

*The Passover of the Church: Melito of Sardis on the Church
and Israel's Exodus in Peri Pascha*

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Abstract: Scholars have studied Melito's *Peri Pascha* as a witness to second century Christian preaching, to a typological reading of Scripture, and to a theology of the Passover. Yet, few have asked what ecclesial conclusions *Peri Pascha* reveals. Melito implicitly communicates a robust ecclesiology, which contributes to an understanding of the second century church. This study reveals Melito's ecclesiology in a numbers of ways: (1) the church stores the reality (*i.e.*, the gospel); (2) it functions to interpret the Old Testament with the gospel; (3) it forms the real people of God; (4) it replaces Israel; (5) it functions as a new royal priesthood; and (6) the church performs a mystery by seeing itself in the story of Israel. These conclusions derive in part via Melito's hermeneutical patterns, which centers on a typological reading of Scripture. Melito's historical setting may also imply that *Peri Pascha* was a sermon celebrating the Eucharist. Finally, the study uncovers how Melito's typological hermeneutic influenced Origen's view of the church. Like Melito, Origen sees the church in the story of Israel, and attributes roles to the church that Israel formerly enjoyed.

Melito of Sardis preached *Peri Pascha* almost two thousand years ago. With the exception of 2 *Clement*, *Peri Pascha* might be the earliest known non-biblical sermon.² Written sometime between 160 and 170,³ this ancient message expositis an even older text—Exodus 12. Clear language and a crisp structure mark the homily. The first half tells the Passover story (δύγημα). The second half explains the story’s meaning.⁴ In his delivery, Melito exhibits rhetorical skill. His language sprouts florid ideas planted in fertile words:

[T]he sermon "On the Passover" has opened a new vista into the shape of preaching in the second century. Prior to the discovery of that work, it was usual to assume that early preaching after the apostles was (as indicated by the so-called Second Clement) rather poor—loosely organized, rustic and quite unpolished, probably mostly extempore, certainly innocent of the skills and conventions of rhetoric until such men as Hippolytus and Origen, two generations later than Melito.⁵

While earlier scholarship had assumed ancient sermons were unpolished, Melito belied this supposition with *Peri Pascha*. The homily lives on an island of skill and rhetoric. But skillful style is not the only reason to read Melito.

² 2 *Clem.* was probably written in the early second century. See Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 134–35.

³ Stuart George Hall, *On Pascha and Fragments*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), xxii.

⁴ Hall, *Pascha and Fragments*, xxii.

⁵ Richard C. White, “Melito of Sardis: An Ancient Worthy Reappears,” *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1979): 16–17.

Theology hides in every crevice of this sermon. Readers soon spot typology and Christology in the obvious places. Melito's ecclesiology, however, is tucked away in less conspicuous places. Only a careful investigation can uncover his rich theology of the church. And to my knowledge, no work has directly studied Melito's ecclesiology. I aim to fill this lacuna. Thus, my driving research question will seek to answer the following question, "What is Melito's ecclesiology in *Peri Pascha*?"

First, I will provide an overview of *Peri Pascha*. Second, I will interact with Melito's use of the term and concept "church." Third, I will provide cursory remarks on Melito's hermeneutics. Specifically, I will explain how Melito relates the two testaments together. This sheds light on Israel's relationship to the church. Fourth, I address Melito's use of performance language in *Peri Pascha*. Fifth, I will look at how Origen used Melito's *Peri Pascha*. My conclusion is that Melito is a thoroughgoing supercessionist—*i.e.*, the church replaces Israel—and the church participates in the Scripture's story when it is preached.

Overview of *Peri Pascha*

Melito pastored in Sardis, a city in western Asia Minor. A prolific writer, Melito flourished during the early second century. The ancient historian, Eusebius, testifies to Melito's popularity:⁶ "For who does not know the works of Irenaeus and of Melito and of others which teach that Christ is God and man?"⁷ Today, few do. The sands of time had buried Melito's writings. It was not until the nineteenth century that scholars recovered *Peri Pascha* and fragments of his other works. But even then it took years to publish these materials. Finally, in 1940,

⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.21.1 and 4.26. Hereafter, Eus. *HE*.

⁷ Eus. *HE*, 5.28.5.

Campbell Bonner published *Peri Pascha*. Scholarship soon analyzed the homily, and a consensus grew on basic matters.

First, the homily's topic is the Passover. *Peri Pascha's* opening line says as much: "The Hebrew Scripture of the Exodus has been read" (*PP* 1).⁸ Although unrecorded, Melito likely read Exodus 12 because the rest of his homily expounds on the Passover. Unique to Melito's message is his view of the Testaments: Old Testament narratives prefigure and typify New Testament antitypes.

Second, Bonner observes that *Peri Pascha* is split into two halves.⁹ What is unclear, however, is whether these are two halves or two books. For example, both Eusebius and Jerome report that Melito wrote two books on the Passover.¹⁰ Another possibility is that *Peri Pascha* is one work delivered in two parts. The latter seems more likely because of the internal unity of the work. *Peri Pascha* 46 forms the hinge that splits the work: "Therefore, you have heard the explanation about the type and antitype.¹¹ Hear also the completed work of the mystery."¹² This hinge connects what comes before with what follows, suggesting a strong unity between the two parts.

Third, Melito's message is straightforward. He first explains how Exodus 12 relates to its antitype, Christ (*PP* 1–45). He then extols the

⁸ Ἡ μὲν γραφή τῆς ἐβραϊκῆς Ἐξόδου ἀνέγνωσται.

⁹ Saint Melito, *The Homily on the Passion*, ed. Campbell Bonner (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1940), xxii.

¹⁰ Eus. *HE*, 4.26.2; Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus*, 24.

¹¹ Literally, it is a repayment or reward. See "ἀνταποδόσις," *BDAG*, 87.

¹² Τὸ μὲν οὖν διήγημα τοῦ τύπου καὶ τῆς ἀνταποδόσεως ἀκηκόατε· ἀκούσατε καὶ τὴν κατασκευὴν τοῦ μυστηρίου.

antitype, Christ, by celebrating his redemptive work and resurrection (PP 46–105).¹³

Church: Defined

No scholar to my knowledge has studied Melito's view of the church, making his ecclesiology an unearthen region. His ecclesiology is implicit, not explicit. To find it, we need to start by mapping out Melito's use of the word "church" in *Peri Pascha*.

Melito uses the word ἐκκλησία ("church") four times, all in one paragraph (PP 40–43). In it, Melito concludes his typological reading of the Exodus, and extols its antitype, Jesus. This passage presents Melito's hermeneutic and theological conclusion about the two testaments:

[40] The people then became a type, a preliminary sketch,¹⁴ and the law became a parabolic writing. The gospel tells the story and fulfills the law. The church is a storehouse of the reality (ἀληθείας).¹⁵ [41] The type then was precious before the reality, and the parable was marvelous before the interpretation. That is, the people [Israel] was precious before the church arose. The law too was precious before the gospel was revealed. [42] But when the church arose and the gospel became preeminent, the type became void, conceding its power to the reality. The law too was

¹³ Hall suggests that PP 46–105 functions as a Christian Haggadah. It answers the question, "What is the Passover" (PP 46) like the Jewish Haggadah answers the same question (Exod 13:8). See Stuart G. Hall, "Melito in the Light of the Passover Haggadah," *Journal of Theological Studies* 22, no. 1 (1971): 29–46.

¹⁴ In other words, the people were a preliminary sketch of the church.

¹⁵ When contrasting a false appearance of something, ἀληθεία signifies the real thing (LSJ, "ἀληθεία," SA.I.2).

fulfilled, conceding its power to the gospel. [43] In the same way the type became void, conceding its image to the real thing, the parable too is fulfilled by the revealed interpretation. Likewise, the law too was fulfilled when the gospel was revealed. The people [Israel] too was made void when the church arose. The type too was destroyed when the Lord was revealed. Today, also, the previous things have become worthless, because the real thing was revealed.¹⁶

Notice how Melito connects the two testaments. The Old Testament law tells a parable that the gospel interprets. As for the Old Testament people of Israel, they were a type of the New Testament church. Melito maintains an organic relationship between the church and Israel. The following paragraphs adumbrate a number of ways this relationship relates to Melito's ecclesiology.

First, the church stores the *reality*, which is the gospel. By storing the gospel, the church interprets the parabolic law. This is why Melito writes, "The church is a storehouse of the reality (*ἀληθείας*)," after explaining that "The gospel tells the story and fulfills the law" (PP 40). Perhaps apostolic teaching led Melito to this conclusion, like Paul's in 1 Timothy 3:14–15: "I am writing to you these things hoping to come to you soon, but if I am delayed, [I am writing to you] so that you may how to behave in God's house, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (*ἀληθείας*)."¹⁷ Whatever the precise source of Melito's ecclesiological conclusion, we can discern Melito's view that the church houses the *real* gospel.

¹⁶ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. I use the text from Hall, *On Pascha and Fragments*.

¹⁷ All biblical translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Second, the church interprets the law with the gospel. As a storehouse, the church distributes gospel-centered interpretations of the Old Testament to those hungry for understanding. The church does so, because, while the law was formerly “precious” (PP 41), the gospel has now become “preeminent” (PP 42). In contemporary terms, Melito reads the Old Testament christologically. The gospel provides an interpretive lens to read the Old Testament, and the church should read it in this way, because it stores the gospel.

Third, the church constitutes the *real* people of God.¹⁸ Melito writes, “But when the church arose and the gospel became preeminent, the type became void, conceding its power to the reality” (PP 42a). “The reality” in this passage probably refers to both the gospel and the church, because Melito ties the church and the gospel closely together. Melito may closely connect the gospel and the church because he considers the church to be a concrete expression of the gospel. Another way to understand the close tie between the church and the gospel is that church and gospel are “the reality” in different ways. The gospel fulfills the Torah, while the church fulfills Israel. This latter option seems almost certain when Melito writes, “The law too was fulfilled, conceding its power to the gospel . . . The people [Israel] too was made void when the church arose” (PP 42b–43). Consider also PP 41: “That is, the people [Israel] was precious before the church arose. The law too was precious before the gospel was revealed.” Thus, PP 42a means that when the church arose, the type, Israel conceded its role to “the reality,” the church. This leads naturally to a fourth conclusion about Melito’s ecclesiology from PP 40–43.

Fourth, the church replaces Israel. This seems to be Melito’s point when he writes, “[T]he type became void, conceding its image to the

¹⁸ I am using the term “real” in the way Melito does—to speak of a reality to which something prior pointed.

real thing . . . The people [Israel] too was made void when the church arose. The type too was destroyed when the Lord was revealed. Today, also, the previous things have become worthless, because the real thing was revealed” (PP 43). Melito, it seems, was a supersessionist,¹⁹ one who believes the church replaces Israel. Melito’s supersessionism allows him to co-opt roles originally for Israel and apply them to the church.

Melito does this in *Peri Pascha* 66–69, a passage where we can observe a fifth aspect of his ecclesiology: the church is a new royal priesthood. In PP 66–69, Melito argues that Jesus was in the lamb of the Passover, and that he redeemed Israel at the Exodus. But Exodus 12 is not merely about Israel. Without hesitation, Melito reads the church in the place of Israel: “[Christ] also made us a new priesthood, and an eternal people precious to him” (PP 68). In the same passage, Melito also calls the church an “eternal kingdom” (PP 68). These clear allusions to Exodus 19:4–6 suggest at least one thing. The church replaces Israel’s regal and priestly function. The church partakes in God’s kingdom. It serves God as priests.

In summary, *Peri Pascha* 40–43 and 66–69 reveal Melito’s ecclesiology in a number of ways: (1) the church stores the reality (*i.e.*, the gospel); (2) it functions to interpret the Old Testament with the gospel; (3) it forms the real people of God; (4) it replaces Israel; and (5) it functions as a new royal priesthood. Much of Melito’s understanding of the church relates to his view of how the Old Testament relates to the New Testament. In other words, Melito’s hermeneutical stance precipitates his ecclesiological conclusions. Thus, to sharpen our understanding of Melito’s ecclesiology, we need to understand his

¹⁹ By using the term supersessionist, I simply mean to describe what Melito’s ecclesiology and not to engage in contemporary intramural debates on the church and Israel.

hermeneutics. This is why the following section discusses Melito's hermeneutics.

Hermeneutic: Supersessionism

Paul Blowers discusses different kinds of patristic interpretation in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*.²⁰ The early church (1) connected prophecy to typology; (2) it also exercised a spiritual interpretation of Scripture; (3) based on a literal interpretation, patristic interpretation engaged in theological interpretation; and (4) patristic study of Scripture was tantamount to spiritual devotion. While none of these methods are mutually exclusive, Melito's *Peri Pascha* highlights a prophetic-typological approach. Melito's approach demonstrates how the "Old Testament—Genesis and other narratives of the Torah, the prophetic books, and not least the Psalms—teemed with adumbrations of, even explicit vectors toward, the mystery of Christ."²¹ Christ is the end. But insofar as the church participates in Christ, the Old Testament too vectors toward the church.

The church unearths its meaning through redemptive history. It fulfills a scriptural pattern. This pattern prefigures what its antitype is and does. *Peri Pascha* 34–38 conveys Melito's hermeneutic. His view of how the old relates to the new, of how the new church relates to old patterns. This section also clarifies Melito's use of words like mystery (μυστήριον), parable (παραβολῆς), preliminary sketch (προκέντημα), and type (τύπος). Each term applies directly to Melito's ecclesiology. The following section makes several observations about Melito's

²⁰ Paul M. Blowers, "Patristic Interpretation," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 81–89.

²¹ Blowers, "Patristic Interpretation," 2:82.

hermeneutic in *Peri Pascha* 34–38. Afterwards, it correlates these observations with the ecclesiological conclusions from the previous section above. This strategy will sharpen our understanding as to why and how Melito makes the ecclesiological conclusions that he does.

Peri Pascha 34–38:

[34] What is this new mystery? First, Egypt was struck for destruction. Next, Israel was protected for salvation! Hear the mystery's force. [35] Whatever has been said or has happened is nothing,²² beloved, without the parable and preliminary sketch. Whatever has happened or has been said attains the status of a parable. What is said is a parable; what has happened is a prefiguration (προτυπώσεως)—so that just as what has happened is demonstrated through this prefiguration, so also what is spoken becomes known through that parable. [36] This is what certainly happens with a preliminary structure: it does not arise as a finished work. But the work will become visible through its image that acts as a type. For this reason, a preliminary sketch of a future thing is made from wax, clay or wood—in order that a future work may arise: taller in height, stronger in power, beautiful in form, rich in its construction, and may be observed through a small and perishable preliminary sketch. [37] But when the thing that the type points to arises, the thing that previously bore the image of the future work is destroyed. It has become like a useless object. It concedes its image to the real thing. Then the formerly valuable thing becomes worthless, when the really precious thing is revealed. [38] For to each belongs a proper time:

²² In other words, whatever the Old Testament says or narrates is meaningless apart from its type or pattern.

a proper time for the type, a proper time for the material, and a proper time for the reality. You make the type. You want that, because in it you see the image of the future thing. You produce the material for the type. You want that, because in it the future thing arises. You complete the work. You want that alone. You love that alone. In it alone, you see the type, the material, and the reality.

Melito lays out his hermeneutical approach to the text in a number of ways. First, mysteries have force—they do something (PP 34). For Melito, the term mystery engages readers to enter into the world of the story: “Hear the mystery’s force!” (PP 34).²³ Second, Old Testament speeches²⁴ (“what has been said”) tell parables (PP 35). The parable’s explanation comes through reading the New Testament.

Third, Old Testament narratives (“what has happened”) are also parables: “Whatever has happened or has been said attains the status of a parable” (PP 35). But Melito further clarifies how Old Testament narratives contrast speeches: “What is said is a parable; what has happened is a prefiguration (προτυπώσεως)—so that just as what has happened is demonstrated through this prefiguration, so also what is spoken becomes known through that parable” (PP 35). Thus, narratives provide preliminary sketches of future things (PP 35). Like clay sculptures only approximate their object, so Old Testament narratives only approximate their real object, Christ and his works.

Fourth, both Old Testament speeches and narratives are types that point to an antitype (PP 36–37). After the antitype appears, “the

²³ I am keeping my explanation brief of Melito’s understanding of mystery and the church, because I dedicate the following section to that topic.

²⁴ “What has been said/spoken” sounds like a broad category that includes conversation, monologue, poetry and so forth.

formerly valuable thing becomes worthless, when the really precious thing is revealed” (PP 37). This precious thing is the antitype. “In it alone, you see the type, the material, and the reality” (PP 38).

How does Melito’s hermeneutical stance of how the old relates to the new sharpen our understanding of his ecclesiology? It does so in a numbers of ways. When Melito asserts that Old Testament speeches tell parables that the New Testament interprets and that Old Testament narratives prefigure New Testament realities, we can understand why Melito believes the church both stores and distributes the reality—the gospel. Additionally, when Melito speaks of the type-antitype relationship, we can see why Melito believes that the church forms (1) the *reality*; (2) replaces Israel as the people of God; and (3) co-opts roles formerly reserved for Israel (e.g. becoming a royal priesthood). Indeed, Melito’s typological understanding of the two testaments forms the backbone of his theological conclusions. For this reason, we should consider how the typological aspect to Melito’s hermeneutic stance can further sharpen our understanding of how and why Melito comes to the previously discussed conclusions about ecclesiology.

Henry Knapp highlights three facets to Melito’s typological hermeneutic: (1) Melito highlights the inherent importance of a type; (2) Melito sees an escalation of the reality over its type; (3) Melito argues for the “eventual displacement of the type by the foreshadowed reality.”²⁵

I add a fourth: the preliminary sketch allows a person to see the finished work (PP 36). When Melito speaks of a type, he sheds light on the antitype. When he speaks of Israel, he talks of the church. When he speaks of the Passover, he previews a reality in the Messiah. Melito

²⁵ Henry M. Knapp, “Melito’s Use of Scripture in Peri Pascha,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 54, no. 4 (2000): 368.

does not merely describe what a type is and does. He also explains what its antitype is and does.

Practically speaking, the experience of Israel in Exodus 12 prefigures the experience of the church. Hence, the life of the church can be seen in the life of Israel. Melito reads Exodus 12 as if the church was Israel, and Christ was leading the church out of Egypt. The following section clarifies how Melito can read the life of the church in the life of Israel.

Mystery-Performance

Melito's ecclesiology highlights preaching as a mystery, a mystery that engages both preacher and congregation in a performance. In preaching, the church performs the Scriptures' story.²⁶ This is the mystery (*μυστηρίον*) of preaching. In *PP* 34, mystery's force topples Egypt. It then props up Israel. The whole Passover story is mystery (*PP* 1). The Pharaoh's scourging and Israel's saving perform the same mystery (*PP* 11). This mystery tells the story of Christ (*PP* 10), since the Torah became the word (*PP* 7).

The following quote highlights the nature of performance:

While the sheep is slaughtered, the Passover eaten, the mystery is performed (*τελείται*), the people make merry, and Israel is sealed, then the angel comes to strike Egypt, the uninitiated in the mystery, the non-participants of the Passover, the unsealed by blood, the unguarded by the Spirit, the hostile, and faithless. (*PP* 16)

²⁶ Dragoș-Andrei Giulea, "Seeing Christ through Scriptures at the Paschal Celebration: Exegesis as Mystery Performance in the Paschal Writings of Melito, Pseudo-Hippolytus, and Origen," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 74, no. 1 (2008): 30.

The basic contrast is between those who do and those who do not perform the mystery. Israel eats the lamb. Egypt does not. Israel celebrates. Egypt awaits liquidation. Israel performs the mystery. Egypt does not.

We observed earlier that Melito sees the church in its preliminary sketch—Israel (cf. *PP* 36). It was also noted previously that Melito reads the church in the place of Israel when he reads the story of the Passover. Jesus rescued Israel from Egypt and “[Christ] also made us a new priesthood, and an eternal people precious to him” (*PP* 68). The “us” here refers to Melito’s audience, a body of Christians. One way that Melito envisions the church performing the mystery of redemption is by seeing itself in the story of Israel. This accords with his supersessionist view and explains why he uses first person plural pronouns, referring to the church, when he interprets the Passover story.

Another way Melito may envision the church participating in the mystery-performance of redemption is through the sacraments. The first sentence of *Peri Pascha* starts the performance. Melito speaks the words of mystery (*i.e.*, he reads Exodus 12; *PP* 1). Then, he makes a series of contrasts (*PP* 2–10). The old is temporary. The new is eternal. The old perishes because of the sheep. The new never dies because of the resurrection of the Lord. “For the law became the word. The old became new. It left Zion and Jerusalem. The command became grace. The type became reality. The lamb became the son. The sheep became a man, and the man became God” (*PP* 7). Torrance suggests that this passage implies a celebration of the Eucharist in relation to the Passover—a kind of Haggadic proclamation of Christ’s death and

resurrection from the OT redemption of Israel.²⁷ Perhaps this is how Melito's congregation practically performed the mystery.

Whatever the actual setting, Melito invites his readers to participate in the mystery by telling the story of the Passover. Christ is the primary actor. But the church can perform the mystery of redemption through hearing the word and seeing themselves within the story (the church is seen in Israel). But does Melito relate his mystery-performance with the sacraments, especially the Eucharist?

Historical Setting: Eucharist

Melito nowhere mentions the Eucharist in *Peri Pashca*. Yet a number of reasons suggest that the setting for Melito's *Peri Pascha* centered on the Eucharist. First, the Eucharist was often celebrated in the early church.²⁸ Larry Hurtado writes, "The early Christians included sacred meals in their worship gatherings."²⁹ He hints that these celebrations perhaps communed with God's "chief agent."³⁰ The New Testament confirms that the church regularly practiced love feasts (2 Pet 2:13; Jude 1:12) and the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:23–24). In the years following the New Testament, these two feasts conflated into one feast. For example, Ignatius speaks of both the *Agape* and the Eucharist as one event (Ign.*Smyrn.* 8:1–2).³¹ In any case, the early church regularly partook of

²⁷ Thomas F. Torrance, "Dramatic Proclamation of the Gospel: Homily on the Passion by Melito of Sardis," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 37, no. 3–4 (1992): 149.

²⁸ For example, the *Did.* seems to assume the regular observance of the Eucharist (Chs. 9–10).

²⁹ Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 111.

³⁰ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 112.

the Eucharist, and Melito possibly preached *Peri Pascha* before taking the Eucharist.

Second, a Sardis provenance for *Peri Pascha* may further suggest that Melito, as bishop of Sardis, preached the homily before the Eucharist.³² Larry Hurtado makes the interesting observation that early Christian feasts have Jewish roots.³³ It may be significant, then, that a large Jewish population lived in Sardis.³⁴ Although a Sardis provenance is by no means certain,³⁵ it seems likely that Melito would deliver *Peri Pascha* in his home church. Jewish converts there were accustomed to regular feasts, and Melito's church may have followed this pattern. Melito's congregation possibly celebrated the Eucharist during the same worship service.

Third, the Eucharist celebrates Christ's redemption.³⁶ *Peri Pascha* too celebrates the death and resurrection of the Lord,³⁷ and this

³¹ Commenting on this passage, Keating suggests that *Agape* included the Eucharist: "so that the Eucharist seems to be still included in the Agapé." John Fitzstephen Keating, *The Agapé and the Eucharist in the Early Church: Studies in the History of the Christian Love-Feasts*. (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 53.

³² Melito could have preached the homily before, during, or after the Eucharist. But I will continue to say "before" to simplify my sentences.

³³ Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 111.

³⁴ A large Jewish synagogue, dating to the second century, has been unearthed in Sardis. See Lynn H. Cohick, *The Peri Pascha Attributed to Melito of Sardis: Setting, Purpose, and Sources* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000), 31–32.

³⁵ Zuntz suggests Palestinian a provenance. See Günther Zuntz, "On the Opening Sentence of Melito's Paschal Homily," *Harvard Theological Review* 36, no. 4 (1943): 314.

³⁶ For a more precise and detailed explanation of the sacraments, see Christopher A. Hall, *Worshiping with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 21–81.

³⁷ Torrance, "Dramatic Proclamation of the Gospel," 153.

celebration accords with Paul's description of the Eucharist in 1 Cor 10:23–26. Hence, Melito may have preached *Peri Pascha*, because it related directly to the Eucharist celebration.

Fourth, the way Melito invites his readers to participate in the mystery of the Passover may suggest that *Peri Pascha* prepared hearers to partake of the Eucharist. Melito invites his hearers to participate in the mystery: “the prophetic leader wove his gathered community into the very story of the Exodus and there revealed to them the heart of the mystery, Christ the eternal Passover.”³⁸

Fifth, Stuart George Hall suggests an exegetical reason that *Peri Pascha's* setting may revolve around the Eucharist. Positing a Jewish influence on Melito and Sardis, Hall suggests that Christ is the ἀφικόμενος: “While coming (ἀφικόμενος) from heaven, he is on the earth because he suffers” (PP 65).³⁹ During the Passover Seder, Jews break a piece of bread off (ἀφικόμενος) from the loaf. At meal's end they reunite this loaf. The ritual possibly celebrates the Messiah.⁴⁰ Melito may capitalize on this messianic ritual in *Peri Pascha* 65.⁴¹ Christ is present in both heaven and on earth—eternally coming from heaven, but present in the bread during his suffering (cf. Jn 6). Stewart-Sykes follows Hall and concludes: “[Jesus] became present to them through the medium of the *aphikomen* and of the cup, and most importantly through the liturgy by which they remembered the acts of their salvation.”⁴² If true, Christ becomes the messianic bread of life at the Eucharist.

³⁸ John Hainsworth, “The Force of the Mystery: Anamnesis and Exegesis in Melito's *Peri Pascha*,” *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 46, no. 2–3 (2002): 107.

³⁹ Hall, *On Pascha and Fragments*, xxvii, 35.

⁴⁰ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Lamb's High Feast: Melito, Peri Pascha, and the Quartodeciman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis* (Boston, MA: Brill, 1998), 197.

⁴¹ Οὗτος ἀφικόμενος ἐξ οὐρανῶν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν διὰ τὸν πάσχοντα.

⁴² Stewart-Sykes, *Lamb's High Feast*, 206.

These five reasons suggest the possibility that Melito's *Peri Pascha* prepared a congregation to celebrate the Eucharist. Does it confirm it? No. But these historical (and exegetical) reasons suggest an additional way we can observe Melito's ecclesiology in *Peri Pascha*.

Reception

A text's afterlife can shed life on its meaning. Studying *Peri Pascha*'s effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) "is an attempt to be truly diachronic and to appreciate the history of texts through time as a key to their interpretation."⁴³ While it may not be *the* "key," observing how later authors have used Melito's *Peri Pascha* provides an additional layer of interpretation. Origen provides one such example when he quotes from Melito's *Peri Pascha*.

Origen uses *PP* 36–37. *Peri Pascha* 36–37 metaphorically speaks about structures made of wax, clay, or wood. These structures eventually give way to the final product. The text reads:

This is what certainly happens with a preliminary structure: it does not arise as a finished work. But the work will become visible through its image that acts as a type. For this reason, a preliminary sketch of a future thing is made from wax, clay or wood—in order that a future work may arise: taller in height, stronger in power, beautiful in form, rich in its construction, and may be observed through a small and perishable preliminary sketch. But when the thing that the type points to arises, the thing that previously bore the image of the future work is destroyed. It has become like a useless object. It concedes its

⁴³ Jonathan Roberts and Christopher Rowland, "Introduction," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 2 (2010): 132.

image to the real thing. Then the formerly valuable becomes worthless, when the really precious thing is revealed.

Melito reasons that the Old Testament is a sketch of the finished product, Christ and his church. Origen does not cite Melito's discussion of the church. He does, however, follow Melito's hermeneutic. This suggests that Origen too shared a similar ecclesiology—the anti-typical church fulfills the typical Israel.

Delivering a homily on Leviticus 16:10, Origen paraphrases Melito:⁴⁴

Just as those who craft it is to make tokens from copper and to pour statues, before they produce a true work of copper or of silver or gold, first form figures from clay to the likeness of the figure image—certainly the model is necessary but only until the work that is principal be completed, but when that work on account of which that image was made of clay is completed, its use is no longer sought—understand also something like this is in these things which were written or done “in a type” and in a figure of the future in the Law and Prophets. For the artist and Creator of all himself came and transformed the “Law which had a shadow of good things to come” to “the image itself of the things.”⁴⁵

Origen's language approximates Melito's to a great extent. Bonner notes: “the fact that the greatest of the Greek theologians borrowed so

⁴⁴ Origen's translator, Gary Wayne Barkley, suggests that Origen used Melito's figure in a footnote. See Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus: 1-16*, Fathers of the Church, trans. Gary Wayne Barkley (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), 202n4.

⁴⁵ Origen, *Hom. Lev. 10.2* (Barkely, *Homilies on Leviticus*, 202-3).

openly from a predecessor is an interesting illustration of the leniency with which the ancient world regarded what we could call plagiarism.”⁴⁶ Indeed, both the figure and the application in the following pages of Origen’s homily closely follow Melito’s thought.⁴⁷

Based partly on this typological reasoning,⁴⁸ Origen speaks of Christ and the church in place of the high priest and priesthood.⁴⁹ When Moses speaks of two tabernacles (Exod 29:25), Origen concludes: “I think this first sanctuary can be understood as this Church in which we are now placed in the flesh, in which the priests minister ‘at the latter of the whole burnt offerings.’”⁵⁰ Whatever the precise influence, Melito’s hermeneutical stance appears to have affected Origen’s ecclesiology.

Like Melito, Origen sees the Old Testament as a type. And like Melito, Origen sees the roles of the church in the life of Israel. The priesthood is a preliminary sketch, made of wax, clay or wood. The church is the reality, the true priesthood.

Conclusion

This study has revealed Melito’s ecclesiology in a numbers of ways: (1) the church stores the reality (*i.e.*, the gospel); (2) it functions to interpret the Old Testament with the gospel; (3) it forms the real people of God; (4) it replaces Israel; (5) it functions as a new royal priesthood; and (6) the church performs a mystery by seeing itself in

⁴⁶ Melito, *The Homily on the Passion*, 70.

⁴⁷ Melito, *The Homily on the Passion*, 70.

⁴⁸ Origen, *Hom. Lev. 2.1*.

⁴⁹ Origen, *Hom. Lev. 9.8.5*.

⁵⁰ Origen, *Hom. Lev. 9.9.3*. In the same place, Origen also discusses 1 Pet 2:9.

the story of Israel. These conclusions derive in part via Melito's hermeneutical stance, which centers on a typological reading of Scripture. Also, Melito's historical setting may imply that *Peri Pascha* was a sermon celebrating the Eucharist. Finally, the study uncovered how Melito's typological hermeneutic influenced Origen's view of the church. Like Melito, Origen sees the church in the story of Israel, and attributes roles to the church that Israel formerly enjoyed.