most likely, these are the attributes that qualify her as a "manful" woman. Most women who were praised for their virtue are called manly. Praising a woman by likening her to a man was regarded as the highest form of compliment by all early Christian authors and serves as the primary trope in the representation of women.⁶⁶ Mygdonia, Maximilla, Thecla, Perpetua, Gorgonia, Olympia are other famous examples of mainly women, but many more could be named. Such a language is usually explained through the so-called one-sex model by Thomas Laqueur, who explained well how the ancient Graeco-Roman world considered women as a non-fully formed male human being.⁶⁷ By calling Tatiana "manful," Origen employs one of the most common tropes associated with women's virtue. However, his rationale for why a virtuous woman should be likened to a man is thoroughly explained in his *Homilies on Joshua*, where he explicitly assigns metaphorical significance to gender. He establishes a clear hierarchy: masculine souls are those capable of achieving divine perfection, whereas feminine souls are those unable to free themselves from passions and earthly pleasures.⁶⁸ This interpretation allows women to be

⁶³ Origen, *On Prayer* 1, 1: Ἀλλ' εἰκός, Ἀμβρόσιε θεοσεβέστατε καὶ φιλοπονώτατε καὶ Τατιανὴ κοσμιωτάτῃ καὶ ἀνδρειοτάτῃ (ἀφ' ἧς ἐκλελοιπέναι τὰ γυναικεῖα ὄν τρόπον ἐκλελοίπει τῇ Σάρρᾳ ἤδη εὐχομαι), ὑμᾶς ἀπορεῖν τί δὴ ποτε, περὶ εὐχῆς προκειμένου ἡμῖν τοῦ λόγου, ταῦτα ἐν προομίῳ περὶ τῶν ἀδυνάτων ἀνθρώποις δυνατῶν χάριτι θεοῦ γινομένων εἴρηται. For the Greek edition, see Koetschau's edition, for the translation see Greer's edition.

⁶⁴ For instance, several documents attest that only women aged forty (and, previously, sixty) could serve in the Church in the order of widows, see Canon 15 of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) in Mayer, *Monumenta*, 28.

⁶⁵ This allegorical exegesis of Sara is fairly consistent in Origen's works, refer to Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 4, 6, 7 and *Homilies on Genesis* 6, 1.

⁶⁶ On Christian women's manliness, the scholarship has published extensively, therefore, I will not speak further of it here, and I will refer to Cobb, *Dying to be Men*; Burrus, *Begotten, not Made*; Vogt, *Becoming Male*; Castelli, *I Will Make Mary Male*.

⁶⁷ Laqueur, *Making Sex*. More recently, scholars have referred to this model as the one-gender model and have underlined that, although ancient authors worked mainly within a binary model, gender was a spectrum determined by both biology and behaviour, as it is indeed the case of Tatiana and other "manly" women. For further information see, Parks – Sheinfeld – Warren, *Jewish and Christian Women*, 12–14 and 282–322.

⁶⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 9, 9: "But you also who under the name "women" are weak, slack, and sluggish, may you be warned so that 'you may raise up the slack hands and loose knees', that is, that you may stir up neglectful and idle spirits and assume a bold

described as manly and men as womanish, depending on their spiritual virtues. Thus, when Tatiana is described as manly, it is a recognition of her ascetic continence and spiritual progress towards God.

Third, the reference to Sarah might also allude to Tatiana being Ambrose's sister, drawing from Genesis 20:2 where Abraham tells Pharaoh that Sarah is his sister. Some scholars give credence to the possibility that Tatiana was part of Ambrose's family.⁶⁹ Most have dismissed the idea that Tatiana was Ambrose's wife, as Eusebius identifies Marcella as his spouse in one of the epistles.⁷⁰ Be as it may, it seems reasonable to assume that she was close to Ambrose and interested in pursuing a life of prayer and intellectual askesis. Addressing a book like *On Prayer* to both a man and a woman reflects Origen's pastoral concern to engage an audience that included women. This work contains several examples of Origen addressing women's spirituality and practices of prayer. In such practices, women are considered as capable as men and are strenuously invited to pursue a life of prayer just like men.⁷¹

3.5 Origen and Imperial Women: Julia Mamaea and Marcia Otacilia Severa

If we are to believe Eusebius, Origen seems to have had at least two illustrious and powerful women among his intellectual audience: the emperor's mother Julia Mamaea and the wife of the emperor Philip, Marcia Otacilia Severa. About Julia Mamaea, Eusebius records:

When Origen's fame had spread everywhere, reports even reached as far as the mother of the emperor, named Mamaea, a most god-fearing woman if there ever was one. Consequently, she made a great fuss to request to see the man and to test his understanding of divine matters, which everyone was marvelling about. She was in fact staying in Antioch, and sent her military bodyguard to summon him. After he spent a period of time with her and gave many demonstrations of the glory of the Lord and the virtue of the divine teaching, he hastened to his usual occupations.⁷²

About Severa, Eusebius writes that he was collecting Origen's work and letters:

His letter to the emperor, Philipp, and another to Philipp's wife Severa, and various others to other people are also in circulation. Of these, whatever we have been able to collect from what has been preserved scattered about in various places we catalogued in individual volumes, so that they would no longer be scattered.⁷³

Origen never mentions or alludes to encounters with the two imperial women – whether through letters or in person – nor does he mention traveling to Antioch. In their detailed analysis of Origen's journeys, Miriam DeCock and Christian Djurslev observed that Origen predominantly refers to his travels to the Holy Land.⁷⁴ These references often serve to support his spiritual interpretations, which he justifies by correcting erroneous

firmness in accomplishing legal and gospel precepts and hasten swiftly to the perfection of strong men. For divine Scripture does not know how to make a separation of men and women according to sex. For indeed sex is no distinction in the presence of God, but a person is designated either a man or woman according to the diversity of spirit. How many out of the sex of women are counted among the strong men before God, and how many of the men are reckoned among slack and sluggish women?" For the translation, see Bruce's and White's edition.

⁶⁹ Perrone, *L'impossibilità donata*, 18; Nautin, *Origene*, 181.

⁷⁰ Origen, *Letter to Julius Africanus* 24.

⁷¹ Origen, *On Prayer* 2, 2–3, 4–9, 1–2.

⁷² Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 21, 3–4: τοῦ δ' αὐτοκράτορος μήτηρ, Μαμαία τοῦνομα, εἰ καὶ τις ἄλλη θεοσεβεστάτη γυνή, τῆς Ὠριγένους πανταχόσε βοωμένης φήμης, ὡς καὶ μέχρι τῶν αὐτῆς ἐλθεῖν ἀκοῶν, περὶ πολλοῦ ποιεῖται τῆς τοῦ ἀνδρός θεάς ἀξιωθῆναι καὶ τῆς ὑπὸ πάντων θαυματομένης περὶ τὰ θεῖα συνέσεως αὐτοῦ πείραν λαβεῖν. (4) ἐπ' Ἀντιοχείας δῆτα διατρίβουσα, μετὰ στρατιωτικῆς δορυφορίας αὐτὸν ἀνακαλεῖται· παρ' ἧς χρόνον διατρίψας πλείστα τε ὅσα εἰς τὴν τοῦ κυρίου δόξαν καὶ τῆς τοῦ θείου διδασκαλείου ἀρετῆς ἐπιδειξάμενος, ἐπὶ τὰς συνήθεις ἔσπευδεν διατριβάς.

⁷³ Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Church* 6, 36, 3: φέρεται δὲ αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν βασιλέα Φίλιππον ἐπιστολὴ καὶ ἄλλη πρὸς τὴν τούτου γαμετὴν Σευήραν διάφοροί τε ἄλλαι πρὸς διαφόρους· ὧν ὅποσας σποράδην παρὰ διαφόροις σωθείσας συναγαγεῖν δεδυνήμεθα, ἐν ἰδίαις τόμῳ περιγραφαῖς, ὡς ἂν μηκέτι διαρρίπτοντο, κατελέξαμεν, τὸν ἑκατὸν ἀριθμὸν ὑπερβαίνουσας.

⁷⁴ DeCock and Djurslev, "Origen on the Move."

geographical information – errors he can verify because he has personally visited the sites.⁷⁵ As for his visit to Antioch, one should bear in mind that the city was, in Eusebius' time, one of the most important cultural centres of the empire. Therefore, it plays right into Eusebius' goal to portray Origen as present in these political centres. Nevertheless, there are other factors to consider. The first is the Severian politics and attitude towards intellectuals in the empire, as recently reconstructed by Jared Secord.⁷⁶ Secord builds a case in favour of the plausibility of Eusebius' news that Origen visited Julia Mamaea in Antioch, as the interest shown by the mother of the emperor for Origen's theology plays well in the grand scheme of the re-evaluation of non-Hellenocentric culture pursued during the reign of Alexander Severus. The emperor and his mother gave greater prominence to the oriental disciplines (including Christianity) than previous emperors. In Secord's reconstruction, Origen was similar enough to a Roman pagan philosopher and intellectual to be well-accepted at court, but sufficiently different to fit in the inclusive intellectual landscape promoted by the Severian rule.

A greater degree of scepticism needs to be used when considering a possible epistolary exchange between Origen and the imperial couple of Philip the Arab and Severa. The alleged sympathy of the emperor for Christianity is an object of many discussions, most of which agree that Philip was never a Christian.⁷⁷ On the contrary, Eusebius is the first historian to portray Philip as the first "Christian" emperor, and the correspondence with Origen would accredit his claim. It is thus essential to exercise considerable caution regarding Eusebius' portrayal of Origen as a transformative figure in the imperial stance towards Christianity. Nonetheless, his narrative offers intriguing insights into women and imperial power. While most likely fictitious, Eusebius' depiction of Origen's proximity to political power through the mediation of women subtly stresses the forms of soft power women could wield within the framework of Roman imperial politics.⁷⁸

4 Conclusion

Origen's interaction with women during his life offers valuable insights into Origen's views on women within society and religious communities, while also raising critical questions about the reliability of rhetorical constructions and narratives as historical sources.⁷⁹ In ancient Christian accounts, as is often the case, women frequently appear at the margins and periphery of the stories of "greater" men.⁸⁰ Their roles and characters could be more easily manipulated to serve the political and theological agendas of figures like Eusebius, who often wrote with specific objectives in mind. Alternatively, their peripheral status might render them less susceptible to distortion, as their manipulation would be less advantageous to the biographer.

Ultimately, the responsibility of evaluating such sources rests squarely on the historian's shoulders. After evaluating each woman mentioned by Origen's biographers individually and comparing their narratives with available related evidence, it seems plausible to conclude that Origen maintained notable connections with several women. The sources indicate with a good degree of reliability Origen's openness to women's involvement in intellectual discourse and cultural debates. Women in his life – patronesses, friends, students, fellow Christians, and ascetics – interacted with him at various points and in different capacities, playing roles that, while often overlooked, are vital for understanding third-century Christian communities and, also, Origen's own life story.

Women such as Juliana, Tatiana, Herais, and Potimaena, along with other unnamed women briefly mentioned by Origen's biographers, appear to have influenced him in one way or the other. Juliana and an

⁷⁵ Hermanin de Reichenfeld, "From Capernaum to Jerusalem".

⁷⁶ Secord, *Christian Intellectuals*, 134–8.

⁷⁷ Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs*.

⁷⁸ Hillner, "A Woman's Place;" and Hillner, *Helena*.

⁷⁹ On the complicated relationship between historical reliability when it comes to women, see the still crucial research by Clark, "The Lady Vanishes."

⁸⁰ For the very few exceptions (if yet contested) to this paradigm, refer to Young, "The Lady Advances."

unnamed patroness were wealthy women who supported Origen financially in his youth or practically by helping recover much-needed books. Others, like Herais and Potimaena, were students of Origen who were inspired by him to endure martyrdom. Their strength, in turn, was recorded and became a source of inspiration for Eusebius to recount their stories. Moreover, Origen's address to Tatiana in *On Prayer* demonstrates his profound trust in women's ability to attain spiritual perfection. For Origen, men and women are fully equal in spiritual matters, both equally capable of reuniting eschatologically with God.

While this conclusion cannot fully render the breadth of the work needed to uncover women's stories, it underscores the need for further research. Exploring these dimensions could significantly enrich our understanding of Origen, his era, and the complex interplay between gender and theology in early Christianity.

Funding information: This publication has been kindly funded by the AUFF NOVA grant no. 44447.

Author contribution: The author confirms the sole responsibility for the conception of the study, presented results, and manuscript preparation.

Conflict of interest: Author states no conflict of interest.

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