

CISSR – Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori sulle Religioni
Italian Centre for Advanced Studies on Religions

Incontro annuale sulle origini cristiane
Annual Meeting on Christian Origins

Centro Residenziale Universitario di Bertinoro

3 – 5 ottobre, 2024

University Residential Centre of Bertinoro

October 3 – 5, 2024



Il **Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori sulle Religioni** (CISSR), fondato nel 1999, promuove la ricerca scientifica sulle religioni, soprattutto nell'ambito della storia del cristianesimo e del giudaismo. Il Centro favorisce lo sviluppo degli studi sulle religioni nella formazione universitaria, organizzando convegni scientifici, offrendo supporto per la formazione post-universitaria e promuovendo iniziative culturali sulle religioni.

The Italian Centre for Advanced Studies on Religions (CISSR), founded in 1999, promotes scholarly research on religion, with a special focus on the history of Christianity and Judaism. The Centre fosters the development of religious studies in academia, organizing scientific meetings, providing support for post-graduate studies, and promoting cultural initiatives on the study of religions.

Incontro annuale 2024 | 2024 Annual Meeting

Comitato scientifico | Scientific Committee

Andrea Annese (Università di Bologna), Luca Arcari (Università di Napoli Federico II), Peter Arzt-Grabner (Universität Salzburg), Francesco Berno (Sapienza Università di Roma), Adriana Destro (Università di Bologna), Cristiana Facchini (Università di Bologna), Dario Garribba (Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Meridionale, Napoli), Claudio Gianotto (Università di Torino), Dorota Hartman (Università di Napoli "L'Orientale"), John S. Kloppenborg (University of Toronto), Mauro Pesce (Università di Bologna), Mara Rescio (CISSR, Bertinoro /Adjunct Fellow, Centre for Advanced Studies "Beyond Canon", Universität Regensburg), Sarah E. Rollens (Rhodes College), Daniele Tripaldi (Università di Bologna), Daniel Ullucci (Rhodes College), Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli (Università di Bologna), Luigi Walt (Università di Napoli "L'Orientale")

Organizzazione scientifica | Scientific Organization: M. Rescio, E.R. Urciuoli

Cura editoriale del programma | Program Book Editing: M. Rescio, E.R. Urciuoli, L. Walt

CISSR — Centro Italiano di Studi Superiori delle Religioni

c/o Centro Residenziale Universitario di Bertinoro
Via Frangipane, 6 – 47032 Bertinoro (FC), Italia

<http://cissr.net>

CISSR Annual Meeting on Christian Origins

Bertinoro, October 3 – 5, 2024

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 3

9:00 – 9:10 | Opening of the Meeting (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

Presiding: Mara Rescio, Emiliano R. Urciuoli

9:10 – 11:10 | Joint Session AM 1 (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

EXPLORATIONS OF PEOPLEHOOD IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

Presiding: Maia Kotrosits, Philip A. Harland

ANDREW DURDIN (Florida State University)

Magians Without Magic: An Ethnographic Reading of Pliny the Elder's "History of Magic"

CAVAN CONCANNON (University of Southern California)

Ethnicity, Groups, and Movement: Making Ethnic Identity across Distance

J. ANDREW DOOLE (University of Innsbruck)

Inventing a Diaspora: The (Non-)Customs of the Christians according to Bardaisan of Edessa

PHILIP A. HARLAND (York University, Toronto)

Criminalizing Conquered Peoples

Break 11:10 – 11:30

11:30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM 2.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

DISCUSSIONS ON THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RABBINIC JUDAISM

Presiding: Gudrun Holtz, Matthias Morgenstern

GUDRUN HOLTZ (University of Tübingen)

The Interpretation of the Commandment of Deut 6:5 in Romans 8 and Early Rabbinic Sources

MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN (University of Tübingen)

Talmudic Responses to the Golden Rule in the New Testament

FEDERICO DAL BO (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)

The Sovereign Messiah of the Law: Daniel Boyarin's Jewish Gospel and its Sabbatianic Undertones

11:30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM 2.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

ORAL AND WRITTEN SOURCES OF EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS

Presiding: Enrico Norelli, Claudio Zamagni

SINCERO MANTELLI (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Rome)

Contra Esdram mulier potius quam ueritas uicit: The Partial Reception of 3 Esdr. 3, 12 in the Late Antique West and the Case of De singularitate clericorum

MATTEO MARIANI (Liceo scientifico Valeriani, Imola)

The Enochic Azazel in the Background of the Synoptic Tradition: Literary Dependencies and New Perspectives on the Logion of “the Strong Man” (Mk 3:27, Mt 12:29-30, Lk 11:21-23)

ENRICO NORELLI (University of Geneva)

Καλάμῳ ἔνυσσον αὐτόν: Which Sources for *Gospel of Peter* 9?

Lunch Break 13:00 – 15:00

15:00 – 1700 | Parallel Session PM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

CONTEXTS OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Presiding: John Kloppenborg

HARRY O. MAIER (Vancouver School of Theology – Max Weber Centre, University of Erfurt)

The Social Networks, Patronage, and Correspondence of Cyprian of Carthage and His Rivals: Toward a New Description of Third-Century Christian Conflicts

WILLIAM ARNAL (University of Regina, Canada)

LARPing the New World: How Paul “Wore” Jesus

CHRISTINA GOUSOPOULOS (University of Toronto)

When Networks Fail: Modelling Network Collapse and Decline in Greco-Roman Associations

GUSTAVO B. BARROSO (University of Lisbon)

Can Disease Lead to Persecution? The Case of the Saint Cyprian’s Plague

15:00 – 17:00 | Parallel Session PM 1.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

BOOK DISCUSSION 1

Presiding: Luca Arcari

A. ANNESE, F. BERNO, D. TRIPALDI (a cura di), *I codici di Nag Hammadi. Prima traduzione italiana integrale*. Roma: Carocci, 2024

Discussants: EDMOND LUPIERI (Loyola University, Chicago), PIERLUIGI PIOVANELLI (EPHE - École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris; online)

Respondents: ANDREA ANNESE (University of Bologna), FRANCESCO BERNO (Sapienza University of Rome), DANIELE TRIPALDI (University of Bologna)

15:00 – 17:00 | Parallel Session PM 1.C (Captain Room – Rivellino)

JEWISH HISTORY AND HELLENISTIC JUDAISM

Presiding: Dario Garibba, Marco Vitelli

GABRIELE BOCCACCINI (University of Michigan)

Did Paul Know Enoch Literature? A Reopened Question

MICHAEL DAISE (College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia)

Iudeorum Romanum: The Jewish Diaspora in Rome and Early Christ-Believing Groups

SANDRA GAMBETTI (College of Staten Island, New York)

The Way to Deal with It: The Roman Institutional Tools Granted to the Jews. The Case of Alexandria's Philo and Beyond

ARIEL LEWIN (University of Basilicata)

The Jews Against the Nabataeans: The Story of Silleus

Break 17:00 – 17:30

17:30 – 19:30 | Parallel Session PM 2.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

WOMEN IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Presiding: Maria Dell'Isola, Mario Resta

CHRISTY COBB (University of Denver)

Household Conversion and Agency in the Acts of Philip

NICOLA DENZEY LEWIS (Claremont Graduate University)

Late Antique Christian Virgins: The View from the Catacombs of Rome

TESSA CANELLA (Sapienza University of Rome)

Helena Augusta and the Ancient Models of Female Christian Devotion

MATTIA CHIRIATTI (University of Granada)

Manus Dei: The Theodosian Empresses and Their Iconography

17:00 – 19:30 | Parallel Session PM 2.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

RE-EXPLORING THE APOCRYPHAL CONTINENT: TEXTS, PARATEXTS, AND CONTEXTS

Presiding: Luigi Walt

JONATHAN CAHANA-BLUM (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

The Disease of Masculinity? Early Gnosticism on What's Wrong with Men

LAVINIA CERIONI (Aarhus University)

From Sophia to Logos: Theological Shifts in the Tripartite Tractate and Valentinian Theology

MAIA KOTROSITS (Harvard University)

Thinking Ethnicity and Social Mobility in the Cosmic Register: The Gospel of Philip and Origen of Alexandria

PAMELA MULLINS REAVES (Colorado College)

Revelation, Testimony, and Ascent in the Paraphrase of Shem (NHC VII,1) and the First Apocalypse of James (NHC V,3; Cod. Tch. 2)

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 4

09:00 – 11:00 | Joint Session AM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

GOSPEL OF THOMAS, NAG HAMMADI, AND GNOSTICISM

Presiding: **Andrea Annese, Francesco Berno**

LOUIS PAINCHAUD (Laval University, Canada)

“During Eight Days before Three Days” (EvJud 33:34): Narrative Weft and Allusive Warp in the *Gospel of Judas*

EINAR THOMASSEN (University of Bergen)

Valentinus’ *Letter to Agathopous* Rediscovered (?)

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN (Aarhus University)

Unravelling the Basic Semiotic System of the Gospel of Truth with a Focus on Its Bearing Concept and Their Afterlife in Subsequent Valentinian Christ Religion

EUGEN STAFIE (Free University of Berlin)

A Multiform Beast: The Theriomorphic Demiurge as the Irrational World Soul in *The Apocryphon of John*

09:00 – 11:00 | Parallel Session AM 1.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

LUKE AND ACTS IN THEIR HISTORICAL, ANTHROPOLOGICAL, AND LITERARY CONTEXT

Presiding: **Michael A. Daise, Dorota M. Hartman, Fabrizio Marcello**

FABRIZIO MARCELLO (École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem)

Feeding Before the End: Luke 12:41–46 in Light of the Zenon Archive

PAOLO COSTA (University of Genoa – Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)

Luke *iuris studiosus*, between *Lokalkolorit* and the Partings of the Ways

KORBINIAN STEGEMEYER (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)

Proven Reality: The Conflict between the Apostles and the Leaders of Jerusalem in Acts 2–5 as Disclosure of Christian Identity

RAFAŁ WĘDZICKI (École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem)

“To Which God Shall I Pray in Order to Be Saved?”: Paul, Pythoness and Greek Oracular Enquiries

09:00 – 11:00 | Parallel Session AM1.C (Captain Room – Rivellino)

FROM THE HISTORY OF EXEGESIS TO RECEPTION HISTORY AND BEYOND

Presiding: Laura Carnevale, Edmondo Lupieri

ANNA MAMBELLI (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia) – FABIO TUTRONE (University of Palermo)
// DAVIDE DAINESI (University of Bologna) – LAURA BIGONI (University of Bologna)

Resilient Septuagint and uBIQUity: Interrelated Research Projects on Sacred Texts and their Heritages in the Digital World

GIOVANNI HERMANIN DE REICHENFELD (Sapienza University of Rome)

Quotation Culture and Computational Analysis in Early and Late Antique Christian Biblical Exegesis: Methodological Challenges and the Case Studies of Origen of Alexandria

GIULIO MARIOTTI (Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose “Romano Guardini”, Trento – Istituto di Scienze Religiose “Centro Studi Teologici”, Bolzano)

The “Domesticated Apostle”: The Invention of Anti-Jewish Paul

Break 11:00 – 11:30

11:30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM2.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

BOOK DISCUSSION 2

Presiding: Luca Arcari

EBERHARD BONS, DANIELA SCIALABBA (eds.) in collaboration with ANNA MAMBELLI, *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (HTLS), 4 vols. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020–

Discussants: ROBERTO NICOLAI (Sapienza University of Rome), EMANUELE CASTELLI (University of Messina)

Respondents: EBERHARD BONS (Université de Strasbourg), ANNA MAMBELLI (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia), DANIELA SCIALABBA (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)

11:30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM2.A (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

PAPYROLOGY AND EARLY CHRIST GROUPS

Presiding: Peter Arzt-Grabner, Marco Stroppa

CAMILLA RECALCATI (UCL Catholic University of Louvain – Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
The LXX Translators and their Villages: Jewish Presence in the Third-Century Fayum

THOMAS WAYMENT (Brigham Young University, Provo, USA)

A Christian Hymn in an Unpublished Fourth Century Papyrus

MARCO STROPPA (Istituto Papirologico “Girolamo Vitelli”, University of Florence)

New Fragments from PSII 6 and 7: The *Protevangelium Iacobi* again and a New Exemplar of the *De Pascha* by Meliton

Lunch Break 13:00 – 15:00

15:00 – 17:00 | Parallel Session PM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

BEFORE AND AFTER REIMARUS: DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE ABOUT JESUS IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD – NEW PERSPECTIVES & METHODOLOGIES

Presiding: Miriam Benfatto, Cristiana Facchini

CRISTIANA FACCHINI (University of Bologna)

The Historical Jesus and Biblical Exegesis in the Seventeenth Century: Spinoza & Simon

JONATHAN ELUKIN (Trinity College, Connecticut)

Jesus on the Eve of the Enlightenment: Jacques Basnage's History of the Jews and Rabbinic Judaism

MARGHERITA PEPOLI (Sapienza University of Rome – EPHE, Paris)

Christ through Kabbalah: An Enquiry through the Hebrew-to-Latin Translations and the Writings of Cardinal Egidio Antonini da Viterbo

ULRICH GROETSCH (University of North Alabama)

Crows like a Cock but Was not a Cock! Early Modern Savants Puzzle over a Biblical Enigma

15:00 – 17:00 | Parallel Session PM 1.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

MARK AND THE OTHER GOSPELS

Presiding: Mara Rescio

AMIEL DRIMBE (University of Bucharest)

The Lion in Wilderness

GIOVANNI IBBA (Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose della Toscana, Florence)

From Enochic Tradition to the Impure Spirits in Mark

STEPHAN HÜLLER (Independent Research, Canada)

Ad Fontes: New Images and the Exoneration of Morton Smith

MARA RESCIO (CISSR, Bertinoro / Adjunct Fellow, "Beyond Canon" Centre, University of Regensburg)

Sin, Divine Punishment, and Disease: Some Insights from Documentary Papyri

15:00 – 17:00 | Parallel Session PM 1.C (Captain Room – Rivellino)

RE-DATING EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS

Presiding: Claudio Gianotto, Enrico Norelli

KIMBERLY STRATTON (Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada)

Reconsidering the *Didache* as Evidence for First-Century 'Christian' Identity

MARKUS VINZENT (King's College, London – Max Weber Centre, University of Erfurt)

The Two Pauline Letter Collections: What Are They (Content, Redactional Profiles) and when to Date the Letters?

RELIGIOUS TRANSFORMATION IN THE ROMAN IMPERIAL PERIOD

Presiding: Francesca Prescendi

GIULIA PEDRUCCI (University of Verona)

The Transformation of the Greek Pythia in Relation to Divination and Female Sexuality by Church Fathers

DANIEL ULLUCCI (Stonehill College, Easton, MA)

The Role of Christian Practices in Roman Status Culture—Interests of the Early Majority

Break 17:00 – 17:30

17:30 – 18:45 | Joint Session PM 2 (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

LECTIO MAGISTRALIS

Presiding: Roberto Alciati

CATHERINE HEZSER (SOAS - School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London)

The Significance of Law in Rabbinic Judaism and Ancient Christianity

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 5

9:00 – 11:00 | Parallel Session AM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

METHODOLOGIES OF JESUS RESEARCH: THE TRANSMISSIONS OF WORDS

Presiding: Mauro Pesce

STEPHEN J. PATTERSON (Willamette University, Salem, Oregon)

Three Source Fragments in Thomas

LUIGI WALT (University of Naples “L’Orientale”)

In Praise of Parallels: An Inventory (and a Few Remarks) against Exceptionalism in the Study of Paul and the Jesus Tradition

[Book Discussion]

SANTIAGO GUIJARRO, *La memoria vivente di Gesù. Dinamiche della trasmissione orale*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2024.

Discussant: CLAUDIO GIANOTTO (University of Turin)

Respondent: SANTIAGO GUIJARRO (Pontifical University of Salamanca; online)

9:00 – 11:00 | Parallel Session AM 1.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

THE BIBLE AND CONFLICT

Presiding: Emiliano R. Urciuoli

LEE GWANGSOO (University of St Andrews, Scotland)

Jewish Davidic Messianism and Jesus’s Kingship and Sonship in John 10

ANDREA DI LENARDO (University of Udine – Ca' Foscari University of Venice)
Food Norms in the Conflict of the Early Church

JILL HICKS-KEETON (University of Southern California)
"For Such a Time as This": Christian Scripturalization of Esther in National Social Conflicts over Slavery and Women's Rights in the Nineteenth-Century U.S.

ROBERTA MAZZA (University of Bologna)
Papyri for the People: The Use and Abuse of Ancient Biblical Manuscripts in Contemporary America

Break 11:00 – 11:30

11:30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM 2.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES IN HELLENISTIC-ROMAN JUDAISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY (2ND CENTURY BCE – 4TH CENTURY CE)

Presiding: Luca Arcari, Daniele Tripaldi

Discussion around:

L. PAINCHAUD, E. LUPIERI (eds.), *"Who is Sitting on Which Beast?" Interpretative Issues in the Book of Revelation*. Turnhout: Brepols 2024

Discussants: NATHAN BETZ (University of Regensburg), DARIO GARRIBBA (Theological Faculty of the Southern Italy "S. Luigi", Naples), ELISA MANZO (University of Cantabria), DANIELE MINISINI (Sapienza University of Rome)

11:30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM 2.B (Garrison Room – Rivellino)

ANTHROPOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS CONCERNING RELIGIOUS FORMS AND PRACTICES

Presiding: Adriana Destro, Francesca Sbardella

MARIANA DOBREVA-HOLDER (University of Toronto)
Ancient Folk Rituals: Survival and Transformation

CATERINA FRATESI (University of Bologna)
Sacred Objects and Objects of Affection in a Psychiatric Residence: An Ethnographic Analysis

LEONARDO ROSSI (University of Florence)
"Her Enduring Presence": The Role of Memory Objects and Devotional Sites in the Formation and Preservation of Gemma Galgani's Cult

Lunch Break 13:00 – 15:00

15:00 – 17:00 | Joint Session PM 1.A (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

ISSUES OF METHOD: NEW ‘SECULAR’ APPROACHES TO EARLY CHRISTIAN RESEARCH

Presiding: William Arnal, Eduard Iricinschi

HAL TAUSSIG (Union Theological Seminary, New York)

Mythmaking, Politics, and the Rise and Fall of the Christian Myth

KATHRYN LOFTON (Yale University)

America: A Mythic Problem in the Study of Religion

PHILIPPA TOWNSEND (University of Edinburgh)

Myth and History in the Story of Manichaean Origins

EDUARD IRICINSCHI (Fulbright Scholar at Princeton University)

The Search for an Imperfect Method in the Study of Religion: Redescription in Burton L. Mack and Jonathan Z. Smith

PROGRAMME UNITS & ABSTRACTS

(Programme Units are listed in alphabetical order)

Keynote Lecture

CATHERINE HEZSER (SOAS - School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London)

The Significance of Law in Rabbinic Judaism and Ancient Christianity

In rabbinic Judaism after 70 C.E. law, in both its religious and civic connotations, became the primary focus of interest. Rather than merely repeating Torah law rabbis created a new and wide-ranging halakhic system with guidelines for all areas of daily life. By contrast, Christian authors from Paul onwards seem to have mainly engaged in theology and developed an ambivalent attitude to law (nomos), which was associated with the material world and a religious state that Christians had left behind. Were rabbinic and patristic attitudes toward the significance of law diametrically opposed? The adherence to specific legal rules would have been an aspect of the social constitution of early Christian communities and Christian behaviour in everyday life. Legal rules could emerge internally, within the communities themselves, or the governing Hellenistic or Roman rules could be adopted. How did rabbis and Christians function in a political context that was governed by Roman rule and legal institutions? Did the difference between Jews as an ethnic group and Christian as a religious community play a role? The political changes of the 3rd to 4th centuries are especially interesting in this regard. After Caracalla's reform (212 C.E.) all inhabitants of the Roman Empire became Roman and Roman law was part of Roman civic identity. Did the Christianization of the Empire in the fourth and following centuries introduce a new legal regime? Can Justinian's prohibition of Jewish deuterotaxis be understood as the wish to eliminate an alternative body of laws once the Digest was created? The paper will investigate these issues, taking political, social, and religious aspects into account.

Anthropological Investigations Concerning Religious Forms and Practices

(Chairs: Adriana Destro, Francesca Sbardella)

MARIANA DOBREVA-HOLDER (University of Toronto)

Ancient Folk Rituals: Survival and Transformation

This paper explores the transformation of the ancient ritual of fire-walking into its modern use in the self-empowerment industry. The Nestinari ritual, preserved in few villages in Bulgaria and Greece, is situated in the context of agrarian culture, keenly oriented to time, space, and community; it organizes cosmic chaos and had blended into Christianity. The modern western mentality has adopted the fire-walking in 21st century (England and North America) by evacuating the communal aspect entirely and transformed the ritual into a performance of individualized achievement.

CATERINA FRATESI (University of Bologna)

Sacred Objects and Objects of Affection in a Psychiatric Residence: An Ethnographic Analysis

Materiality plays a fundamental role in the experience of individuals, contributing to the construction of meaningful contexts and acting as a mediator in human relationships. The article analyzes "sacred" objects and "objects of affection" within an Italian psychiatric residence. An ethnographic approach is used to analyze the performative characteristics of these objects and the processes of sacralization in which they are involved. The aim of the research is to highlight the role and significance of "sacred" materiality in the context of confinement.

LEONARDO ROSSI (University of Florence)

"Her Enduring Presence": The Role of Memory Objects and Devotional Sites in the Formation and Preservation of Gemma Galgani's Cult

This presentation explores beliefs, practices, and rituals employed by devotees of Gemma Galgani – a Tuscan mystic and visionary who lived between the late 19th and early 20th centuries – to "musealize" and "sacralize" her memory through the strategic use of her material and spiritual legacy.

[The] Bible and Conflict

(Chairs: Sarah E. Rollens and James Crossley)

LEE GWANGSOO (University of St Andrews, Scotland)

Jewish Davidic Messianism and Jesus's Kingship and Sonship in John 10

In the Good Shepherd Discourse, the Johannine Jesus teaches his willing death (vv. 11, 15, 17), and his teaching causes controversy among his hearers (vv. 19–21). This reaction is evidence of the difference between Jesus' use of the shepherd-sheep analogy and the audience's precedent. The narrative of the Feast of Dedication (vv. 22–42) reveals that some Jews expected Jesus to be the Christ (v. 24). However, Jesus' response to those who did not understand his teachings provoked strong opposition from some Jews (v. 31). Some point out that the teaching of Jesus' death with the good shepherd imagery does not fit with the expectation of a new Davidic shepherd-messiah. Moloney argues that John uses the traditional shepherd imagery in his own unique way and then argues that the death of the good shepherd proclaims the unconditional gift of Jesus and reveals his messiahship and sonship. Barrett also focuses on Jesus as the Good Shepherd and his sonship. Stovell contends that the Good Shepherd discourse reveals the two distinct kingships, i.e., Jesus as shepherd-king (vv. 1–16) and Father-Son kingship (vv. 17–18). However, they do not clearly clarify the dynamics of the shepherd imagery, kingship, and sonship. I argue that Zechariah 9–14 influences the Good Shepherd discourse, and that John overcomes the heterogeneous death of the shepherd by revealing Jesus' identity as his divine sonship.

ANDREA DI LENARDO (University of Udine – Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Food Norms in the Conflict of the Early Church

This contribution examines food norms and the practice of sharing meals with Gentiles in the ideological conflict of the early Church narrated in the Letter to the Galatians. It deals with the controversy between the radical Jews present in the community of James the Just, the brother of Jesus (such as Cerinthus according to Epiphanius) and, on the other hand,

Paul's view. For him, the norms of food purity are overcome because it is the Mosaic Law itself that is overcome, while the Letter of James expresses a completely different opinion. So the intent of this speech is to analyze this conflict in the light of the cultural, socio-political and religious context. In the Jewish groups of the time, and then in the Judeo-Christian ones, in fact, the norms of food purity played a significant role (as among the Essenes and in the Dead Sea Scrolls). In some of these groups even more radical food habits were practiced, such as abstention from alcoholic beverages (as for James) and vegetarianism (as for James again, the Nasareans, the Dositheans, Elxai the Ossaeans, and the Ebionites, who considered Jesus and John the Baptist themselves as vegetarians). Even with regard to vegetarianism, the position expressed by Paul in the Letter to the Romans appears to be opposite to that of these groups and again to that of James.

JILL HICKS-KEETON (University of Southern California)

"For Such a Time as This": Christian Scripturalization of Esther in National Social Conflicts over Slavery and Women's Rights in the Nineteenth-Century U.S.

The biblical book of Esther has proven historically to be a polyvalent and flexible literary resource in competitions over power and place. In the nineteenth-century U.S., Esther became a resource for abolitionists and women's suffragists fighting for progressive causes in national social conflicts. This paper assesses lore about how protagonist Mordecai's key phrase "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14) became a political motivator. It is said, for example, to have tipped Abraham Lincoln toward enacting the Emancipation Proclamation after Rev. William Weston Patton uttered the phrase to suggest that God was behind the president. Angelina Grimke opened her abolitionist treaty *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* with the same passage (Esther 4:13-16) to similar rhetorical effect. Esther drew further attention from Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the other editors of *The Woman's Bible*, as they endeavored to recruit the Bible as an ally for their cause. Often overlooked, however, is how these uses of Esther were accompanied by anti-Judaic sentiment as Christian elites sought to make Esther's story relevant for social causes in their own day in a country whose public discourse was saturated with the Christian Bible. A major reason why, this paper shows, is that the book of Esther itself produces a fundamental problem for Christians who make it scriptural: how to see themselves in a text originally written neither by or for them.

ROBERTA MAZZA (University of Bologna)

Papyri for the People: The Use and Abuse of Ancient Biblical Manuscripts in Contemporary America

In the last decade, we have witnessed the rise and fall of the Green Collection and the birth of yet another museum of the Bible in the United States, The Museum of the Bible in Washington D.C. Starting from this case study, this paper investigates how Biblical manuscripts and other artefacts have been used as means to support political agendas and discourses, especially in Christian evangelical circles. When and why did the trend begin? For which reasons the objects themselves became so central to fuel a trade in illicit and forged manuscripts? And what about the role of academics in all this? Based on my forthcoming book (*Stolen Fragments: Black Markets, Bad Faith, and the Illicit Trade in Ancient Artefacts*, Stanford University Press, 17 September 2024), the paper will offer some answers.

Before and after Reimarus: Discourses and Practices around Jesus from the Early Modern Period – New Perspectives & Methodologies

(Chairs: Miriam Benfatto and Cristiana Facchini)

CRISTIANA FACCHINI (University of Bologna)

The Historical Jesus and Biblical Exegesis in the Seventeenth Century: Spinoza & Simon

The TTP is considered by many scholars of the 17th century a masterpiece of radical biblical interpretation. In this contribution I will analyze some interpretations of the strategies deployed by Spinoza in historicizing both ancient Judaism and the very figure of Jesus. In doing so, I will attempt to relate this reading of the Bible to religious polemical literature of the time, particularly but not exclusively the one produced in Amsterdam. In doing so, I will analyze how certain components of the polemical debate contributed to redefine the very nature of both ancient Judaism and early Christianity. In the last part of my contribution, I will compare Spinoza's analytical strategies with Richard Simon's similar attempts, hoping to detect some of the major tendencies in historicizing ancient Judaism and the rise of Christianity.

JONATHAN ELUKIN (Trinity College, Connecticut)

Jesus on the Eve of the Enlightenment: Jacques Basnage's History of the Jews and Rabbinic Judaism

Jacques Basnage, an early 18th century Huguenot pastor, is famous for writing the first "tolerant" history of the Jews by a Christian. Written in French on the eve of the Enlightenment, Basnage's History of the Jews, became a touchstone of Enlightenment thinking about the Jews and Jewish history. My early work on Basnage explored how he deployed the history of the Jews as a coded attack on the Catholic Church. Despite the ideological motivation behind Basnage's interest in the Jews, his work still served as a reservoir of early modern knowledge about Jewish history, including the early Church and Jesus's relationship to Judaism. Basnage saw Jesus as representing a pure ancient Judaism uncorrupted by the later rabbis. In this paper, I will explore how Basnage synthesized earlier traditions about Jesus and reshaped them to fit his larger themes about Jewish history. In addition, I hope to explore how later Jewish and Christian historians relied upon Basnage's account of Jesus's life.

MARGHERITA PEPOLI (Sapienza University of Rome – EPHE, Paris)

Christ through Kabbalah: An Enquiry through the Hebrew-to-Latin Translations and the Writings of Cardinal Egidio Antonini da Viterbo

From XV century on, humanists and christian intellectuals tried to study and re-discover Classics and new sources that could allow them to reform and, in some ways restore, Christianity as a whole. One of the new literary sources that caught their attention was Hebrew literary tradition, especially the mystical texts of Kabbalah. From Giovanni Pico della Mirandola to Johannes Reuchlin, to even cardinal Egidio Antonini da Viterbo, all the intellectuals who studied Kabbalah among Christians focused their interest mainly on those teachings and interpretations that allowed them to confirm their own faith. A common aspect of these studies, for the most part mediated by translations from Hebrew to Latin, are the references to the Trinitarian dogma and to Jesus Christ presumably found by humanists in these kabbalistic texts. Through an analysis of some of the passages we can find in Egidio da Viterbo's manuscripts of Latin translations of Hebrew kabbalistic texts, I will try to describe the image of Christ that emerges from the production of his roman scribal atelier, and the writings he elaborated.

ULRICH GROETSCH (University of North Alabama)

Crows like a Cock but Was not a Cock! Early Modern Savants Puzzle over a Biblical Enigma

At that moment, while (Peter) was still speaking, the cock crowed." This event recorded in the writings of the evangelists can easily be numbered among the most enigmatic episodes in the New Testament. Its theological significance, of course, remains undisputed, symbolizing the weakness of men and the saving grace of Christ. It is no coincidence that a rooster adorns the steeples of many Christian churches. Similarly, the "denial of St. Peter" has been immortalized in countless paintings and musical scores by giants such as Caravaggio and Karel Dujardin. But did a cock really crow? According to Jewish sources, chickens were not even permitted within the limits of the holy city. Whereas modern audiences may be somewhat dismissive of what seems like an overly pedantic question, the biblical scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth century felt differently. To Christian Hebraists such as Adriaan Reland from Utrecht (1676–1718) the truth and credibility of Christian doctrine were at stake here. And they were not incorrect in their assessment. As I have shown in my previous work, around the same time, the German Enlightenment radical Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) drafted his scathing attack on Scripture, in which philology played a key role in undermining the credibility of Scripture. My paper serves as a "prequel" to my earlier work on Reimarus, demonstrating how early modern Hebraists and savants, relying on their expertise of Jewish sources and law, attempted to reconcile the apparent disagreement of the New Testament account with the socio-economic, legal, and cultural realities of ancient Israel.

Contexts of Early Christianity

(Chair: John S. Kloppenborg)

HARRY O. MAIER (Vancouver School of Theology – Max Weber Centre, University of Erfurt)

The Social Networks, Patronage, and Correspondence of Cyprian of Carthage and His Rivals: Toward a New Description of Third-Century Christian Conflicts

Cyprian of Carthage has significantly influenced how church historians describe early Christianity. His responses to those evading imprisonment, exile, or execution during the reigns of emperors Decius, Gallus, and Valerian are now classic examples in early Christian studies. This is partly due to the survival and transmission of his letters, the largest Christian letter collection from the pre-Constantinian era. Additionally, Cyprian was among the top 3% of economic elites in the Roman Empire, and his wealth enabled him to support Christ assemblies across North Africa. His resources allowed him to send letters throughout the Mediterranean, building relationships with Christians and establishing social networks. His wealth, social connections, and correspondence helped him maintain authority despite differing views on how to treat those who complied with imperial demands for sacrifices and oaths to Roman deities. However, his opponents also used letters strategically, supported by other wealthy patrons, to promote their allegiances. This paper uses Social Network Theory (SNT) to analyze the creation of these networks, their costs, and their function in religious rivalry. Although SNT has been applied to other aspects of early Christianity, it has not been used to explore the connectivity of North African Christians. SNT helps recognize and analyze the fluidity of allegiances during this formative period, challenging monolithic narratives of early Christianity's rise and success. The paper will demonstrate how SNT offers insights into the social hubs, strong and weak ties, and the overall function of these networks. It will show the value of SNT in representing Christian origins, particularly concerning third-century developments in North Africa and the western Mediterranean.

WILLIAM ARNAL (University of Regina, Canada)

LARPing the New World: How Paul “Wore” Jesus

In his brilliant *Having the Spirit of Christ*, Giovanni Bazzana enjoins the reader to “dare to take [our texts] literally.” I would like to explore what doing so might look like with respect to Paul’s references in Galatians to “putting on” Christ, and to the rather puzzling reference he makes to Jesus having been “publicly exhibited as crucified” before the Galatians’ own eyes (Gal 3:1). Galatians also contains a statement (6:17) that Paul bears physical marks of Christ on his own body. Specifically, this paper will explore the possibility that Paul, while possessed or inhabited by Christ’s spirit, performed an act of crucifixion, perhaps with props such as masks. Admittedly speculative, the paper will draw from ancient cultic practice, cross-cultural evidence of spirit-possession, and analysis of the text of Galatians itself, and suggest a view of Pauline practice that may help defamiliarize this all-too-familiar figure

CHRISTINA GOUSOPOULOS (University of Toronto)

When Networks Fail: Modelling Network Collapse and Decline in Greco-Roman Associations

In recent scholarship of Greco-Roman associations, social network analysis has increasingly become an important tool, both to understand the diffusion of elective cults and, to a lesser extent, to track their decline. This paper considers network collapse as one possible mechanism for group failure and demise in the ancient Mediterranean world, with a particular focus on the cult of Mithras and early Christ groups. While our data for cultic decline is irreparably lacunary, I argue that the model of network collapse is not only productive for understanding the role of social relationships in the adoption/demise of cultic groups, but it is further helpful to combat triumphalist narratives of 'Christianization' during the fourth century CE.

GUSTAVO B. BARROSO (University of Lisbon)

Can Disease Lead to Persecution? The Case of the Saint Cyprian’s Plague

I propose to analyze the impact of the St. Cyprian Plague on two persecutions of Early Christianity. This pandemic was named after St. Cyprian, whose *De mortalitate* described some symptoms of a disease that hit the Roman Empire’s main cities such as Carthage, Rome, and Alexandria. Disease was a heavenly punishment against an unholy people. However, Christians would be saved, and the heathens would not. In the third century, the Empire struggled not only with disease but also with major military challenges from within (secession of the West, uprising on the East) and from outside (the deep invasions of Barbarians). Amid this unprecedented chaos in Roman history, Christians began to be persecuted *officially* and *systematically*. Decius (c.249-251) and Valerian (c.253-260) targeted this obscure sect that resisted to worship the emperor. The high-ranked Christians were especially targeted, and the Roman episcopate was severely disrupted. Eusebius of Caesarea stated that duress was exerted to extract apostasy. Or were Christians the perfect scapegoats for divine wrath, military, and sanitary mayhem, from a pagan point of view? Were the persecutors willing to annihilate an unpleasant and exclusivist religion that even rejected Roman gods? Questions like these will be explored in this paper to attempt to understand the relationship between this plague and the following Christian persecutions led by Rome.

Discussion of Books

(Chair: Luca Arcari)

BOOK DISCUSSION 1

A. ANNESE, F. BERNO, D. TRIPALDI (a cura di), *I codici di Nag Hammadi. Prima traduzione italiana integrale*. Roma: Carocci, 2024

Discussants: EDMONDO LUPIERI (Loyola University, Chicago), PIERLUIGI PIOVANELLI (EPHE - École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris; online)

Respondents: ANDREA ANNESE (University of Bologna), FRANCESCO BERNO (Sapienza University of Rome), DANIELE TRIPALDI (University of Bologna)

BOOK DISCUSSION 2

EBERHARD BONS, DANIELA SCIALABBA (eds.) in collaboration with ANNA MAMBELLI, *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (HTLS), 4 vols. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020-

Discussants: ROBERTO NICOLAI (Sapienza University of Rome), EMANUELE CASTELLI (University of Messina)

Respondents: EBERHARD BONS (Université de Strasbourg), ANNA MAMBELLI (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia), DANIELA SCIALABBA (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)

Explorations of Peoplehood in the Ancient Mediterranean

(Chairs: Maia Kotrosits and Philip A. Harland)

ANDREW DURDIN (Florida State University)

Magians Without Magic: An Ethnographic Reading of Pliny the Elder's "History of Magic"

For the last half century, the category of magic has been consistently derided in ancient studies for its lack of analytic utility. Yet, despite such criticisms, few efforts have been made to redescribe sources traditionally understood as "magic" as evidence for other issues in the study of religion. This paper works in that direction. I offer a reading of Pliny the Elder's "history of magic" (*NH* 30.1-18) as a piece of ancient ethnography, or in keeping with the description of this unit, "ethnographic culture." In the opening of *Natural History* book 30, Pliny offers an account of the *magicae vanitates* ("magical/Magian arts"), tracing the temporal and geographical expansion of this "most fraudulent of arts" from its ancient origins in Persia, with Zoroaster and the Magi, up to his own times in the latter first century CE. However, rather than reflecting a "strong view of magic" (Gordon 1999), I argue that Pliny's text represents a form of ethnic theorizing, deploying imperial "habits of compilation" to manage, via textualization, the diversity of the Roman empire and the human and cultic mobility it fostered (Konig and Whitmarsh 2007, 4). Specifically, using the conventions of ancient *historia*, Pliny argues that the disparate array of ritual technologies across the Greek and Roman worlds, past and present, share a common origin in the Persian Magi and that this common lineage has made them enemies of Roman *humanitas*. In short, Pliny contends that in antiquity, the often-fuzzy line between proper and improper cult practice is ultimately an ethnic one—the Magians and their descendants were not Roman, and were even anti-Roman. Thus, rather than a touchpoint in the longue durée of ancient magic, Pliny's text, when set in the discursive economy of the late first century CE, reveals a growing intellectual preoccupation in the early Principate with the social reality of cultic diversity and human and cultural movement within the Roman empire

CAVAN CONCANNON (University of Southern California)

Ethnicity, Groups, and Movement: Making Ethnic Identity across Distance

This paper looks at the ways in which ancient groups made, maintained, and transformed the ethnic coding of their groups across distance. The analysis treats ethnicity as a mode of aspirational rhetoric that frames and codes groupness as ethnic. Studies of ethnic reasoning often focus on cosmology, etiology, and other forms of literate identity construction. In this paper, I explore how attempts to connect across geographic distance in the ancient Mediterranean had effects on, or could be mobilized around, local and inter-regional modes of ethnic reasoning. I draw on evidence from Egyptian cultic groups, ethnically-coded associations, Greek and Latin epistolary collections, and itinerant ritual practitioners. These sources show the variety of ways in which geographic distance, physical movement, and institutional interconnectivity were entwined with rhetorics of groupness and ethnic identity.

J. ANDREW DOOLE (University of Innsbruck)

Inventing a Diaspora: The (Non-)Customs of the Christians according to Bardaisan of Edessa

While the anonymous work *To Diognetus* contrasts the Christians to the Jews/Judeans by insisting that Christians cannot be identified by any customs or identity markers because they blend in completely to the society in which they live, Bardaisan of Edessa argues that Christians – like Persians and Jews/Judeans – observe their own customs regardless of where they live. But Christians do not take their culture with them through migration, rather “the Messiah has raised a new race in all places”. Bardaisan engages in negative ethnography, arguing that Christians do not adopt the customs of the lands in which they live. I will show that the existence of diaspora communities allows him to explain Christian practices without the need for genealogy, physiognomy, or other elements of ancient ethnography.

PHILIP A. HARLAND (York University, Toronto)

Criminalizing Conquered Peoples

The Roman historian Curtius Rufus (*History of Alexander* 7.8.19-21) imagines an encounter between a Scythian ambassador and Alexander of Macedon just before the “bloody slaughter” of these northern peoples. Challenging Alexander’s assumption that all such “barbarians” are merely “bandits,” the Scythian enumerates all of the territories that Alexander has wrongly taken and retorts that, in fact, it is Alexander who is the true bandit. Using this episode as a launching point, this paper examines processes of criminalization in the Roman era. The paper delves into both literary (Strabo, Livy) and epigraphic evidence (from northern frontiers) regarding a variety of peoples and considers the involvements of Judeans and Jesus adherents in these widespread discourses.

From the History of Exegesis to Reception History and Beyond

(Chairs: Laura Carnevale and Edmondo F. Lupieri)

ANNA MAMBELLI (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia) – FABIO TUTRONE (University of Palermo) // DAVIDE DAINESI (University of Bologna) – LAURA BIGONI (University of Bologna)

Resilient Septuagint and uBIQUity: Interrelated Research Projects on Sacred Texts and their Heritages in the Digital World

Resilient Septuagint and *uBIQUity* are transdisciplinary research projects linked by common methodologies and aims. Both originate from the idea behind the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (ed. by Eberhard Bons and Daniela Scialabba, in collaboration with Anna

Mambelli, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020–), a multi-volume dictionary on the history of the most significant terms or word groups attested in the Septuagint Bible, from Classical Greek to early Christian literature. *Resilient Septuagint*, an Italian Research Project of Relevant National Interest (PRIN 2022), focuses on the semantics of “killing” and “healing” in the Septuagint (Qo/Eccl 3:3) and its reception in Patristic and Late Antique sources (3rd cent. BCE – 5th cent. CE). *uBIQUity*, which incorporates the “BI” of the Bible(s) and the “QU” of the Qur’ān in its title and is part of the larger PNRR project *ITSERR – Italian Strengthening of the ESFRI RI RESILIENCE* funded by *NextGenerationEU*, aims at investigating the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions in different environments and historical periods through two huge *corpora*: Greek and Latin Christian commentaries on the Bible(s) written from the Patristic age until the Late Byzantine period, and classical commentaries on the Qur’ān written in Arabic (*tafāsīr*) from the rise of Islam until the 15th century. In terms of Digital Humanities, *uBIQUity* aims to develop a new research tool that can identify with a high degree of accuracy quotations/allusions to the Bible(s) and the Qur’ān in Christian and Islamic commentaries. Intertextual references, conscious or unconscious, work as invisible “places of memory”, thus making the sacred texts “ubiquitous”. For the development of this semantic search engine, *uBIQUity* closely cooperates with *Resilient Septuagint* for the Greek Bible(s) and Patristic section and includes an investigation into generative AI strategies and tools to generate new knowledge on biblical filigree.

GIOVANNI HERMANIN DE REICHENFELD (Sapienza University of Rome)

Quotation Culture and Computational Analysis in Early and Late Antique Christian Biblical Exegesis: Methodological Challenges and the Case Studies of Origen of Alexandria

Knowledge production in the ancient world is shaped by the use of quotations, so much so that scholars commonly refer to it as 'quotation culture'. This broad definition encompasses both the study of the methods and practices of quoting and appropriating texts by ancient authors, as well as understanding how deeply ancient cultures were shaped by rephrasing and repositioning quotations in literary, philosophical and theological production. In the last twenty years, studies on Graeco-Roman and New Testament quotations' structure (e.g. composite, combined, conflated, condensed) has thrived. Contrarily, very few studies tried to apply the principles and finding of this line of investigation to early and late antique Christian exegesis of the Bible. This paper sprouts from the belief that studying the patterns and clusters of biblical quotations and how they changed over time is crucial for understanding how knowledge production worked in early Christian groups, whose doctrines and beliefs were patterned after the biblical texts and various canons. With this framework in mind, the paper discusses two methodological issues. First it will reflect on the application of definitions and findings of quotation culture studies to non-narrative texts concerning biblical exegesis (treaties, homilies, commentaries). Secondly, it will discuss the eventual benefits and challenges that the application of computational analysis methods such as network analysis graph and social network analysis could bring to the study of quotation pattern and clusters in ancient Christian biblical exegesis by presenting the case-study of Origen of Alexandria.

GIULIO MARIOTTI (Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose “Romano Guardini”, Trento – Istituto di Scienze Religiose “Centro Studi Teologici”, Bolzano)

The “Domesticated Apostle”: The Invention of Anti-Jewish Paul

The current emergence of the «within Judaism Perspective» and interpretations that go beyond supersessionism are the result of nearly a century of Pauline studies history, in which attempts have been made to restore Paul to his authentic image. This became necessary because since the era of heresiologists and apologists, there has been an attempt to dissociate the Apostle and his writings from the groups of so-called Judaizers, often portraying him with an anti-Jewish face. According to John Gager, the end result of this process led to considering Paul a «domesticated apostle». The subsequent development was by John Chrysostom and Augustine, who proposed

two interpretive lines that continued throughout the Middle Ages into the modern era. They stem from a debate no longer focused on church members from Judaism but on the intrinsic relationship between Christianity and Judaism. It can be asserted that the reception of Paul, already in the 2nd century CE, was not free from ideological claims or was particularly influenced by the debate against what were considered heresies such as Gnosticism and Marcionism. It is within the dialectic between these positions that a supersessionist image of Paul will find space, which for many centuries will be identified with the Apostle's own thinking to the point of making him the champion of anti-Judaism. This paper, drawing on the thoughts of authors like Justin Martyr and Tertullian, as well as John Chrysostom and Augustine, seeks to show how the supersessionist and anti-Jewish image of Paul originated.

Gospel of Thomas, Nag Hammadi, and Gnosticism

(Chairs: Andrea Annese, Francesco Berno, Claudio Gianotto)

LOUIS PAINCHAUD (Laval University, Canada)

"During Eight Days before Three Days" (EvJud 33:34): Narrative Weft and Allusive Warp in the *Gospel of Judas*

Since it was first published in 2006, the chronological data contained in the *incipit* of the *Gospel of Judas* (EvJud 33:3-6) have remained an enigma, unresolved by Matteo Grosso's discussion (2009) or by subsequent commentaries. Its solution lies on the one hand, in the temporal indications contained in the narrative framework of the text concerning the crucifixion and the arrest in the Garden of Olives assimilated to the Transfiguration and, on the other hand, in the chain of allusions that support it. The intersection of this narrative weft and this warp of allusions makes it possible to situate this dialogue between Jesus and Judas at a precise moment in the narratives of Jesus' life, namely during the eight days preceding the transfiguration (Lk 9:28). From a methodological point of view, this reading highlights the 'texture' of the *Gospel of Judas* and the need to recognize and decode the chains of allusions on which its narrative plot is woven.

EINAR THOMASSEN (University of Bergen)

Valentinus' Letter to Agathopous Rediscovered (?)

The recent claim (Porter 2023 = VC online preprint) that Ps.-Basilus *ep.* 366 is identical to Valentinus' *Letter to Agathopous*, previously known from a citation by Clement of Alexandria, naturally deserves careful evaluation. The proposed paper will contribute to this task by considering the extent to which the letter is consistent with what we otherwise know about Valentinus' ideas and Valentinianism in general. Special attention will be given to the Christology of the text, which promises to enrich our understanding of Valentinus' view of the incarnation and its soteriological significance.

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN (Aarhus University)

Unravelling the Basic Semiotic System of the Gospel of Truth with a Focus on Its Bearing Concept and Their Afterlife in Subsequent Valentinian Christ Religion

The Gospel of Truth of Nag Hammadi Codex One is a unique and enigmatic text of early Valentinian Christ religion. From a fourth order perspective, EV constitutes a revelatory, comforting instruction that in many ways work as a piece of rewritten Scripture of Paul and the Gospel of John. Additionally, it introduces a number of interconnected semiotic clusters introducing new concepts into the mental world of formative Christ religion. The paper explores these concepts as adaptive responses to a new socio-cultural situation of early Christ religion

and proceeds to tease apart their semiotic function and their isotopic relationship in the discourse of EV. Finally, the paper looks into the afterlife of these concepts in subsequent forms of Valentinianism.

EUGEN STAFIE (Free University of Berlin)

A Multiform Beast: The Theriomorphic Demiurge as the Irrational World Soul in *The Apocryphon of John*

My presentation aims to highlight the Platonic tradition underlying the motif of the theriomorphic evil ruler in *The Apocryphon of John*. According to the shorter version of the text, Yaldabaoth has "the face of a snake and the face of a lion" (BG 37, 21), while the longer version depicts him as "a lion-faced serpent" (II 10, 9). Although the recensions offer a significantly different picture, due to the integration of different sources in their narrative structure, I argue that they both have a unifying background that stems from *The Republic* (588b-e), where Plato symbolically depicts the two irrational parts of the human soul as a multi-headed beast and a lion. The starting point of my investigation is the narrative section featured in the long recension of *The Apocryphon of John* on the origin of human procreation. The text states that responsible for it is the chief ruler who supplied Adam and Eve with sexual desire "from his counterfeit spirit/περιπνά ετωββιαειτ" (II 24,30-31). The Greek correspondent of ωββιαειτ is ποικίλος, which means multiform. Plato uses this term to describe the lowest part of the soul/έπιθυμητικός, which he also calls multi-headed/πολυκέφαλος and a monster/θηρίον (Rep., 588c and 605a). Based on this observation, I will then read through a Platonic lens the passages in *The Apocryphon of John* referring to Yaldabaoth's ability to change his appearance due to the "multitude of faces"/"multitude of forms" (II 11,35-12-3; BG:42, 11-13) he possesses. This approach makes it possible to precisely correlate them with Typhon's snake heads, which in Plato's account symbolizes the appetites of the lowest part of the soul, while the spirited part of the soul, depicted by Plato as a lion, along with its inclination to anger, can be equated to the lion-like aspect of Yaldabaoth and his roaring wrath.

Issues of Method: New 'Secular' Approaches to Early Christian Research

(Chairs: Roberto Alciati and Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli)

HAL TAUSSIG (Union Theological Seminary, New York)

Mythmaking, Politics, and the Rise and Fall of the Christian Myth

Mack's analysis of mythmaking is enmeshed in his social formation theory, ritual theory, and cultural analysis. In direct attention to Mack's *The Rise and Fall of the Christian Myth*, this paper addresses Mack's terms relative to both ancient and (post) modern politics and extends his analysis of mythmaking on two different levels: the ancient Mediterranean and North African religious contexts and contemporary North and Central American perspectives. It will first discuss mythmaking in the Nag Hammadi text "Thunder, Perfect Mind" (NHC VI,2) in conversation with Roman power. Next, it will connect this examination to Mack's analysis of the American Christian myth, nationalism, and politics of cultural amnesia.

KATHRYN LOFTON (Yale University)

America: A Mythic Problem in the Study of Religion

Why does modern America tempt Burton Mack, a scholar of late antiquity, to explore it mythically? Departing from Mack's description of why he wrote *Myth and the Christian Nation*, *Christian Morality*, and *The Rise and Fall of the Christian Myth*, this talk asks what kind of

a subject America for the history of religions. Reflecting on the post-9/11 public Christian jingoism in America, Mack writes, "There was little left of what Protestant Christians had understood as Christianity except the archaic fascination with sovereignty, power, and authority which was now being transferred from the deity in his cosmic realm to the hands of the conservative politicians and financial institutions of the American nation-state." Scholars of American religious studies predict that Mack's analysis of American myth derives from a particular position toward Protestantism. This talk asks, with Mack, whether religion has anything left to say about the social and cultural issues of the present, post-10/7, state of the world. Included what will be considered is how Christian theology informs Mack's analysis and whether the study of religion has any salience after Christendom.

PHILIPPA TOWNSEND (University of Edinburgh)

Myth and History in the Story of Manichaean Origins

This paper draws on insights from Burton Mack's work to interrogate scholarly narratives of the origins of Manichaeism. I examine how scholarship has used the terms 'myth' and 'history' to distinguish between different Manichaean sources and assign value to them accordingly. In particular, I examine how the discovery of the Cologne Mani Codex (CMC), a collection of stories about the life and mission of Mani, has shaped the scholarly story of Manichaean origins. Mack's critique of New Testament scholarship is relevant in two ways to scholarship on the CMC: firstly, because the authors and editors of the CMC consciously referenced and replicated aspects of the New Testament Gospels' origin stories, producing narrative similarities that were recognizable and consequently plausible to scholars of early Christianity; secondly, because Manichaean sources have frequently been read through embedded narratives of Christian origins. Reflecting on Manichaean origin stories provides insights into how 'the Christian myth' (in Mack's phrase) continues to shape the ways in which scholars understand, categorize, and historicize religious traditions.

EDUARD IRICINSCHI (Fulbright Scholar at Princeton University)

The Search for an Imperfect Method in the Study of Religion: Redescription in Burton L. Mack and Jonathan Z. Smith

This paper will investigate the four-step research method proposed by Jonathan Z Smith and adopted and refined by Burton L. Mack. The two scholars envisaged its stages – "description," "comparison," "redescription," and "rectification of categories" – in related but subtly different ways. These differences are articulated, this paper argues, by radical reactions to the North American academic establishment, or, to be more precise, on the one hand, a more economical take on the unbridled methodological optimism in the phenomenology of religion, characteristic of Mircea Eliade's comparative studies, and an intellectual challenge to Gospel-centrism, the cardinal historical value attributed to the text of the New Testament, on the other hand. In conclusion, the paper argues that most current North American and European scholars of religion and the New Testament are still working out the methodological consequences, rigors, and limitations of redescription in a post-Mack and post-J.Z. Smith era.

Jewish History and Hellenistic Judaism

(Chairs: Dario Garribba and Marco Vitelli)

GABRIELE BOCCACCINI (University of Michigan)

Did Paul Know Enoch Literature? A Reopened Question

In Pauline studies, a consolidated interpretative trend underlines the presence of apocalyptic elements in his thought, especially regarding eschatological expectations of cosmic redemption. However, the myth of Paul's rejection of Judaism and the insistence on his supposedly unique view of justification led New Testament scholars (notably, Emmanuele da San Marco in "Biblica", 1937) to quickly dismiss R.H. Charles's claim that "the Apostle was well acquainted with and used the Book of Enoch" (1893). Only in recent years have some Enoch specialists (George Nickelsburg, James Waddell, Gabriele Boccaccini, James Scott, and Stewart Tyler) reopened the question, shifting the emphasis from eschatology to protology. In their view, Paul the apocalyptic Jew and follower of Jesus fits into a much larger debate within first-century Judaism regarding the problem of the origin of evil and the remedies for it through divine grace in the imminence of the last judgment. The debate, originating within the Enochic tradition, found different answers in the diversity of Second Temple Judaism, from the Book of Jubilees (and the Essene tradition) to the emergence in 4 Ezra (and proto-rabbinic traditions) of the concept of the evil inclination (yetzer hara). Far from turning away from Judaism and being alien to any Enochic influence, Paul more than anyone else saw the coming and sacrificial death of the Messiah as the fulfillment of Enoch's "prophecies" and the definitive remedy for the power of evil.

MICHAEL DAISE (College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia)

Iudeorum Romanum: The Jewish Diaspora in Rome and Early Christ-Believing Groups

The Jewish communities in 1st century Rome figure significantly in accounts of early Christ-believers. Not least is their likely presence, as converts, among 'the beloved of God in Rome' to whom Paul addresses his epistle of that name (Romans 1:7), whether as longtime residents of the city or as recent immigrants, such as Paul knew from the east (Romans 16:3-16). They also feature in Acts. They are found on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 2:10). They are the kinspeople to whom Aquila and Priscilla migrated from Pontus, and with whom they were expelled under Claudius (Acts 18:2). And they are the people whose leaders are summoned and reproved by Paul when he arrives in the city for trial before Caesar (Acts 28:17-28). The data on these communities has now been revisited and updated by Samuele Rocca, as part of his monograph *In the Shadow of the Caesars: Jewish Life in Roman Italy* (Brill, 2022). Taking his discussion as a point of departure, this paper assesses the new *status quaestionis* for its bearing on nascent groups of Christ-believers. Special attention will be given to (1) the history and location of Jewish settlements in Rome; (2) the channels by which Jews came to the city; (3) the social and legal status of the Jews who came, individually and collectively; (4) the organizational framework of the several discrete Jewish populations that emerged; and (5) the relations of these populations with the city's inhabitants, including the provocations behind the imperial expulsions.

SANDRA GAMBETTI (College of Staten Island, New York)

The Way to Deal with It: The Roman Institutional Tools Granted to the Jews. The Case of Alexandria's Philo and Beyond

Philo of Alexandria opens *Legatio ad Gaium* with the admission of having failed, as a member of the Jewish *gerousia*, in the negotiations with the Roman Emperor about the Jewish rights of residence in the city. This paper will focus on the political tool, not limited to the *gerousia*, which the Jews had at their disposal to secure their civic and religious life in Alexandria and in the other cities of the eastern Roman empire.

ARIEL LEWIN (University of Basilicata)

The Jews Against the Nabataeans: The Story of Silleus

Thanks mainly to the detailed account of Flavius Josephus we are particularly well informed about the history of relations between the Jews and the Nabataeans in the period between about 24 and 8 BC. The figure of the powerful Nabataean minister Silleus played a central role in the history of diplomatic relations and wars between the Nabataeans and the Jews in those years. This paper will discuss some important aspects of the events surrounding him, with the aim of clarifying the causes of the growing friction between the two kingdoms and understanding the ways in which Augustus resolved their dispute.

Luke and Acts in Their Historical, Anthropological, and Literary Context

(Chairs: Michael A. Daise, Dorota M. Hartman, Fabrizio Marcello)

FABRIZIO MARCELLO (École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem)

Feeding Before the End: Luke 12:41–46 in Light of the Zenon Archive

In his parable of the steward awaiting his master's return (Luke 12:41–46 // Matthew 25:45–51), Luke articulates the steward's primary task of providing food for the servants with an image of a well-run household in mind. Unlike Matthew, he uses a technical term, *τὸ σιτομέτριον* (v. 43), to describe the food allowances to be distributed to the household employees. Commentaries on this passage make only general references to dictionaries and lexicons. Reference is sometimes made to inscriptions from Asia Minor that describe sitometria as a quasi-institutionalized form of social welfare provided by municipal structures. However, an analysis of the documentary papyri belonging to the Zenon archive, which constitutes one of the richest records of household management in the Ptolemaic period, allows us to reconstruct the sitometric system in detail. By placing it in a precise social setting, this exercise in microeconomics serves in turn to better detail the parable's meaning.

PAOLO COSTA (University of Genoa – Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)

Luke *iuris studiosus*, between *Lokalkolorit* and the Partings of the Ways

The significance of the presence of legal and administrative data in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles is commonly recognized by the exegetes. However, the interpretations of this presence are divergent. For some scholars, it represents an index of Luke's reliability; for others, it is a sign of fiction style. The value of this presence has been interpreted differently by those who hypothesize that the aim of the book is to be an *apologia pro imperio* and those who see it as an *apologia pro ecclesia*. In recent years, there has been a growing interest among legal historians in Luke's writings. The purpose of this paper is to critically present these numerous recent contributions from legal historians who interpret Lukan data – together with literary, epigraphic, and papyrological sources – as relevant sources for reconstructing the provincial legal context of the early empire. This approach moves from the text to better reconstruct the context; such an approach is also very useful for exegetes who, with a better-reconstructed context, can return to the text with a new perspective. Furthermore, this paper aims to show how the presence of such data, and particularly the importance of the enforcement of Roman criminal law norms, is relevant for understanding the relationship between Judaism and early Christianity and, therefore, for a new interpretation of the question of the Partings of the Ways. Some examples of the fruitfulness of this interdisciplinary approach will be presented, focusing in particular on Acts 17:1-10a; 18:12-16; 19:23-40; 22-26.

Proven Reality: The Conflict between the Apostles and the Leaders of Jerusalem in Acts 2–5 as Disclosure of Christian Identity

After being filled with the Holy Spirit the apostles, namely Peter, fulfill the Lord's commandment (cf. Luke 24,47f. and Acts 1,8) and preach the crucified and risen Jesus in Jerusalem as a first step to spread his testimony all over the world (Acts 2–5). Therefore, the first who are confronted with the appeal to repent and receive forgiveness in his name are those responsible for the crucifixion (2,22f.; 3,13–15; 4,10f.; 4,27; 5,30)! The leaders in Jerusalem threaten to execute them as well (5,33; cf. Luke 6,11) and even have them flogged (Acts 5,40; cf. Luke 22,22). Thus, the apostles do not only testify about Jesus as bystanders but continue his fate. And since Christ's passion was the final consequence of his just existence (cf. 23,47) and his messianic work (cf. 24,26,46) as planned by God (cf. Acts 2,23; 4,28) it seems that the continuity to the apostles does not only result from the same external circumstances but expresses that the apostles take part in Jesus' mission and even in his identity. This paper wants to explore how Acts 2–5 portrays the threats to the apostles as a feature of their new identity. It argues that the conflict with the leaders results from an unhindered relationship with God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit (cf. 2,38). The apostles act in the frame of a new reality centered around the Lord (cf. a.o. 3,6,16; 5,29) and even their personality is transformed to boldness (cf. 4,13,31). Risking conflict and punishment is an act of obedience to the real leader Jesus (5,21,31f.) and manifests the development of a new community of righteous separated from former leaders (cf. a.o. 2,43–47; 4,23f.). Narrating at first glance only a human power struggle, Acts hints here with the historiographical means of its time towards the reality of salvation.

RAFAŁ WĘDZICKI (École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem)

“To Which God Shall I Pray in Order to Be Saved?”: Paul, Pythoness and Greek Oracular Enquiries

According to the narrative of Acts, Paul and Silas, in the course of their missionary activity at Philippi, had to confront a local *mantis* – a female slave who had a spirit of divination in her (16:16–18). The pythoness introduces the Christian missionaries to the local populace as “servants of the Most High God, who preach to you a way of salvation” (v. 17). Commentators sensible to the Graeco-Roman context of Acts usually point towards a possible ambiguity of such presentation due to the popularity of *Zeus Hypsistos* / *Theos Hypsistos* cults, seeing Luke as exploiting a common *topos* of ambiguity of oracles. However thus far, what has not been noticed by scholars is that ancient records and tools of oracular enquiry feature *soteria* as a prominent concern of consultants. The ancients turned to various methods of divination in order to learn how to secure safety and well-being or find deliverance when facing danger, sometimes asking questions about the proper divinity to which a cultic action should be addressed. An analysis of a series of sources regarding oracular enquiry (lamellae from Dodona, *Astragaloi*, *Sortes Astrampsychi*) may shed a new light on the nature of confrontation presented by Luke in Acts 16. Christian missionaries replace the pagan *mantis* by becoming authorities in matters pertaining to *soteria*.

Mark and the Other Gospels

(Chair: Mara Rescio)

AMIEL DRIMBE (University of Bucharest)

The Lion in Wilderness

The forty days of Jesus' temptation (Mk. 1:12-13) have often been associated with similar periods spent in the wilderness by Moses and Elijah, or with the Israelites' forty-year wandering through the Sinai desert. However, there is another potential parallel that exegetes have largely overlooked: the experience of King Nebuchadnezzar. In the Book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar is punished for the pride in declaring himself the ruler of the world (Dan. 4:30, LXX) by being sent "into the wilderness" (Dan. 4:25, LXX). According to the Septuagint, he is "chased" by angels for seven years (Dan. 4:32, LXX), whereas Theodotion's version states that he dwelled "with the wild beasts" (Dan. 4:32, Θ). In the 4th century, Aphrahat the Persian (*Demonstr.* 5.16) describes Nebuchadnezzar as a winged lion caged in the wilderness until his heart was humbled: transitioning from a king's heart to a lion's heart, then to an eagle's heart, and finally to a human heart. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is similarly portrayed as a winged lion (Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 3.11.8-9). His wilderness experience, among angels and wild beasts, follows immediately his act of humility—the baptism by John. Jesus approaches the Jordan as an ordinary man (Mark 1:9), but after His baptism, the heavens open and God the Father proclaims him the "Beloved Son" (1:10-11). The heavens remain open throughout His forty days in the wilderness, marked by the constant presence of angels. In the wilderness, Jesus reveals his status as a winged lion, demonstrating authority over angels, demons, wild beasts, and ultimately, over Satan and the whole world.

GIOVANNI IBBA (Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose della Toscana, Florence)

From Enochic Tradition to the Impure Spirits in Mark

If we consider the contents of these texts together (*The Book of the Watchers* of 1 Enoch; *Jubilees*, especially chap. 10; and 4Q510/ 4QShir^a), we are in a better position to understand why the impure spirit cries out in Mark 1:24. Jesus' presence is interpreted by the impure spirit as his ruin, probably because he regards him as the bringer of his own destruction: Jesus represents the final time for the spirit's role to corrupt, and, evidently, to possess human beings. The force of the impure spirit, as we can see in other episodes of Mark's Gospel (cf. 5:4), is considerable and frightening, and as such can be compared with the force attributed to the giants in the *The Book of the Watchers* (1 En. 7:2-6; 9:9). The brutality of the giants is described in the *The Book of the Watchers* as terrible and destructive (1 En. 7:3-6), and this brutality, in turn, brings about impurity and destruction. The impure spirits, produced from giants continue (Jub. 9:6-6) to corrupt the humanity after the Flood, but only until that final judgment. Thus, Jesus seems to portend a danger to the impure spirit; he is an eschatological personality, that is, one bound up with the final judgment. Perhaps in the figure of Jesus, we can also see a relationship with another idea in the Enoch tradition: the Son of Man's role in the final judgment, as found in *The Book of Parables* (1 En. 37-71).

STEPHAN HÜLLER (Independent Research, Canada)

Ad Fontes: New Images and the Exoneration of Morton Smith

The paper focuses on the scholarly contributions of Quentin Quesnell, particularly his scrutiny of the Letter to Theodore, which Morton Smith claimed to have discovered. This manuscript, attributed to Clement of Alexandria, includes references to a secret Gospel of Mark. Quesnell's mission to discredit the document's authenticity led him to Jerusalem in 1983, where he produced high-resolution photographic slides of the manuscript. These images were intended

for paleographic analysis to challenge the manuscript's authenticity. Contrary to Quesnell's objective, these slides have become invaluable for scholars, providing detailed insights into the text and script styles, thereby complicating the debate over its authenticity. The study also addresses the nuances in transcribing specific Greek terms from the manuscript, which differ from Smith's original interpretations. These differences have fueled ongoing discussions about the document's genuineness and whether it could have been a forgery by Smith. Interestingly, if Smith's interpretations are not supported by the manuscript, it undermines the argument that he forged the document, thus reshaping the narrative around Smith's credibility. Additionally, the study touches on the reception of the Gospel of Mark in the first three centuries, particularly a longer version reportedly circulated in Rome during the second century, which was linked to ritual nudity. This intriguing detail adds another layer to the complex history of the Gospel's transmission and its varied textual forms. Ultimately, the research highlights the importance of meticulous preservation and examination of historical documents, demonstrating how Quesnell's work inadvertently advanced biblical scholarship and nuanced the perception of Morton Smith's legacy.

MARA RESCIO (CISSR, Bertinoro / Adjunct Fellow, "Beyond Canon" Centre, University of Regensburg)

Sin, Divine Punishment, and Disease: Some Insights from Documentary Papyri

It has often been observed that the Gospel miracle stories are not always concerned with specifying the causes of the diseases that Jesus allegedly cured (see, e.g., John Granger Cook, "In Defence of Ambiguity: Is There a Hidden Demon in Mark 1.29–31?", *NTS* 43 [1997] 184–208). Such a textual ambiguity, which becomes particularly apparent in the case of healing stories other than exorcisms, leaves open to the scholar multiple possibilities of interpretation that can significantly change the meaning of a story. In this paper, which is part of a larger research project aiming to produce a Papyrological Commentary on all the miracle stories reported in the synoptic tradition, the thorny issue of the etiology of diseases will be explored starting from a comparative reading of the synoptic narratives in light of papyrological evidence coming from the Greco-Roman world. Special attention will be paid to the problem of the social construction of illness in the historical context of the Gospels, with a focus on the supposed link between illness and sin/transgression on the one hand, and between healing and forgiveness of sins on the other.

Methodologies of Jesus Research: The Transmissions of Words

(Chairs: Clare K. Rothschild and Mauro Pesce)

STEPHEN J. PATTERSON (Willamette University, Salem, Oregon)

Three Source Fragments in Thomas

The question of sources in the Gospel of Thomas has been overly fraught with the question of Thomas' relationship to the synoptic gospels. When these questions are uncoupled, allowing one to follow literary clues (both formal and thematic) in Thomas itself, multiple sources come to light. In this paper, I will discuss three: a three-saying *eratopokresis* sequence (sayings 51-53); a collection of three extended narrative "mysteries" (sayings 63-65); and a collection of 3 extended similes likening the "kingdom of the father" to various people in their various pursuits (sayings 96-98). Together they tell us something about the redactional touch of the Thomas sages; individually they offer a window into earlier contexts in which the sayings of Jesus were celebrated and pondered.

LUIGI WALT (University of Naples “L’Orientale”)

In Praise of Parallels: An Inventory (and a Few Remarks) against Exceptionalism in the Study of Paul and the Jesus Tradition

Just as it is true that no man ever steps into the same river twice, it is also true that the killer always returns to the scene of the crime. Ten years after the publication of a substantial work on Paul and the transmission of Jesus’s words (Luigi Walt, *Paolo e le parole di Gesù: Frammenti di un insegnamento orale*, 2013), I will therefore attempt to reflect again on the assumptions that guided me in that analysis. I will critically examine, in particular, the list of parallels provided in the appendix to the book, proposing an updated and corrected version of the list based on its own classification criteria. As I will try to show, what we still need to apply to the study of Paul and the early Jesus tradition is a ‘distant reading approach’, which can help us overcome crypto-theological concerns such as that of determining the degree of continuity or discontinuity between Jesus and Paul. In this sense, I will contend that it is too much parallelophobia that has driven scholars away from history, while a bit of parallelomania can lead them back to it. Analytical tools such as graphs, maps, and trees—all the more so if they result from the intersection of data collected with well-defined criteria (see Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History*, 2005)—will thus allow us to re-address the problem starting from the ‘data’ themselves, at the same time accounting for the theories we are using to create and analyze them.

[Book Discussion]

SANTIAGO GUIJARRO, *La memoria vivente di Gesù. Dinamiche della trasmissione orale*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2024.

Discussant: CLAUDIO GIANOTTO (University of Turin)

Respondent: SANTIAGO GUIJARRO (Pontifical University of Salamanca; online)

Oral and Written Sources of Early Christian Texts

(Chairs: Enrico Norelli and Claudio Zamagni)

SINCERO MANTELLI (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Rome)

Contra Esdram mulier potius quam ueritas uicit: The Partial Reception of 3 Esdr. 3, 12 in the Late Antique West and the Case of De singularitate clericorum

In the legend of the *Three Pages*, relayed by 3 *Ezra* 3, 1-5, 6 (Latin or *Ezra A* or *Ezra apocryphal*),^[1] the conclusion is left to a sentence which stating that woman has more power than anything else in the world, but truth triumphs over woman. In the story, the parallel between woman and truth is of crucial importance, given since it fits into the historical event narrated in the book: even King Darius is hostage to the power of his concubine Apame. If we look at the generally rather modest fortune of this text in late antique literature, we notice a different fate between East and West. If the parallelism between woman and truth is maintained in Greek-speaking authors, in the Latin world it seems that the reference to the feminine is overshadowed in favor of truth, which is made absolute, also thanks to a gnomic phrase: *ueritas uicit*. An exception is the pseudo-Cyprian writing *De singularitate clericorum* which refers to 3 *Esdr. 3, 12* with an expression – found in the title – unmistakably linked to the theme of the comparison between woman and truth. The reasons for such singularity must certainly be sought in the theme of the work, but perhaps also in the origin of the text and in the author’s reflections, which we are trying to investigate and bring out separately.

MATTEO MARIANI (Liceo scientifico Valeriani, Imola)

The Enochic Azazel in the Background of the Synoptic Tradition: Literary Dependencies and New Perspectives on the Logion of "the Strong Man" (Mk 3:27, Mt 12:29-30, Lk 11:21-23)

In Lv 16, as part of the ritual practices underlying *yôm kippûr*, there appears a well-known hapax (at least as far as canonical literature is concerned), a character who seems identifiable as a demonic entity associated with the ritual of the scapegoat: the enigmatic Azazel, demon of the desert. Without delving into the complicated editorial affair of this passage, I will attempt to highlight some aspects related to the demonology and etiology of evil in Second Temple and intertestamental Judaism. In order to do so, I will follow the traces left by the myth of Azazel in an apocryphal writing belonging to the apocalyptic genre: *Book of the Watchers*, first section of the so-called "Ethiopic Enoch" (*1Enoch*). After outlining the features of the "Enochic Azazel", I shall attempt to propose a parallel reading between *1Enoch* 8-13 and the *logion* about the strong man who must be bound in order to be defeated. This saying appears in Mk 3:27, Mt 12:29-30 and Lk 11:21-23, in the context of disputes over the authority with which Jesus casts out demons. The shift from the dimension of the Matthean Community to the wider perspectives of Q, plus the link with Is 49,24-25a, which will place this *logion* in a broader horizon, will hopefully help us to emphasize the influences of the Enochic demonology in the Synoptic Background.

ENRICO NORELLI (University of Geneva)

Καλάμῳ ἔνυσσον αὐτόν: Which Sources for *Gospel of Peter* 9?

Gospel of Peter 6-9 lists the mistreatment inflicted on Jesus before his crucifixion. Some elements match those of the synoptic tradition, others do not. Scholars have shown that the *Gospel of Peter* reveals a close connection with the exegetical tradition on the scapegoat (*Leviticus* 16). This connection has been studied in particular by John Dominic Crossan and Helmut Koester, also by comparison with the elements attributed to that ritual in *Barnabas* 7,8. However, a closer look shows that the situation is more complex. This paper aims to examine one of the actions: "they pricked him with a reed" (v. 9: καλάμῳ ἔνυσσον αὐτόν). A hypothesis of explanation appears possible within the history of the transmission of the stories about the Passion of Jesus.

Papyrology and Early Christ Groups

(Chairs: Peter Arzt-Grabner and Marco Stroppa)

CAMILLA RECALCATI (UCL Catholic University of Louvain – Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

The LXX Translators and their Villages: Jewish Presence in the Third-Century Fayum

While conventionally linked with Alexandria, this study proposes an alternative, placing the genesis of the LXX-Pentateuch within the wider context of the Jewish diaspora in Egypt, notably in the villages of the Fayum region. Utilizing Greek documentary sources such as the papyri of the *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* and funerary inscriptions, this paper delves into the dynamics of the many Jewish communities in the Fayum testing their plausible connection to the Biblical translation. Central to this investigation is the exploration of a novel hypothesis, building upon Aitken's work (2022), which suggests that the translation of the Torah may have originated in the Fayum rather than in Alexandria. Through a comprehensive examination of documentary sources, the Fayum region and its Jewish inhabitants in the 3rd century BCE, alongside an assessment of their interactions with central power structures, this study seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of the Septuagint within the context of the Jewish Hellenistic-Egyptian

diaspora. It positions the exploration of the Fayum region as a pivotal starting point for further inquiries into the origins and evolution of the Septuagint, and, especially to the cultural, educational and social background of its translators.

THOMAS WAYMENT (Brigham Young University, Provo, USA)

A Christian Hymn in an Unpublished Fourth Century Papyrus

P.Oxy. 72/64, an unpublished papyrus from the Oxford collection, contains fragments from three different Christian hymns. Two of the hymns are written acrostically, and one contains a refrain. The first hymn, the most complete of the three, preserves 17 complete lines of the hymn written in four-line stanzas that are composed acrostically, as well as an additional five fragmentary lines. The lines are written in a consistent poetic meter, and offer commentary on Matthew 25 as well as themes from James. In this presentation, I will present my edition of the hymn, discuss it in context with other early Christian hymns, and offer commentary on several of its lines. The first hymn is the earliest surviving fifteen syllable regulated hymn, a form that became popular in the later Byzantine tradition.

MARCO STROPPA (Istituto Papirologico "Girolamo Vitelli", University of Florence)

New Fragments from PSI I 6 and 7: The *Protevangelium Iacobi* again and a New Exemplar of the *De Pascha* by Meliton

The study of some inedited fragments from a late antique codex in the PSI collection leaded to the discovery of small portions of the *Protevangelium Iacobi* joining to the PSI I 6 (published by Girolamo Vitelli in 1912) and two fragments from the *De Pascha* by Meliton, an almost complete work transmitted by papyrological sources. The identification lies on the ground of few letters, but it seems to be enough sound. All these fragments are from the same artifact, a miscellaneous codex produced in Hermopolis in the 4-5th century which shares common features with similar books of the 4th century, as P.Beatty 12 and P.Bodmer C.

Discussions on the New Testament from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism

(Chairs: Gudrun Holtz and Matthias Morgenstern)

GUDRUN HOLTZ (University of Tübingen)

The Interpretation of the Commandment of Deut 6:5 in Romans 8 and Early Rabbinic Sources

In Early Judaism, Deut 6:5, the commandment addressed to Israel to love God, is widely interpreted. In the New Testament, these discussions are reflected in the Jesus tradition of the Synoptic Gospels in particular. In the *corpus paulinum* the topic hardly figures. Yet, in Rom 8 Paul takes it up seemingly in passing. The way it resonates in the context, however, is paralleled in early Rabbinic interpretations of the commandment. The paper analyzes the literary evidence and discusses the methodological issues involved.

MATTHIAS MORGESTERN (University of Tübingen)

Talmudic Responses to the Golden Rule in the New Testament

According to Matthew 7:12, 'the law and the prophets' are summarized in one sentence: 'Whatever you want people to do to you, do it to them!' In the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 31a), we find the 'Golden Rule' in its negative formulation: "That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah!" The Rabbis pass on this sentence in the mouth of Hillel in

Aramaic thus characterizing it as a *post-biblical* teaching. My lecture is intended to show that this sentence can be understood as a response to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and his commandment of love. A first indication is the fact that Hillel's sentence is set in the context of a discussion about the details of Sabbath observance and that the editors of the Talmud use a Greek word for explication. In addition, there are theological and anthropological discussions that have a humorous point: Rabbinic teaching can be better taught beginning with a milta de-bedihuta, a joke (Shabbat 30b): Hillel's demand is to be heard by a candidate for conversion standing 'on one leg'. The Talmud responds to the high demands of Christianity of all-encompassing love with its own humor.

FEDERICO DAL BO (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)

The Sovereign Messiah of the Law: Daniel Boyarin's Jewish Gospel and its Sabbatian Undertones

In my presentation, I will analyze Daniel Boyarin's monograph *The Jewish Gospels* from a religious studies perspective, focusing on his interpretation of Jesus as the "Sovereign Messiah of the Law." Boyarin's depiction of Jesus as a new lawgiver who establishes a new covenant with his followers aligns with his portrayal of Second Temple Judaism and Enochic Judaism tradition. My primary focus will be on Boyarin's application of a "Sabbatian paradigm," inspired by Scholem's research, which evaluates the fundamental dynamics of religiosity through a postmodern lens. Boyarin argues that Jesus' emphasis on the observance of the Sabbath highlights the fundamental importance of this day to Jewish religiosity. Drawing on Scholem's writings, Boyarin constructs a Sabbatian paradigm that analyzes the deep-seated religious impulses that underpin Jewish life. This perspective contends that the Sabbath, as the centerpiece of Jewish religious practice, is emblematic of Jewish religiosity as a whole. Boyarin applies this paradigm to his analysis of Jesus, arguing that Jesus' emphasis on the Sabbath illuminates his status as the "Sovereign Messiah of the Law." Overall, my presentation will explore Boyarin's interpretation of Jesus' significance within Judaism and the implications of his Sabbatian paradigm for understanding the religious experience of Jews and Christians alike.

Re-dating Early Christian Texts

(Chairs: Claudio Gianotto and Enrico Norelli)

KIMBERLY STRATTON (Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada)

Reconsidering the *Didache* as Evidence for First-Century 'Christian' Identity

Markus Vinzent's recent book, *Resetting the Origins of Christianity*, shifts the composition and/or recension of many canonical writings to the mid-second century, undermining the first-century date and priority as evidence for Christian origins that they are traditionally accorded in modern scholarship. Vinzent argues that the gospels in particular were not intended to be repositories of early Christian memory but were theologically motivated responses to Marcion's collection of Paul's letters and his composition of a gospel, which Vinzent argues is the first gospel that instigated the writing of others in response. Vinzent also surmises that Marcion is the first to use the title 'Christian' as a self-acclamation. There is much to recommend Vinzent's argument, which places Christian origins in the second century, following the Bar Kokhba revolt. Two witnesses to "Christian" identity in the first century raise potential challenges to Vinzent's historical reconstruction. The first is Josephus; in his *Testimonium Flavianum*, he not only describes Jesus as the Christ but refers to those who are called Christians after him (AJ 18.64). This indicates that followers of Jesus were already identified as a distinct and separate group, known by the title Christian, although it does not indicate whether followers of Jesus ascribed to

this label or not. Furthermore, Vinzent adeptly raises doubts about the authenticity of the *Test. Flav.* so one could ascribe the reference to the tribe (*phulon*) of Christians as an accompanying interpolation by Eusebius. The other early witness to the term "Christian" as a self-identifying label is the Didache (12.4). This text raises interesting questions by virtue of its apparent proximity to Judaism, often garnering the anachronistic label "Jewish-Christian." If we dispense with the *Test. Flav.* then the Didache would constitute the earliest use of this term and, more importantly, evidence for insider identification as "Christian." This paper will investigate the Didache as evidence for Christian identity in the late first or early second century (prior to Bar Kokhba). It will explore three possibilities: 1. the word Christian reflects a later addition to a document that, Milavec has argued, circulated orally (which would explain textual instability in extant manuscripts); 2. the Didache should be re-dated to the second century to align with Vinzent's theory; or 3. it does, in fact, provide evidence for an early identification with the term "Christian," supporting reigning scholarly theories and methods for studying Christian origins in the first century.

MARKUS VINZENT (King's College, London – Max Weber Centre, University of Erfurt)

The Two Pauline Letter Collections: What Are They (Content, Redactional Profiles) and when to Date the Letters?

Our early Christian authors tell us of two Pauline Letter collections, a 10-letter collection and a 14-letter collection. The first one was part of the "New Testament" that they credited to Marcion of Sinope, the second one was part of the larger collection of writings, known to us for the first time from the works of Irenaeus of Lyon (around 177) which during the third century adopted the title of "New Testament". The paper is going to present the two collections, ask whether and if so which kind of redactional profiles they show and how to date the letters contained in them.

Re-exploring the Apocryphal Continent: Texts, Paratexts, and Contexts

(Chairs: Tobias Nicklas and Luigi Walt)

JONATHAN CAHANA-BLUM (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

The Disease of Masculinity? Early Gnosticism on What's Wrong with Men

While gnostic myths are fond of ascribing the very creation of sexual differentiation to an evil and malignant creator, this has been variously interpreted as either the expression of hatred of the body (and concomitantly of feminine embodiment) or as a strive to androgyny (which, some would argue, is a male androgyny). My own research strategy was to delineate, through feminist and queer lens, how gendering itself was the problem for gnostics, and how that led them to reject masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. However, my recent research seems to suggest that even this is not the whole story. An early undercurrent in Gnosticism seems to have developed a special discontent with masculinity per se. This paper will address the remarkable and often over-looked idea evinced in the Berlin Codex version of the Apocryphon of John, that marital/opposite sexual relations are evil because they lead to procreation, and the source of this malady is in the masculine desire for progeny. After carefully tracing the changes, this stance has suffered in the later redacted versions of the Apocryphon of John, we should be in a better position to reevaluate other discussions of masculinity and opposite-sex acts in gnostic literature as well as their abstruseness in the contemporary normative cultural surroundings.

LAVINIA CERIONI (Aarhus University)

From Sophia to Logos: Theological Shifts in the Tripartite Tractate and Valentinian Theology

In the 2018 entry on the Tripartite Tractate in the Brill Encyclopedia on Early Christianity, Einar Thomassen writes that Tri. Trac., “for reasons unknown”, deliberately avoids the name Sophia for the errant aeon who disrupts the Pleromatic order, instead changing it to a generic logos. This paper aims to pick up this challenge and further explore the theological and philosophical implications of this shift from a feminine to a masculine aeon in Tri. Trac. and in Valentinian theology at large. In order to explore the transformation of “Sophia” into “Logos” the paper will proceed to situate this Valentinian work within the larger context of the Middle and Neoplatonic philosophies, account for the cross-fertilization with the so-called masculinization of the mother proper to later Sethian texts, analyze the reception of the Christian Logos theology into Valentinianism and examine the intricate relationship between late Valentinian theologians and the so-called mainstream Christian theologians, like Clement and Origen. This paper aims therefore to shed light on the place of Tri. Trac. in Valentinianism by evaluating the long-standing question of the role and significance of Sophia’s absence rather than her presence.

MAIA KOTROSITS (Harvard University)

Thinking Ethnicity and Social Mobility in the Cosmic Register: The Gospel of Philip and Origen of Alexandria

The Gospel of Philip has long puzzled readers not only for its cut-and-paste composition, which thwarts narrative readings, but for its paradoxical and rather metaphysical ruminations on status and social categories. This paper will focus precisely on the preoccupations with status and social categories that appear throughout the gospel, placing them alongside some of Origen of Alexandria’s own spiritualized negotiations of ethnic categories, belonging, and status. It will argue that such abstract and philosophical rhetorical gestures around these categories are something more and different than esoteric theological speculation: they provide ways of thinking through questions of social mobility and intractability.

PAMELA MULLINS REAVES (Colorado College)

Revelation, Testimony, and Ascent in the Paraphrase of Shem (NHC VII,1) and the First Apocalypse of James (NHC V,3; Cod. Tch. 2)

This paper examines language and concepts of testimony in the Paraphrase of Shem (NHC VII,1) and the First Apocalypse of James (NHC V,3; Cod. Tch. 2), especially in connection with privileged revelation and the prospect of ascent. In both texts, the provision of revealed knowledge prepares the recipients, Shem and James, to testify in the course of ascent and thus access desired superior realms. Through a close examination of this material, this paper shows how both texts engage in distinctive constructions of proper testimony, or martyrdom, in early Christian discourse and offer related paths for a reader’s participation, or imitation. Each text’s attention to cosmic figures who seek to hinder one’s progress similarly encourages a reframing of the prospects of suffering and persecution. Through this analysis, the paper disrupts typical readings of the First Apocalypse of James as celebratory of a martyr’s death; rather, martyrdom is cast in a way that minimizes the prospect of death.

Religious Practices and Experiences in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism and Early Christianity (2nd century BCE - 4th Century CE)

(Chairs: Luca Arcari and Daniele Tripaldi)

Discussion around:

L. PAINCHAUD, E. LUPIERI (eds.), *"Who is Sitting on Which Beast?" Interpretative Issues in the Book of Revelation*. Turnhout: Brepols 2024

Discussants: NATHAN BETZ (University of Regensburg), DARIO GARRIBBA (Theological Faculty of the Southern Italy "S. Luigi", Naples), ELISA MANZO (University of Cantabria), DANIELE MINISINI (Sapienza University of Rome)

Religious Transformation in the Roman Imperial Period

(Chairs: Francesca Prescendi and Jörg Rüpke)

GIULIA PEDRUCCI (University of Verona)

The Transformation of the Greek Pythia in Relation to Divination and Female Sexuality by Church Fathers

If we take into account the 'traditional' representation of the Pythia, she gives oracles in a frenzied and confused state. Yet we have several ancient Greek sources that offer quite different images of her behavior and oracular expertise. The idea that the Pythia, while prophesying, acted like a 'hysterical' woman, more or less like a shaman or a possessed person, comes from the relevant Roman and Christian sources. In particular, Origen and John Chrysostom claimed that she behaves as an epileptic or as a woman with uterus afflictions because she was possessed by a demonic spirit. However, they represented Judaeo-Christian divination as clear and calm because, in their view, it comes directly from God. On the one hand, the way that the Pythia screams is clearly sexually connotative, while on the other hand, she is supposed to be virginal (and hysteria has often been considered as the typical disease affecting women who do not have sex). The crucial aspect that this chapter will investigate is the association between divination and gynecology, attempting to illuminate and enlighten biases and distortions associated with female sexuality in the ancient world.

DANIEL ULLUCCI (Stonehill College, Easton, MA)

The Role of Christian Practices in Roman Status Culture—Interests of the Early Majority

This paper employs insights from scholarship on "status culture," to analyze the development of early Christian 'church-based' practices, theorized by Stowers as "the religion of literate specialists and political power." Seeing 'Christianity' as a package of practices and discourses for signaling status rather than (or in addition to) a 'religion' can be beneficial in two ways. First, while rejecting confessional models of conversion, it also problematizes epidemiological models of the spread of ideas dominant in cognitive science of religion. Both models assume a comparably stable 'thing' spreading. This approach focuses on change—practices shift through a series of sequential phases famously outlined by Everett Rogers (innovators, early adopters, early and late majority, laggards). Through this process, social risks of adopting innovative practices are continually decreased. Second, this approach allows us to reframe a conspicuous element of Christian practice and discourse—the idea of Christianity as a 'religion of the book.'

This paper does not deny that Christians participated in Roman literate culture. Rather, it argues that the set of practices spreading among the majority should be better described as an imitation of literate culture. The practices within Christian churches bear the hallmarks of a set of elite practices repackaged and made safe for wide consumption. This approach seeks to advance our understanding of how one form of Christianity came to dominance in the late 4th century. Augustine's sermons provide the data to illustrate the approach.

Women in Early Christianity

(Chairs: Maria Dell'Isola and Mario Resta)

CHRISTY COBB (University of Denver)

Household Conversion and Agency in the *Acts of Philip*

The *Acts of Philip* includes a lengthy story about an elite family who converts to Christianity after hearing the message of the apostle Philip. This household conversion is led by the *paterfamilias*, Ireos, and is resisted by his wife, Nerkella, a reversal of the typical pattern in the Apocryphal Acts. The second person in this household to convert is the doorkeeper, Marklaina (5.17). This enslaved domestic worker is described as willingly joining the religious community after hearing Philip speak. Finally, Ireos's wife, Nerkella, and daughter, Artemilla, convert as well and the whole family rejoices together (7.1). Thus, this fourth century text depicts an elite family—along with an enslaved worker—who converts to Christianity as a household. In this paper, I analyze *Acts of Philip* 5-7 with a focus on gender, status, and agency. I argue that this story counters other household conversions from the Apocryphal Acts through the fictional example of a husband who enthusiastically converts and a wife who resists. Thus, the *Acts of Philip* offers a portrait of an ideal Christian family: a generous male *paterfamilias* who leads the women and enslaved workers in his household to convert to this new ascetic faith. The focus of my analysis will be two marginalized members of the family—Marklaina, the enslaved doorkeeper, and Artemilla, the free daughter. Through a discussion of the literary descriptions of their age/status, I consider how these factors affect the perceived rhetorical agency of their conversions.

NICOLA DENZEY LEWIS (Claremont Graduate University)

Late Antique Christian Virgins: The View from the Catacombs of Rome

The category “virgin” has been, since the earliest Christian treatises on the subject, entirely constructed by male clerical interests, and can perhaps be fairly characterized as “overdetermined.” The virgin of the Church, with her chaste and pure body, is the embodiment of the Church itself. Both a symbol and ostensibly an aspirational identity, the holy virgin remained one of the only roles available to Christian women. And yet – beyond the treatises of Clement, Methodius, Jerome, Chrysostom, and a host of other men – we have precious little testimony to what virginity meant for actual women, particularly sub-elite or non-elite Christian women. In her article “Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity,” Elizabeth Castelli poses some important questions: “where did women’s experience of virginity and asceticism coincide with the orthodox line and where did it rupture that line? Did women use the Christian categories to try to break the severely limiting conventions of social order?” (Castelli, “Women’s Sexuality in Early Christianity,” 65). Indeed – was the ideology of virginity useful to women, beyond the obvious protections it might give from the dangers of pregnancy and childbirth, or the constrictions of the arranged marriage? And how was it understood “on the ground,” by non-elite populations? To explore these questions, I turn in this paper to a data-set which has not yet been mined for the information it can provide about late ancient virginity: funerary inscriptions from the catacombs of Rome. These inscriptions, dating from the third to the fifth or sixth

centuries, reveal the presence of Roman virgins – but they are rather different from the ideals of the Church Fathers, and offer us a significant corrective to the dominant model of Christian virginity and the idealized virgin.

TESSA CANELLA (Sapienza University of Rome)

Helena Augusta and the Ancient Models of Female Christian Devotion

This study aims to examine the figure of Helena Augusta, mother of Emperor Constantine, credited with the rediscovery of the Holy Land and the finding of the relics of the True Cross of Christ. The analysis will focus on the models of female devotion conveyed by early Christian traditions, encompassing figures such as Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, the hemorrhaging woman, and later Veronica. These traditions attribute to pious women a distinctive connection with images and objects of veneration, indicative of a propensity for tangible expressions of faith. This tendency can be interpreted as a manifestation of the classical motif of the intrinsic association between women, corporeality, and blood, as evidenced in ancient Christian literature. In light of recent historiographical developments concerning ancient female biography and the social agency of women in the early centuries, this investigation seeks to elucidate the extent to which the commemorative constructs surrounding Helena integrate these models and the degree to which they have reinforced and disseminated them. Helena emerges as an archetype not only for female pilgrims but also for empresses and queens aspiring to establish a special connection with sacred sites, invoking Helena's myth. These women, such as Pulcheria, Irene, and Theodora, were often designated as "new Helenas," contributing significantly to the entrenchment of the concept of the Christian images, places and objects as a response to an ostensibly "female" demand.

MATTIA CHIRIATTI (University of Granada)

Manus Dei: The Theodosian Empresses and Their Iconography

The Theodosian dynasty brought imperial consorts to the fore. Their public visibility is well witnessed both in iconography (numismatics, statuary, depictions in general), in literature (panegyrics) and in the political propaganda of their time, since most of them held the title of Augusta. The first empress of the Theodosian dynasty to receive this honour was Aelia Flavia Flaccilla, a Hispanic aristocrat and first wife of Theodosius the Great. Her title, as well as her *praenomen*, became an emblem of imperial power and orthodoxy for the empresses of the Eastern and the Western part of the Roman Empire. It can be observed, from the analysis of their official portraiture, a process of "feminization" of the Augustas' title and attributes in the iconography together with a search for political and religious legitimacy, as these attributes of power traditionally had been reserved for the imperial male images (Angelova 2004; Brubaker-Tobler 2000; Clark 1994; Herrin 2000, Marcos 2004). The epiphany of the *manus dei*, which appeared in the depiction of the Byzantine sovereigns after Flaccilla, strengthened therefore the idea of their Christian authority, corroborating the message that the empress had received the imperial investiture directly from God and confirming publicly his orthodoxy as guardians and guarantors of the Nicene Creed.