

MOSES PRAYING WITH HIS ARMS “STRETCHED OUT”—
UPWARDS OR SIDEWAYS? THE GESTURE IN EXOD 17:11 AND ITS
USE AS PREFIGURATION OF THE CRUCIFIXION IN ANCIENT
CHRISTIAN EXEGESIS

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Exodus 17:8–16 relates the fight of Israel with Amalekites. Israel secured a victory under the military command of Joshua, but mostly thanks to Moses who was praying with his arms “raised.” Ancient Christian exegesis developed the figurative meaning of several aspects of this episode. One of them was the prayer gesture of Moses. There were several interpretations, but the version most widely spread was the one according to which Moses was a prefiguration of Christ who “stretched out” his arms on the cross—which is usually understood to denote stretching arms sideways.

How did it happen that a gesture of arms raised upwards changed to denote their stretching out sideways? Or did it change? In the present study, I will try to find an answer. First, I will present the general outline of the patristic exegesis of this episode. It will be followed by an outline of the Greek vocabulary of the gesture (with some support of Latin sources). Then I will analyze the exegetical material again in detail.

A note on English translation equivalents is in order. The English verb “stretch out” may denote the movement of hands/arms in any direction, forwards, upwards, or sideways. The common use of this verb slightly hides the depth of the problem, at least in anglophone scholarship. (Languages that use different expressions for different movements have a cognitive advantage in this case.) To avoid confusion, I will use the verb “raise” (or “lift”) to express the upward motion and “stretch out sideways” to express

the horizontal position. The ambiguous simple expression “stretch out” is used when ambiguity is intended.

Overview of Exegesis

Exodus 17:8–16

The episode about the fight between Israel and Amalekites offered a lot of material for the figurative interpretation already in the time of Philo, which was further developed by Christian exegetes.

In this interpretation, Amalek is the enemy of the people of God who can be found either inside of the human soul (e.g., irrationality, or passions)¹ or outside (e.g., the devil).² Or it may represent various heresies threatening the Christian teaching.³ Such an enemy can only be defeated by prayer.⁴

Christians also developed the typology of Joshua (Ἰησοῦς) as prefiguration of Jesus Christ.⁵ When applied to the exegesis of this episode, a Christian is supposed to pray like Moses, while the actual fighting is done by Jesus. This model was followed by Basil the Great,⁶ Gregory Thaumaturgus,⁷ or Ephraem the Syrian.⁸

The fact that it was Moses who prayed with his arms raised also allowed another interpretation. If Moses represents the law (as usual), then his raised arms suggest the spiritual meaning of the law.⁹ They may point to a specifically Christological meaning—Joshua/Jesus wins when Moses has raised arms; that is, when the law is interpreted spiritually.¹⁰ Origen connects this idea with Jesus’ words to the Jews: “If you believed Moses, you would believe me” (John 5:46 ESV).

1. Philo, *Congr.* 55; *Leg.* 2.186–187.
2. Cyprian, *Ad Fort.* 8 (CSEL 3/1:330).
3. Gregory of Nyssa, *Ephr.* (PG 46:844D); Jerome, *Ep.* 91 (CSEL 55:146).
4. Origen, *Hom. Num.* 13.4.7 (SC 442:136–38).
5. Barn. 12.8 (SC 172:170); Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 75.1–3; 111.1–2; 113.1–7 (PTS 47:200, 260–61, 264–65); Origen, *Hom. in Jos.* 1.3 (SC 71:100); 2.1 (SC 71:116–18). Cf. Daniélou, *Sacramentum futuri*, 203–16.
6. Gregory of Nyssa, *Basil* (GNO 10/1:129).
7. Gregory of Nyssa, *V. Greg.* (GNO 10/1:49).
8. Gregory of Nyssa, *Ephr.* (PG 46:844D).
9. Origen, *Hom. in Exod.* 11.4 (SC 321:332–36).
10. Origen, *Hom. in Jos.* 1.2 (SC 71:96).

Among Christians, however, there developed another interpretation according to which Moses with his arms stretched out prefigures Christ on the cross.

Exodus 17:11—Moses Praying

This is the earliest attested interpretation—found already in Barnabas¹¹—and was widely spread both east and west.¹² However, Origen pointed out that exegesis built on Moses’ arms “stretched out” sideways was lexically and semantically incorrect. The ancient Mediterranean gesture of prayer was raising one’s arms up, towards the heavenly divinity. Moses prayed in the same way,¹³ which is also indicated in the Septuagint text with the unequivocal verb *ἐπαίρω* “lift up, raise”: *ἐπῆρεν Μωυσῆς τὰς χεῖρας* “Moses kept his arms raised” (Exod 17:11).

In their treatises, Christian authors often replace *ἐπαίρω* with synonymous *ἐκτείνω*,¹⁴ which has much wider range of meanings: it denotes stretching arms in any direction away from the body: upwards, forwards, or sideways (just like the analogous Latin formation *extendere* and English “stretch out”). In the Christian era—unlike in the preceding periods—it became a standard denotation of the prayer gesture. At the same time, it denoted the crucifixion.

In the following part, I will present an overview of the Greek verbs used for the gesture accompanying prayer.

The Vocabulary of Prayer Gestures

In all ancient Mediterranean and Near East, it was usual to pray with hands and arms raised upwards to heaven—towards the heavenly divinity.¹⁵

11. Barn. 12.2 (SC 172:166–68).

12. *tritum iam et a multis saepe dissertum est* (Origen, *Hom. in I Reg.* 1.9 [SC 328:130]).

13. *Moyses quidem elevat manus, non extendit* (Origen, *Hom. in Exod.* 11.4 [SC 321:334]).

14. E.g., Barnabas. It is also found in later authors, e.g., Eusebius, *Ps. Com.* (PG 24:53A), Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes* 2.88 (SC 247:202); 32.16 (SC 318:118); Gregory of Nyssa, *Tridui* (GNO 9:275).

15. von Severus, “Gebet I.”

Greek Literature

In Greek literature,¹⁶ the hand gesture accompanying prayer was usually expressed with verbs prefixed with ἀνα- (ἀνέχω, ἀνατείνω “hold up, lift up”):¹⁷

λαοὶ δ’ ἠρήσαντο θεοῖσι δὲ χεῖρας ἀνέσχον
The people made prayer and lifted their hands to the gods,¹⁸

ἀνατείνων πρὸς ἥλιον τὼ χεῖρε
raising his hands towards the sun.¹⁹

The Bible

Septuagint: People Praying to God. When we turn to the Septuagint, the lexical situation changes. The dominant verbs found here are: αἶρω, ἐπαίρω, ἐκπετάννυμι and διαπετάννυμι (“spread out”). But the gesture was (most probably) identical. The verbs αἶρω (“lift up, raise”) and ἐπαίρω (“raise up/above”) indicate it clearly:

ἐν τῷ με αἶρειν χεῖράς μου πρὸς ναὸν ἅγιόν σου
When I lift up my hands towards your holy temple,²⁰

ἔπαρσις τῶν χειρῶν μου
lifting up of my hands.²¹

The prefixed forms of πετάννυμι (πετάζω), ἐκπετάννυμι, and διαπετάννυμι denote stretching out arms/hands in any direction to cover a flat space, as when throwing a fishing net. In this movement, either the hands are farther apart from each other²² or the palms of hands are spread out. In the LXX, these verbs are used to denote the gesture of prayer:

16. “Greek literature” denotes works that are neither Jewish nor Christian.

17. There were also other, less frequent, expressions, e.g. ὀρέγω (ἠύχετο, χεῖρ’ ὀρέγων εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα [Homer, *Il.* 15.371]).

18. Homer, *Il.* 3.318 (cf. 1.450, 5.174, 19.254; *Od.* 13.355).

19. Plutarch, *Mor.* 774B.

20. Ps 27:2 LXX (cf. Ps 62:5 LXX).

21. Ps 140:2 LXX.

22. In Greek literature, both ἐκπετάννυμι and διαπετάννυμι were used also to denote the spread of wings of a bird (cf. AP 5.178.10; Diodoros Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 17.115).

διεπέτασα πρὸς σὲ τὰς χεῖράς μου
I stretched/spread out my hands/arms to you,²³

τὰς χεῖράς μου ἐξέπέτασα πρὸς ὕψος
I stretched/spread out my hands/arms toward heaven.²⁴

The verb *ἐκπετάννυμι/ἐκπετάζω* is also used in the Exodus narrative when Moses prays to the Lord to end the plague:

ἐκπετάσω τὰς χεῖράς μου πρὸς κύριον
I will spread/stretch out my hands/arms to the Lord.²⁵

There are two other verbs occasionally used to denote the prayer gesture, *ἀναλαμβάνω* (“take up, lift up”) with the unequivocal prefix and the polysyllabic *ἐκτείνω*:

ἀναλάβωμεν καρδίας ἡμῶν ἐπὶ χειρῶν πρὸς ὑψηλὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ
Let us lift up our hearts with our hands towards the High One in heaven,²⁶

ὅταν τὰς χεῖρας ἐκτείνητε πρὸς με
when you spread/stretch out your hands to me.²⁷

In the Exodus narrative, we encounter the verb *ἐκτείνω* (with *χεῖρες*) in many places. However, it does not denote the prayer to God, but Moses’ (delegated) power over elements in the episodes about the plagues and crossing of the Red Sea. When Moses stretches out his arms (or the rod or both), the plagues begin from the indicated source (water, earth, or heaven),²⁸ and the Red Sea opens.²⁹

23. Ps 87:10 LXX (cf. Ps 142:6 LXX; 1 Kgs 8:38).

24. Sir 51:19 (cf. 48:20).

25. Exod 9:29 (cf. 9:33).

26. Lam 3:41.

27. Isa 1:15 (cf. 1 Esd 8:70; 4 Macc 4:11).

28. Exod 7:19; 8:1, 2, 12–13; 9:22–23, 10:12, 21–22. Only in one place there is *ἐπαίρω* (10:13).

29. Exod 14:16.

God Appealing to People. There is one peculiar place in Isaiah where God appeals to his people using the gesture of prayer towards them. The Septuagint uses the verb ἐκπετάννυμι:

ἐξέπέτασα τὰς χεῖράς μου ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν πρὸς λαὸν ἀπειθοῦντα καὶ ἀντιλέγοντα
 All day long I stretched/spread out my hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people.³⁰

In the context of our debate, it is noteworthy that this passage—also quoted in the New Testament (Rom 10:21)—is frequently found in Christian authors as one of the “testimonies,” that is, Old Testament places where Christians saw prophecies about Jesus as Messiah. This verse prophesied the Crucifixion.³¹ The verb used, ἐκπετάννυμι, would allow this interpretation.

New Testament. In the New Testament, the gesture is scarcely attested. Apart from the above-mentioned Old Testament quotation, there is only one case, which uses ἐπαίρω:

βούλομαι οὖν προσεύχεσθαι τοὺς ἄνδρας . . . ἐπαίροντας ὁσίους χεῖρας
 I want the men to pray lifting up their holy hands.³²

There is one notable usage of the verb ἐκτείνω. This polysemous verb also denotes—for the first time in Christian sources—the Crucifixion.³³ It is in the episode at the end of the Gospel of John where Jesus, talking with Peter, says,

When you were younger, you used to gird yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands

30. Isa 65:2.

31. Botte, “Extendit manus suas.”

32. 1 Tim 2:8.

33. The oldest witnesses of this usage are from profane sources. Epictetus (*Diatr.* 3.26.22) writes about a man in baths who undresses and get ready for a massage: ἐκτείνας σεαυτὸν ὡς οἱ ἐσταυρωμένοι “when you stretch out like those who are crucified”; this probably means stretching out of the whole body. Another witness is Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* 1.76 (quoted below).

(ἐκτενεῖς τὰς χεῖράς σου), and someone else will gird you and lead you where you do not want to go.³⁴

The Christian tradition understood this to foretell the way of Peter's death by crucifixion, not only because of the hand gesture but also because of the "girding" as the condemned person was bound to the cross.³⁵

Christian Literature

Already in the early Christian literature, the verb ἐκτείνω is used to denote both the prayer gesture³⁶ and the crucifixion.³⁷ This situation characterizes the whole period. The noteworthy feature is that, on the one hand, the authors clearly distinguished between the two meanings, and on the other hand, they used both sources to explain the meaning of the prayer gesture. Arms that are raised symbolize the mind lifted to God. Arms that are spread out sideways as in the Crucifixion represent Christ's love for the community.³⁸

In the Greek and Latin Christian circles, the subtype of *orans* prevailed. In this prayer gesture, well-known from visual arts, only forearms and palms are raised, while the upper arms rest. Although it was neither new nor specifically Christian,³⁹ it was taken over by Christians as very suitable.⁴⁰ According to Tertullian, the fact that the arms did not rise too high expressed appropriate modesty and humility before God.⁴¹ But there was also the detail that, in this gesture, the palms are farther apart than the elbows (or

34. John 21:18.

35. *Petrus ab altero cingitur cum cruci adstringitur* (Tertullian, *Scorp.* 15 [CSEL 20:178]).

36. The first attested case is 1 Clem. 2:3. Other verbs were still in use, but this one prevails.

37. See "ἐκτείνω."

38. von Severus, "Gebet I."

39. It was attested already in Egypt and in pre-Christian Greek and Roman sources (cf. Engemann, "Orans"). Cf. also Saxer, "«Il étendit les mains à l'heure de sa Passion.»"

40. This gesture is physically much less demanding than arms fully raised, but no ancient author mentions this important fact.

41. Tertullian, *De orat.* 17.1 (SC 646:108).

the upper arms). This could perhaps support the parallelism with the Crucifixion.⁴²

Christological Interpretation of Exodus 17:11

The survey of the vocabulary showed that in the Christian era, the verb *ἐκτείνω* was the prevalent choice for denotation of both the prayer gesture of raised arms and the Crucifixion with arms stretched out sideways. Although it remained clear that the position of arms was different, there was also some interference between the two images. Now, let us return to the gesture of Moses praying in Exod 17:11 and its exegesis.

Two Different Interpretations

In the introductory overview of the exegesis of this episode, I presented two exegetical approaches. The one built on the fact that Moses’ arms were “raised”; this was seen as symbolizing the spiritual meaning of the law, which could be specifically Christological, that is, the law understood spiritually points to Christ.

The other exegetical approach saw in Moses’ gesture a prefiguration of the Crucifixion. On this basis, it is implicitly presupposed that the verb *ἐκτείνω* denotes here arms “stretched out sideways.” (It is so in many modern translations of patristic works, which I leave aside.) The semantic range of the verb certainly allows this interpretation. In many treatises, the wider context also supports it. Gregory of Nyssa, for example, has this formulation:

τὸν Μωυσέα . . . τῇ τῶν χειρῶν ἐκτάσει τὸν σταυρὸν διαγράφοντα
Moses . . . who with his stretched-out arms depicted the cross.⁴³

However, there are some cases where it is not so neat.

42. Engemann, “Orans” (esp. col. 360); *Nos non solum attolimus (manus) tantum sed etiam expandimus* (Tertullian, *De orat.* 14 [SC 646:102]).

43. Gregory of Nyssa, *De tridui* (GNO 9:275). In the Latin environment, Tertullian (*Marc.* 3.18.6–7 [CSEL 47:407]) uses the verb *expandere* in this context: *Moses . . . expansis manibus orat . . . crucis . . . erat habitus necessarius* (“Moses prays with arms spread out [wide open] . . . the form of the cross was needed”).

Both Interpretations at the Same Time

The first complication appears in those cases when both types of exegesis are found in the same place. They are, of course, not mutually exclusive: the spiritual meaning of the law, understood Christologically, can easily point to the Crucifixion. However, there remains the problem of the position of arms. Here follows an extract from Gregory of Nyssa:

149. If the people saw the hands of their lawgiver lifted (*ἐπιηρμέναις* . . . *τὰς χεῖρας*), they prevailed over the enemy in battle; but if they saw them hanging limp, they fell back. Moses' holding his hands aloft signifies the contemplation of the Law with lofty insights; his letting them hang to earth signifies the mean and lowly literal exposition and observance of the Law.

150. The priest lifted the weary hands of Moses, using as a helper a member of his family. Nor is this outside the sequence of things contemplated. For the true priesthood, through the word of God joined with it, lifts high again the powers of the Law which fell to earth because of the heaviness of the Jewish understanding. The priesthood supports the falling Law at its base with a stone so that the Law, presenting a figure of outstretched hands (*τῆς τῶν χειρῶν ἐκτάσεως*), shows forth its own purpose to those who behold it.

151. For truly, to those who are able to see, the mystery of the cross is especially contemplated in the Law. Wherefore the Gospel says somewhere⁴⁴ that not one iota, not one diacritic (*τὸ ἰῶτα καὶ ἡ κεραία*),⁴⁵ shall disappear from the Law, signifying in these words the horizontal and vertical lines (*τὴν τε ἐκ πλαγίου γραμμὴν καὶ τὴν κάθετον*)⁴⁶ by which the form of the cross is drawn. That which was seen in Moses,

44. Matt 5:18.

45. Malherbe and Fergusson (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*) translate as “one dot” and “one tiny stroke”. I prefer to keep the original meaning because it fits Gregory's exegesis better.

46. Malherbe and Fergusson (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*) change the word order probably to avoid the original chiasmus.

who is perceived in the Law’s place, is appointed as the cause and monument of victory to those who look at it.⁴⁷

The expression ἡ τῶν χειρῶν ἔκτασις in *Vit. Moys.* 2.150 (above) can be understood to mean arms “stretched out sideways,” especially as there follows a mention of the cross. But the preceding chapter clearly presented Moses with arms “raised.” Did Gregory’s mental image of Moses change? Probably not. But that would mean that the two types of exegesis are based on the same gesture. Can crucifixion be symbolized by “raised” arms?

The first indication that it can be so is found in this very text where Gregory describes the cross; the iota represents the vertical stake, while the diacritic mark—hovering above the letter—is the short transverse beam. His idea was obviously the cross in the shape of the letter T (rather than the usual form with four points). In this case, the crucified man has his arms stretched more upwards than sideways, and the similarity with a praying person becomes clear. And there is more lexical evidence.

Crucifixion Symbolized by Arms Raised

This hypothesis finds support in several places where Christian authors, alluding to the episode, do not use the usual verb ἐκτείνω but utilize another one. Gregory of Nazianzus, for instance, in one of his poems, uses αἰρώ (poetic=αἴρω) “raise” and, at the same time, the gesture symbolizes the Crucifixion:⁴⁸

Χριστὲ ἀναξ, ὃς ἀγναῖς ποτ’ ἀειρομέναις παλάμησι
σταυροτύποις Μωυσιῆως ἐπ’ οὐρεῖ σοῦ θεράποντος
ἔκλινας Ἀμαλήκ ὄλοδὸν σθένος . . .

Lord Christ, at one time, you defeated the deadly power of Amalek
with the holy palms of your servant Moses, raised on the hill as an
image of the cross . . .⁴⁹

But even many of those authors who did use ἐκτείνω understood it to denote raising of arms, not their stretching out sideways. This emerges from

47. Gregory of Nyssa, *Vit. Moys.* 2.149–151 (Malherbe and Fergusson; translation modified).

48. An analogous situation is found in the Latin sources: Moses with his raised arms symbolizes the cross (*in signo et sacramento crucis adlevabat supinas manus*); cf. Cyprian, *Ad Fort.* 8 (CSEL 3/1:330).

49. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Carmina Historica* 1 (PG 37:969 [vv. 1–3]).

the wider context, in Barnabas, for instance, the oldest testimony of the Crucifixion symbolism:

Μωυσῆς . . . σταθεῖς ὑψηλότερος πάντων ἐξέτεινεν τὰς χεῖρας, καὶ οὕτως πάλιν ἐνίκη ὁ Ἰσραήλ. εἶτα, ὁπότεν καθεῖλεν, πάλιν ἐθανατοῦντο.
Moses stood higher than the rest and stretched out (= raised) his arms, and so Israel was winning again. But then when he lowered them, they were slain again.⁵⁰

The verb ἐκτείνω itself can be interpreted in both ways. But as there immediately follows καθαιρῶ (“lower”) as its antonym, the meaning of ἐκτείνω in this passage must be “raise.” In an earlier place, the author of Barnabas expressed explicitly that he had the T-shaped cross on his mind.⁵¹

Origen’s Disagreement

Now let us take a closer look at what the great Origen says on the matter. As has already been mentioned, he criticized it as lexically incorrect if the exegesis wanted to see the prefiguration of the Crucifixion in the arms of Moses stretched out sideways:

Moyses quidem elevat manus, non extendit.
Moses raises his arms; he does not stretch them out (sideways).⁵²

However, in another place, Origen himself interprets the prayer gesture of Moses as symbolizing the cross. Does he contradict himself? When we pay attention to what he exactly says, it becomes clear that he does not:

Cum enim ipse (= Moyses) elevaret manus, vincebatur Amalech; si vero velut lassas eas deiceret et brachia infirma deponeret, invalescebat Amalech. Ita ergo etiam nos in virtute crucis Christi extollamus brachia et elevemus in oratione sanctas manus.

When Moses kept his hands raised, Amalek was being defeated. But when he put his tired hands down and lowered his weak arms, Amalek acquired strength. So, we, too, in the power of the cross of Christ, raise our arms and lift our hands in prayer.⁵³

50. Barn. 12.2 (SC 172:166–68).

51. Barn. 9.8 (SC 172:146).

52. Origen, *Hom. in Exod.* 11.4 (SC 321:334).

53. Origen, *Hom. in Exod.* 3.3 (SC 321:112).

The symbolism of the cross is clearly present here, but Origen sees it in the arms that are “raised” in the traditional prayer gesture (*elevare*). It seems that what he criticized was not the Christological exegesis itself but its derivation from the idea that Moses had arms “stretched out sideways.” This is obviously a later (circular) reinterpretation of the biblical image on the basis of its exegesis.

We may sum up the situation in this way: Moses with his arms raised symbolized the Crucifixion. This symbolism was probably based on the idea of the cross shaped as T, which feels strange for a modern reader—but a part of the ancient readership felt that way, too. The dominant image of the Crucifixion was with the arms “stretched out sideways” (which also influenced the theory of the Christian prayer gesture, as seen above). And so, an easier connection developed, which derived the Crucifixion symbolism from the arms of Moses supposedly “stretched out sideways.” This shift was, in my view, what Origen criticized.

It should be also noted that just as the idea of a T-cross—though marginal—still existed, so did the connection of the prayer gesture with raised arms with the crucifixion. When Nilus of Ancyra speaks about “praying in the form of the cross” (τὸ σταυροειδῶς εὐχεσθαι), the position of arms is unequivocal:

σταυροειδῶς τὰς χεῖρας εἰς οὐρανὸν ἐκτείνας
stretching the arms towards heaven in the form of the cross.⁵⁴

Final Note: “Raised High”

The last question that arises in this matter regards the symbolism of the Crucifixion through raised arms. This interpretation is—to my knowledge—limited to this episode. However, Bernard Botte⁵⁵ points out that the Crucifixion was symbolized not only by a certain position of arms but also by the elevation of the whole body. Artemidorus, in his work on dream interpretation, explains:

σταυρωθήσεται: διὰ τὸ ὕψος καὶ τὴν τῶν χειρῶν ἔκτασιν
he will be crucified: because of the height and outstretched arms.⁵⁶

54. Nilus Ancyranus, *Ep.* 1.87 (PG 79:121A).

55. Botte, “Extendit manus suas,” 308.

56. Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* 1.76.

More importantly, the Crucifixion symbolized by the elevation of body is also found in a very ancient exegesis of the episode with the copper snake in the wilderness lifted by Moses to bring healing.⁵⁷ As early as in John, it was interpreted to prefigure the Crucifixion:

καθὼς Μωϋσῆς ὑψωσεν τὸν ὄφιν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ, οὕτως ὑψωθῆναι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐν αὐτῷ ἔχῃ ζωὴν αἰώνιον.

As Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.⁵⁸

It seems to be rather significant that both these images—praying Moses and the snake in the wilderness—are often used side by side, already in the earliest authors both Greek⁵⁹ and Latin.⁶⁰

Conclusion

In Christian exegesis, Moses praying with his arms raised (*ἐπῆρεν Μωϋσῆς τὰς χεῖρας* [Exod 17:11]) became a prefiguration of the Crucifixion when Jesus “stretched out his arms” on the cross, which was (and is) commonly understood to denote stretching the arms sideways. This interpretation was made easier by the lexical change that happened in Christian era when the verb *ἐκτείνω* became the dominant expression for both the prayer gesture of raised arms and the position of arms stretched out sideways in the Crucifixion. However, Origen pointed out that such exegesis was semantically incorrect although he preserves the Christological meaning of the gesture.

My analysis of ancient texts shows that the symbolic parallel between the prayer gesture and crucifixion was precisely in the raising of arms, in the upward motion. The underlying idea was the T-shaped cross, in which case the crucified person has indeed his arms raised in a way resembling the ancient Mediterranean prayer gesture.

57. Num 20:2–11.

58. John 3:14–15.

59. Barn. 12.2–7 (SC 172:166–70), Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 91.3–4; 112.2; 131.4.

60. Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.18.6–7 (CSEL 47:407); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.24.1 (SC 100/2:698–700).

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