

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
25 – 27 Settembre, 2025

University Residential Centre of Bertinoro
September 25 – 27, 2025



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CISSR Annual Meeting on Christian Origins

Bertinoro, September 25 – 27, 2025

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

9:15 – 9:30 | Opening of the Meeting (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

Presiding: Mara Rescio, Emiliano R. Urciuoli

9:30 – 11:00 | Joint Session AM 1 (Jacopo da Bertinoro Room – Rivellino)

PAPYROLOGY AND EARLY CHRIST GROUPS

Presiding: Marco Stroppa

ELENI CHRONOPOULOU (Papyrological Institute “Girolamo Vitelli”, University of Florence – University of Patras, Greece)

Early Christian Curative Amulets: Rhetorical Devices and the Legacy of Pagan Curses

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

A New Fragment from a Roll of Amos (PSI XV 1575)?

PETER ARZT-GRABNER (University of Salzburg, Austria)

Were Paul’s Letters Really Large? A New Interpretation of Gal 6:11

Break 11:00 – 11:30

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

BOOK DISCUSSION

Presiding: Luca Arcari

SANDRA HUEBENTHAL, *Memory Theory in New Testament Studies: Exploring New Perspectives* (Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible, vol. 10), Brill - Schöningh, Leiden, 2023.

Discussants: DOROTA M. HARTMAN (University of Naples “L’Orientale”), DANIELE TRIPALDI (University of Bologna)

Respondent: SANDRA HUEBENTHAL (University of Passau, Germany // online)

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

DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES AROUND JESUS IN THE EARLY MODERN AND MODERN PERIOD

Presiding: Miriam Benfatto, Cristiana Facchini

ANTONIO GERACE (University of Bologna)

Contaminated Presence: Transconfessional Debates in Jerónimo Xavier’s *Historia Christi Persice Conscripta*

NIKOS KOUREMENOS (Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Greece)

Christological Rhetoric and Orthodox Identity in Early Modern Greek Theological Polemics

Lunch Break 13:00 – 15:00

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

JEWISH HISTORY, HELLENISTIC JUDAISM, AND SEPTUAGINT STUDIES

Presiding: Anna Mambelli, Marco Vitelli

ANDREA DI LENARDO (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

The Fourth Philosophy and the Sicarii in Early Christian Literature

FRANCESCA LORENZINI (Roma Tre University)

It's Time to Fight against Rome: The Theocratic 'Manifesto' of the First Jewish Revolt

LAURA BIGONI (UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA) AND ISABELLA PIGNOCCO (University of Catania)

Scriptural Continuities in the Alexandrian Tradition: A Computational Approach to the Septuagint in Philo and Clement

ANTONELLA BELLANTUONO (Catholic University of Lille, France)

Semantic Reconfiguration of *θυμός* in the Septuagint: From Classical Psychology to Religious Lexicon

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

ANTHROPOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS CONCERNING RELIGIOUS FORMS AND PRACTICES

The Gift in Religious Studies I: Offering and Receiving

Presiding: Adriana Destro, Francesca Sbardella

LIA GIANCRISTOFARO (University "Gabriele D'Annunzio" Chieti-Pescara)

Devotional Gifts: A Baby and His "Holy Body" in a Catholic Sanctuary

MARTA SCIALDONE (University of Perugia)

The Bahá'ís during the Ayyám-i-Há: The Gift of Love, Brotherhood and Unity

FRANCESCA BENNA (Sapienza University of Rome)

Dāna and the Dissolution of the Self: Reflections on the Ethics of Giving in Buddhism

FEDERICA MANTELLO (University of Florence)

A Christianized Magical Gem? Epigraphic Observations on the So-Called "Pereire Gem"

Break 17:00 – 17:30

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

ISSUES OF METHOD: NEW 'SECULAR' APPROACHES TO EARLY CHRISTIAN RESEARCH

Presiding: Roberto Alciati

CHIARA CREMONESI (University of Padua) AND LUIGI WALT (University of Naples "L'Orientale")

Mr. Smith's Cabinet of Wonder: On Data, Examples, and Scale in the Scholarly Imagination of Religion

EDUARD IRICINSCHI (University of Erfurt, Germany)

On the Joys of Chaos in the Study of Religions: Jonathan Z. Smith and Mircea Eliade in the 1970s Chicago

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN (Aarhus University, Denmark)
Evolutionary and Cognitive Approaches to the Study of Religion: Discrepancies, Continuities, and Overlaps

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

RABBINIC JUDAISM AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Paul and Rabbinic Judaism

Presiding: Matthias Morgenstern

MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN (University of Tübingen, Germany)
Romans 7 and Rabbinic Marriage Law

DORU DOROFTEI (FAU – Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany)
The Forms and the Meanings of the Ritual of the First Bread Offering in Pauline and Rabbinic Religious Systems

LUKE NEUBERT (LMU – Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany)
Paul between Philosophical Ethics and Pharisaical Halacha

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

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

ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE: MATERIALS, APPROCHES, AND PERSPECTIVES

The Gift in Religious Studies II: Language, Signs, and Bodies

Presiding: Adriana Destro, Francesca Sbardella

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN (Aarhus University, Denmark)
In the Beginning Was the Gift: Continuity, Change, and Caesuras in Hominid Gift-Giving

LEONARDO ROSSI (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Brescia)
Divine Signa: Perceiving Corporeal Signs as Contested Mystical Gifts

ANDREA PEZZINI (University of Bern, Switzerland)
“God Rewarded Him with Supernatural Gifts”: Post-Mortem Bodily Phenomena between Holiness and Sanctity, between 19th and 20th Century

GIUSEPPINA VISCARDI (University of Bologna)
Coping with the Language: εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγέλια between Acts of Communication and Gifts of Words

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

EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS AND ROMAN LAW

Presiding: Martina Carandino, Paolo Costa

FEDERICA ARGIOLOS (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)
Toward an Understanding of Paul’s Speech ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου: Between History, Law and Narrative

FRANCESCO FILANNINO (Pontifical Lateran University – Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)
Collegia of Brothers? The Semantics of Brotherhood in Greco-Roman Associations and the New Testament

LÁSZLÓ ODRÓBINA (Saint Athanasius Greek Catholic Theological College – Nyíregyháza; University of Szeged; University of Public Service – Budapest, Hungary)
The *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 and the Concept of Marriage in Ancient Christianity

GIOVANNI VACCARO (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)
Paul and Jesus before the Herods: Criminal Procedure and Literary Devices in Luke-Acts Trial

Break 11:00 – 11:30

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

CONTEXTS OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Presiding: John Kloppenborg

HARRY O. MAIER (Vancouver School of Theology, Canada)
The Right to the City: Urban Aspiration in Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Clement of Alexandria

WILLIAM M. FOLEY (National Distance Education University, Spain)
And the Lord Added to Their number: An Empirical Network Analysis of the Spread of Christianity, Mithraism, the Cult of Isis, and the Cult of Cybele

ANDRÁS HANDL (KU Leuven, Belgium)
Impact of Persecution: Networks and Mobility in the Letters of Cyprian of Carthage

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

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

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

FABRIZIO MARCELLO (Catholic University of Paris, France)
Christianizing Shamelessness: A Cynic Motif in the Parable of the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-13)

DOROTA M. HARTMAN (University of Naples “L’Orientale”)
The Parable of the Watchful Servants (Luke 12:35-40): Where Does it Come from?

MARIE-THÉRÈSE GERSTNER (University of Graz, Austria)
Lament as Last Appeal: Luke 23:26-32 in Literary and Cultural Context

11.30 – 13:00 | Parallel Session AM2.C (Captain Room – Rivellino)

FROM THE HISTORY OF EXEGESIS TO RECEPTION HISTORY AND BEYOND

Presiding: Laura Carnevale, Edmondo Lupieri

PAOLA STORNAIUOLO (University of Bari “Aldo Moro”)
Mary Magdalene as Hermeneutical Palimpsest: From Gospel to Goddess in Reception History

GIOVANNI RAGNO (University of Bari “Aldo Moro”)
Lexicon of Corporeality in the Biblical Exegesis of Hildegard of Bingen

Lunch Break 13:00 – 15:00

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

GOSPEL OF THOMAS, NAG HAMMADI, AND GNOSTICISM

Presiding: Andrea Annese, Francesco Berno

PHILIPPE THERRIEN (Laval University, Canada)
References and Allusions to the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament in the Long Version of the *Secret Book of John* (NH II,1; IV,1)

LAVINIA CERIONI (Sapienza University of Rome)
Gendered Divinity: Female Imagery in Gnostic Christologies

DAVIDE MOCELLIN (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)
Nag Hammadi Codex I in the Context of the Origenist Controversy

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

ORAL AND WRITTEN SOURCES OF EARLY CHRISTIAN TEXTS

Presiding: Enrico Norelli, Claudio Zamagni

CECILIA ANTONELLI (University of Geneva – University of Lausanne, Switzerland)
The *Acta et martyrium Bartholomaei* in Greek and Armenian (BHG 226z) and Bartholomew's Death: The Mystery, the Cross, and the Door

SINCERO MANTELLI (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Rome)
Qoheleth: Epicurean and Nihilist? Marginalizing the Letter

ENRICO NORELLI (University of Geneva, Switzerland)
Καλάμῳ ἔνυσσον αὐτόν: Which Sources for Gospel of Peter 9?

PAUL ROBERTSON (University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA)
Computational Approaches to Paul's Letters: Surveys on Method and Future Directions

Break 17:00 – 17:30

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

LECTIO MAGISTRALIS

Presiding: Mara Rescio

GIOVANNI B. BAZZANA (Harvard University, USA)
Apocalyptic Time between Presentism and the Anthropocene

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

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

GENDER ISSUES IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Presiding: Maria Dell’Isola, Mario Resta

LUCA ARCARI (University of Naples “Federico II”)

Re-inventing Traditions in Sexualized Spaces. Urbanity and Stigmatization of Non-normative Sexuality in Philo and Paul

LUANA L. ASCONE (University of Padua)

“And I Was Made a Woman”: (Self-)Portrait of the Exegete as a Young Woman

MARIO RESTA (University of Bari)

Reading The Female Body through Time and Space: How Gender Might Be a Solution to a Christian Resignification of Places

KATE WILKINSON (Towson University, USA)

Marriage as Bondage but Not Slavery: The Case of an Absent Metaphor in Early Christian Feminine Pro-Chastity Rhetoric

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

THE BIBLE AND CONFLICT

Presiding: Sarah Rollens

SARAH ROLLENS (Rhodes College, Memphis, USA // recorded talk)

An Unknown Stranger: Misrecognition in the Gospel of Mark and W.E.B. Du Bois’s “Jesus Christ in Texas”

GIOVANNI RIBUOLI (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum. Rome)

The Perverted Quote: Carl Schmitt’s “Freund-Feind” Theory as a Hermeneutical Conflict

EXPLORATIONS OF PEOPLEHOOD IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN

Presiding: Emiliano R. Urciuoli

GUY EDELSZTEIN AND ELLA KAREV (Tel Aviv University, Israel)

Conceptions of Captivity: The Christian and Non-Christian Captives of Šapūr I

ARTURO MASSA (University of Bari “Aldo Moro”)

Populi, Gentes, and Nationes: The Perception of “Barbarians” in the Sermons of Chromatius of Aquileia (388/389–407/408)

Break 11:00 – 11:30

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

HISTORICAL JESUS: NEW PATHS AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ISSUES

Presiding: Miriam Benfatto, Cristiana Facchini

CRISTIANA FACCHINI (University of Bologna)

The 'Historical Jesus' and the Holy Land: The Impact of New Media and Technology in Historical Writing

DARIUSZ PNIEWSKI (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torún, Poland)

'New Jesus': The Rhetorical Figure of Jesus in the Rhetoric of Utopian Socio-Political Movements of the First Half of the 19th Century

JONATHAN ELUKIN (Trinity College, Hartford, USA // online)

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

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

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

Presiding: Luigi Walt

GIULIO MARIOTTI (John XXIII Foundation for Religious Sciences, Bologna // online)

Narrating Destruction: The Reception of Ezekiel and Jeremiah in 4 Ezra and Revelation

PHILIPPA TOWNSEND (University of Edinburgh, Scotland)

The Cologne Mani Codex as Apocalypse

MARTA MICILLO (University of Naples "Federico II")

The Integration of Imperial Bureaucratic Elites into Christian Groups (6th Century) through the Case Study of the *Acta Pilati*

Lunch Break 13:00 – 15:00 (Closing of the Meeting)

PROGRAMME UNITS & ABSTRACTS

(Programme Units are listed in alphabetical order)

Keynote Lecture

GIOVANNI B. BAZZANA (Harvard University, USA)

Apocalyptic Time between Presentism and the Anthropocene

The time regime of early Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts is often confused with the Christian time regime that became hegemonic in western Europe through Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages and then (according to the seminal analyses of Koselleck and Hartog) produced the linear and teleological time of modernity. In recent years, several interventions have pointed to the resurgence of a form of apocalyptic time in the context of so-called "presentism" (produced by the acceleration of history) and/or the notion of the Anthropocene. In this perspective, apocalyptic future is envisaged almost uniquely under its most catastrophic and destructive dimensions. Indeed, a similar conception of the apocalypse pervades (with very negative socio-cultural effects) areas like public policy discussions or popular culture. The present paper will review the contours of this historical and hermeneutical problem and pose the question if traditional Jewish and Christian apocalyptic time regimes may still be mobilized to support more productive and even liberating conceptions of time and of the future.

Anthropological Investigations Concerning Religious Forms and Practices **The Gift in Religious Studies I: Offering and Receiving**

(Chairs: Adriana Destro, Francesca Sbardella)

LIA GIANCRISTOFARO (D'Annunzio University of Chieti–Pescara)

Devotional Gifts: A Baby and His "Holy Body" in a Catholic Sanctuary

My proposal considers a cult that developed and still thrives in a small Abruzzo town in the years between the two world wars. During these decades, the mummified body of a baby became the object of worship and devotional practices. The epileptic baby called Donato died, and after few months his body was given by his mother to the Sanctuary of St Donatus in Celenza sul Trigno. St Donatus is the saint who protects epileptics and in Italian Catholicism is therefore the master of disease. The name Donato means given and the ailment (epilepsy) is given by the saint to his subjects in exchange for being cured they give him devotion and gifts. In this case, the sick child's mother embarked on a much greater initiative and gave the saint the dead body of the sick child dead. Analyzing the cult of the mummified child in Abruzzo allows us to understand not only the establishment of an autonomous expression of popular religion but also illustrates anthropological mechanisms that expand a simple mythical individual invention into a wider scenario. A devotion expands into a large-scale dimension when it satisfies the needs of the imagination of a large group, as is the case of Baby Donato. By exploring the reasons for the affirmation, persistence and local diffusion of devotional practices of this unique extra-liturgical worship, this paper offers some general considerations of Catholicism and Southern Italy.

MARTA SCIALDONE (University of Perugia)

The Bahá'ís during the Ayyám-i-Há: The Gift of Love, Brotherhood and Unity

What is a gift? According to Marcel Mauss (1923) the gift isn't a simple act of economic exchange but a complex event involving multiple dimensions of social life. He argues about a 'total social fact', core concept to his theory. He suggests that the gift not only satisfies material needs but also has deep symbolic and political implications. According to Mauss, every act of giving implies a tripartite obligation: to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. This obligation isn't just economic, but also moral and social, deeply rooted in the cultural structures of communities. Following these concepts, the Baha'i Faith understands the gift not merely as something material, but as something far more significant: charity and benevolence. In this paper, I intend to analyze the significance of the Ayyám-i-Há, the Intercalary Days, experienced by Baha'i believers as a time of giving to others in terms of both practical help and moral support. Bahá'ís follow the Badí calendar, composed of 19 months, and starts on March 1st. These days always fall immediately before the month of fasting, called 'Alá', during which Bahá'ís are encouraged to celebrate God and his oneness by showing love, fellowship, and unity. In many instances, Bahá'ís give and accept gifts to demonstrate these attributes. It is also a time of charity and goodwill and Bahá'ís often participate in various projects of a humanitarian nature. Believers usually meet relatives and friends, spend time with them in the name of 'Ha', symbol of the essence of God. Thus Ayyám-i-Há is at the heart of the innovating, scientific religious stance. My objective is therefore to analyze, based on written and oral sources, their attitudes, behaviors, and their *modus operandi*.

FRANCESCA BENNA (Sapienza University of Rome)

Dāna and the Dissolution of the Self: Reflections on the Ethics of Giving in Buddhism

In Western civilization, the act of giving is considered an exception to the rule. The prevailing norm is to keep one's possessions for oneself and to acquire other goods through purchase or explicit exchange. Anthropology has instead provided numerous examples of societies in which gift-giving constitutes one of the foundational elements of social life. Starting from Mauss's model of the gift as a form of contract, a system grounded in giving, receiving, and reciprocating, this research aims to reflect on the Buddhist logic of giving, particularly the practice of *dāna*, where the ideal is a gift given free from expectations of return. The act of giving holds intrinsic value in Buddhism, as it contributes to the dissolution of attachment to the ego and to material possessions. In certain traditions, such as Theravāda Buddhism, my research being grounded in participant observation at the Santacittarama monastery, the quality of the gift is determined more by the mental state of the donor than by the material value of the object given. This perspective, in my view, opens the door to a profoundly different understanding of ethical and social relations, aligned with the values of peace, detachment, and compassion. The apparently simple yet subtle and fertile identification of the three components of the gift: giving, receiving, and reciprocating, provided the foundation for the development of a broader theory: that of the "total social fact" (Aime, 2016). Human relationships are born of exchange. This exchange is initiated by the offering of a gift from one party to another, generating a sense of obligation to reciprocate, and thus setting into motion a chain of exchanges. But, as Mauss observed (1923), it is not only material goods that circulate: the spirit of the donor travels with the gift, giving rise to a bond between individuals that extends well beyond mere economic transaction. Thus, the act of giving does not merely represent a transfer of goods; it mobilizes the totality of cultural elements that define a society. In the case of *dāna*, or true giving, true generosity, nothing is expected in return. It is not a contract, nor even a form of sharing. It is not a matter of offering something to another while keeping something else for oneself. Rather, one gives completely, without expectation. Within this framework, the experience of separation is key. It is a condition shared by all human beings, an internal experience that can also be observed in animals. We recognize that 'this' is separate from 'that,' and in various ways, we attempt to overcome this sense of separation. Perhaps the most primal response is to take, to draw from the surrounding environment, absorbing it into ourselves. We take nourishment; we take power. This taking is one strategy for confronting separation. Yet all of these strategies ultimately reinforce the sense of separateness. Whether through taking, bargaining, or even sharing, the perception of a self-separate from others remains intact. It is precisely here that *dāna* performs its transformative function, exposing and dissolving the illusion of a fixed self.

FEDERICA MANTELLO (University of Florence)

A Christianized Magical Gem? Epigraphic Observations on the So-Called “Pereire Gem”

The so-called “Pereire gem,” now housed in the British Museum, is one of the most enigmatic examples of amuletic production in Late Antiquity. This engraved gem, datable to the 2nd–3rd century CE, features inscriptions on both sides. Side A bears what may be the earliest known depiction of the crucified Christ; side B contains inscriptions typical of the Greco-Egyptian magical tradition. The inscription on side A, however, poses a significant interpretive challenge, situated at the intersection of Christian symbolism, Gnostic elements, and magical formulas. The amulet is to be regarded as a symbolic gift: if the act of giving has always constituted a form of exchange through which relationships are woven, here the owner of the gem establishes a connection with the deity, whose power and suffering are invoked in exchange for protection and salvation. This paper proposes a new epigraphic reading of the text on side A, closely linked to the accompanying image of the Crucifixion. Through a combined analysis of epigraphic, iconographic, and material evidence, the study suggests that the gem underwent a process of “Christianization” after its original creation as a magical object. The gem occupies a liminal space between magic and religion, between paganism and early Christianity. In this light, the amulet becomes a privileged artifact for exploring religious transformation in the Mediterranean during Late Antiquity, a period when the boundaries between devotion, ritual, and magic remained porous.

Anthropological Knowledge: Materials, Approaches, and Perspectives **The Gift in Religious Studies II: Language, Signs, and Bodies**

(Chairs: Adriana Destro, Francesca Sbardella)

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN (Aarhus University, Denmark)

In the Beginning Was the Gift: Continuity, Change, and Caesuras in Hominid Gift-Giving

Building on Durkheim’s foundational insight, “Rien ne vient de rien” (1883, p. 181; 1912, p. 321), I begin my exploration of our distant hominid past with chimpanzees scratching the backs of their peers and eating their lice. Admittedly, this is a primitive, although appetizing, form of quid pro quo, but it ultimately constitutes the *raison d’être* of later symbolic systems of gift-giving, as Mauss astutely recognized. However, he did not consider the hominid precedents for lack of primatological knowledge of the time. From early ‘gift-giving’ among bonobos and chimpanzees, I then take a significant step forward, pivoting from the urban type of religion to the *kosmos* form, and examining the transformation of religious gift-giving from transitive to reflexive sacrifice. Whereas gift-giving in gatherer-hunter, horticultural and agricultural and urban forms of religion consisted of giving something on behalf of oneself or society to superhuman entities, the injunction to give was considerably strengthened with the emergence of the *kosmos* type of religion (emerging in some Eurasian cultures and societies from around 600 BCE). This form of religion was conducive to turning oneself into a sacrificial animal: “Du musst dein Leben ändern” (Rilke, *Archaischer Torso Apollos*, cf. Sloterdijk, 2009). Life itself becomes a persistent fitness or training center in which one must prepare to offer oneself as a fitting gift to the divine. As Paul writes in Romans 12:1-2, “I urge you, brothers, by God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God — this is your reason-borne worship. Do not conform to the patterns of this *aeon*, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well-pleasing, and perfect” (my translation). Divinization, embodied and emminded in an array of ascetic practices, becomes the way of life (cf. Hadot *Philosophie comme manière de vivre*), whether the aim is to obtain *nirvana*, *moksha*, *soteria*, likeness with the godhead, *ataraxia*, or similar. Ultimately, however, the purpose of divine gift-giving is to strengthen members’ adherence to the ideals, values, norms and rules of society — that is, religion. The change at the threshold between urban religion and the *kosmos* type stems from new selection pressures relating to production, reproduction, regulation and distribution. These pressures arise from the emergence of empires, which demand stronger adherence to societal rules due to much greater population sizes and

conducive genetic heterogeneity. In this way, I return to the beginning with our hominid cousins. However, unlike them, our ancestors left the arboreal areas around 4–3.5 million years ago, making socialization an absolute necessity for our survival. Therefore, if we are to uphold culture and stabilize society, we must engage in gift-giving at all levels to control our selfish, despotic and rather promiscuous hominin nature.

LEONARDO ROSSI (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Brescia)

Divine Signa: Perceiving Corporeal Signs as Contested Mystical Gifts

Catholic tradition defines charisma as an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a gift bestowed *ad personam* but intended for the *bonum commune*. While theologically configured as *gratiae gratis datae* – a benefit granted for the collective, echoing Thomist thought – its tangible manifestation, that “physical phenomena of mysticism” evoked by the English Jesuit Herbert Thurston, has often ignited fervent debates extending far beyond sacred confines. Groups of the faithful, civil society, and the scientific community questioned these signs, suspended between divine revelation and potential deception. Early twentieth-century Italy witnessed an unprecedented mystical flourishing: an impressive galaxy of “living saints” – predominantly female figures – burst onto the scene claiming extraordinary charismata: prophecies, inexplicable healings, prolonged inedia, ecstasies, and bleeding stigmata. But how were these gifts perceived? Along a sliding scale oscillating between the miraculous and the fraudulent, between supernatural manifestation and symptoms of psychic fragility (‘hysteria’, as it was commonly called in the nineteenth century by both doctors and religious members). The identity of the bearer and the gaze of the evaluator proved to be distorting lenses, capable of transmuting grace into suspicion, faith into skepticism. Through the analysis of emblematic case studies, this contribution delves into the interpretative disputes that animated early twentieth-century Italy surrounding mystical gifts and charismatic figures. We will explore the conceptual categories, social dynamics, and cultural frameworks that shaped the perception of these phenomena.

ANDREA PEZZINI (University of Bern, Switzerland)

“God Rewarded Him with Supernatural Gifts”: Post-Mortem Bodily Phenomena between Holiness and Sanctity, between 19th and 20th Century

Since early Christianity, certain extraordinary phenomena affecting the bodies of the dead – such as incorruption, the absence of *rigor mortis*, the exhalation of sweet fragrances, or the emission of liquids – were counted among the signs of sanctity. From the eighteenth century onward, however, the Catholic Church gradually revised its approach to such occurrences. With the publication of Prospero Lambertini’s *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione et Beatorum Canonizatione* (1734–1738), bodily signs began to lose their centrality in canonization processes. Sanctity came to be defined increasingly in terms of heroic virtue, with miracles for canonization attributed to the intercession of the deceased, rather than to extraordinary signs emanating from their physical remains. This shift did not, however, diminish the devotional value attributed to such signs. Despite this institutional reframing, in local communities these phenomena continued to be interpreted as manifestations of divine predilection. They were perceived as gifts granted by God to specific individuals, tokens of election that were not only theologically meaningful but also socially and institutionally charged. The perceived divine preference embodied in these signs frequently became entangled in local disputes, struggles over legitimacy and succession, and the network of meaning surrounding religious orders. This paper investigates how, in Catholicism in Italy between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, cadaveric phenomena were interpreted and valued as divine gifts, independently of official ecclesiastical criteria. Through selected case studies, it highlights the gap between canon law and devotional life, showing how such signs functioned as markers of sanctity not validated institutionally, but acknowledged through local community perception and ritual engagement.

Coping with the Language: εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγέλια between Acts of Communication and Gifts of Words

The aim of this paper is to provide a historically and culturally contextualized analysis of the term εὐαγγέλιον (and its plural εὐαγγέλια) in the Greco-Roman world. Even εὐαγγέλιον has notoriously become a word monopolized by the Christian tradition, but the present investigation— which will draw on literary, papyrological, and epigraphic sources—will attempt to show its antecedents and past history, starting from the Archaic period. This will allow us to observe the ubiquity and persistence of this term over time and its semantic and conceptual implications. In particular, we will consider the occurrence of the term in letters, with specific reference to the papyrus document from the Ptolemaic period P. Koln IX 364, whose ultimate purpose is to request the delivery of εὐαγγέλια, where the letter itself, especially when it conveys news about events eagerly awaited and desired by the recipients, takes on connotations that make it almost entirely comparable to a gift, in this case a “gift of words”. Like any material gift, an epistolary document must be carefully packaged before being sent (Bagnall, Cribiore 2006; Ceccarelli 2013). Its nonephemeral nature, as an object that can be handled, stored, and potentially enjoyed several times, gives rise to particular care in its preparation. Confirmation that letters belong to the category of gifts can be seen, for example, in the fact that the same class of verbs can refer to both (to send, to receive, to exchange/πέμπω, δίδωμι and derivatives). But what these human activities really have in common is an even deeper meaning: both establish or nurture an act of communication of the highest social importance, as it ratifies a relationship between individuals and/or groups. As Caille (1998) clearly outlines: “primary sociality is nourished by the gift of words.”

[The] Bible and Conflict

(Chairs: James Crossley and Sarah Rollens)

SARAH ROLLENS (Rhodes College, Memphis, USA)

An Unknown Stranger: Misrecognition in the Gospel of Mark and W.E.B. Du Bois’s “Jesus Christ in Texas”

This paper examines the portrayal of Jesus (“the Stranger”) in W.E.B. Du Bois’s short story “Jesus Christ in Texas” and places it in conversation with the Gospel of Mark’s depiction of Jesus as a misunderstood and ultimately rejected messiah. Both narratives emphasize the theme of misrecognition through numerous encounters with other characters, yet they deploy this trope to different rhetorical ends. As it widely known, the Gospel of Mark uses repeated episodes of misrecognition to highlight those who correctly identify Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God; the continual misunderstandings underscore the tragedy of Jesus’ eventual crucifixion. Many scholars have argued this theme of misrecognition reflects the disillusionment of early Jesus followers in the aftermath of the Jewish War—a time when messianic hopes remained unfulfilled, and the reach of the Jesus movement was not as wide as anticipated. Mark’s use of misrecognition helped him account for these frustrated circumstances by prefiguring them in the life of Jesus. In comparison, Du Bois’s “Stranger” is also consistently misunderstood and misrecognized, not because other characters lack the correct theological convictions, but rather, because they harbor the inherent racial prejudices of the Jim Crow South. This story marks a compelling moment in the reception history of Jesus, because it demonstrates how a central rhetorical trope of an ancient gospel, that is, misrecognition, was integral to a story of Jesus penned some 2,000 years later. Both Du Bois and Mark’s author used this trope to come to terms with the inherently conflicted societies in which they found themselves and to depict these societies as places where Jesus ultimately had no place.

The Perverted Quote: Carl Schmitt's "Freund-Feind" Theory as a Hermeneutical Conflict

Biblical scholars today are setting on a Christological ground the role that the εἰρήνη concept played in Lukan literature (e.g. Massimo De Santis, *Rivista Biblica*, 71-1, pp. 63-92). Political thinkers and jurists instead still make references to biblical and early Christian writings to authorize conflicts. Indeed, Carl Schmitt's theory is again popular in the scientific community too (*Telos* 208, Fall 2024). Political scientists, law historians and philosophers worked many different ways on Schmitt's Freund-Feind theory, although none grasped its original and controversial biblical content. When readers come across the crucial passages (Schmitt 1932, *Begriff des Politischen*, pp. 10-11), the main quotes aimed at consolidating that theory come directly from canonical gospels (Mt 5, 44; Lk 6, 27). Schmitt argues that ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ὑμῶν never aimed at 'war' enemies (»Feind«), which should be called πολέμιος, but instead, at simple 'adversaries' (ibidem »Konkurrent oder der Gegner ... der Gegenspieler«). As any historian, biblicist or scholar of early Christianity would surely have noticed, Schmitt's biblical argument revealed its preposterous assumption, as the word πολέμιος, not very common in the κοινή, never occurs in the canonical Greek New Testament. This paper will therefore offer a systematical semantical disproof of Schmitt's argument that Mt 5, 44 and Lk 6, 27 would authorize military conflict and that the two words (ἐχθρός and πολέμιος) are to represent different realities. The intervention will propose a survey of the two terms in the Greek New Testament canonical literature with due references to the First Testament, where πολέμιος is attested in *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim*.

Contexts of Early Christianity

(Chair: John S. Kloppenborg)

HARRY O. MAIER (Vancouver School of Theology, Canada)

The Right to the City: Urban Aspiration in Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Clement of Alexandria

This presentation draws on Henri Lefebvre's 1968 monography, *The Right to the City* [*Le Droit à la ville*]. Lefebvre proposes an understanding of cities as human work in which is "the oeuvre of its citizens instead of [an] imposing itself upon them as a system, as an already dosed book." This essay takes up and develops Lefebvre's essay by investigating three early texts and authors: *1 Clement* (a letter written by a Roman Christ assembly to another in Corinth during the Flavian period or later); the second century pseudonymous letters of Ignatius of Antioch; and the third century writings of Clement of Alexandria (especially the *Paedagogus* and the *Stromateis*). It explores each of the (sets of) documents as promoting a production of the city and thereby expressing a right to the it This becomes paradoxical when for example the same metaphors used to advance a right to the city also express renunciation of the world (Ignatius), or when the world is represented as a place of persecution (*1 Clement*). The paradox lies also in the ways in which the two authors draw on commonplace civic vocabulary to articulate their respective ideals and impugn those who disrupt them. One (*1 Clement*) does so through lengthy passages describing concord and the other (Ignatius) does so by rendering support of his martyrdom as a means of instantiating a harmonious civic order. A new form of urbanism is promoted when Christ religion is imagined as shaping the practices of everyday life (albeit an elite from of it) by Clement of Alexandria. The essay seeks to dispel the notion that imperial cities were places of moribund decline and decay and that Christ religion was a compensatory mechanism for dealing with anomie, status inconsistency, or an attempt to salve the sorrows of ancient Romans. The essay rather seeks to consider these documents as indicative of at least some forms of Christ religion as forms of urban aspiration. Such aspiration promoted inventive participation in the fabric of everyday neighborhood urban life. As such it was symptomatic of forms of urban vitality that were essential features of Roman cities and their populations.

WILLIAM M. FOLEY (National Distance Education University, Spain)

And the Lord Added to Their number: An Empirical Network Analysis of the Spread of Christianity, Mithraism, the Cult of Isis, and the Cult of Cybele

In the early centuries of its titular era, Christianity was a marginal religion. Nevertheless, it spread rapidly and widely throughout the Roman Empire. How? The topic is of obvious importance, and has inspired centuries of scholarly and popular debate. Yet few modern social scientists have seriously engaged, even while a large body of social scientific theory exists which scholars from historical fields have drawn on. To address this question, I develop a theoretical framework drawing on social network theory, institutional theory, the sociology of religion, as well as bible scholarship and the historiography of the ancient world. My primary argument is that Christianity was a relatively “simple” institution compared to its competitors – its worship format was homogeneous, inexpensive, and scripted – enabling it to spread more easily to less central locations. To test this theory, I capitalize on the vast quantity of data on the ancient world which advances in digital humanities have made available. I am currently constructing a dataset of the 600 largest cities in the Roman Empire, incorporating data on their populations and the presence of four competing religions: Christianity, Mithraism, the cult of Isis, and the cult of Cybele. Using data on city connections, I will construct measures of network centrality to evaluate the theory’s implications. Auxiliary implications – relating to cultural, economic, and demographic characteristics – will also be tested. I hope that this paper, and my participation in the conference will lead to deeper and more serious collaborations between social scientists and ancient historians.

ANDRÁS HANDL (KU Leuven, Belgium)

Impact of Persecution: Networks and Mobility in the Letters of Cyprian of Carthage

The mid-third century CE marks a dark period, as the Roman Empire initiated its first state-orchestrated persecution against Christian communities. The epistolary corpus of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, stand out not merely as active instruments of ecclesiastical, as communication, and as crisis management. The letters also illuminate the mobility of a minority religious group and shed light on how communities maintained cohesion and mutual support across geographic boundaries. By applying Social Network Analysis to this corpus, this study seeks to reconstruct the connections that underpinned resilience and explores how transregional links and mobility functioned as channels for mitigating the impact of persecutions.

Discourses and Practices around Jesus from the Early Modern and Modern Period

(Chairs: Miriam Benfatto and Cristiana Facchini)

ANTONIO GERACE (University of Bologna)

Contaminated Presence: Transconfessional Debates in Jerónimo Xavier’s *Historia Christi Persice Conscripta*

This paper explores the complex theological landscape of the early modern period through the *Historia Christi Persice conscripta*. Originally composed in Persian by the Jesuit missionary Jerónimo de Ezpeleta y Goñi (1549-1647) for the Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great (1542-1605), the work was translated into Latin and published in Leiden in 1639 by the Dutch Orientalist and Calvinist theologian Louis de Dieu. The Latin title’s striking addendum, “simulque multis modis contaminata,” explicitly frames the text as a nexus for vigorous transconfessional debates, reflecting wider religious conflicts. Focusing on Xavier’s articulation of fundamental Catholic doctrines—such as the transubstantiation and Papal Supremacy—this presentation analyzes how these tenets, necessarily reconfigured for a non-Christian, Islamic audience, were simultaneously perceived through a critical Reformed lens. For the Calvinist de Dieu, Xavier’s attempts at cross-cultural apologetics likely appeared as compromises, or

‘contaminations,’ of authentic Christian belief. Utilizing the 1639 Latin translation, this study examines how the *Historia Christi* serves as a unique example of interreligious encounter, the global circulation of texts, and intense intra-Christian disagreements over doctrinal authenticity, missionary strategies, and the very formation of confessional identities, contributing to understanding historical representations of Jesus and early Christianity.

NIKOS KOUREMENOS (Volos Academy for Theological Studies, Greece)

Christological Rhetoric and Orthodox Identity in Early Modern Greek Theological Polemics

This paper examines the role of Christological rhetoric in the formation of confessional identity within early modern Greek Orthodox theology. In the context of growing theological pressures from both Protestant and Catholic traditions, Greek Orthodox scholars such as Meletios Syrigos and Dositheos II of Jerusalem reaffirmed traditional doctrines surrounding the person of Christ—particularly the real presence in the Eucharist and the inseparability of Christ from the Church—as central to the Orthodox faith. Rather than engaging in speculative representations of Jesus, these authors deployed inherited patristic Christology as a tool for delimiting the boundaries of Orthodoxy in opposition to Western theological developments. The Synod of Jerusalem (1672), under the leadership of Dositheos, stands as a paradigmatic example of this strategy: its decrees explicitly reaffirm Chalcedonian Christology and the sacramental nature of the Church, directly countering Calvinist influences introduced by figures like Cyril Lucaris. By analyzing key polemical texts and conciliar documents, this paper argues that Christological discourse in the 17th-century Greek Orthodox world functioned as a means of ecclesial self-definition and resistance to theological heterodoxy. These confessional strategies did not seek to reinterpret the figure of Jesus in modern terms but rather to anchor him as the living center of Orthodox continuity and authority within a contested religious landscape.

Discussion of Books

(Chair: Luca Arcari)

SANDRA HUEBENTHAL, *Memory Theory in New Testament Studies: Exploring New Perspectives* (Studies in Cultural Contexts of the Bible, vol. 10), Brill – Schöningh, Leiden, 2023.

Discussants: DOROTA M. HARTMAN (University of Naples “L’Orientale”), DANIELE TRIPALDI (University of Bologna)

Respondent: SANDRA HUEBENTHAL (University of Passau, Germany)

Early Christian Writings and Roman Law

(Chairs: Martina Carandino and Paolo Costa)

FEDERICA ARGIOLOS (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)

Toward an Understanding of Paul’s Speech ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ Ἀρείου Πάγου: Between History, Law and Narrative

Paul’s famous speech in Acts 17:22–30 can be fully understood only when placed within its geographical, political, juridical and social context, in order to interpret it in coherence with the author’s narrative intention. This paper begins by examining the status of the Areopagus in first-century Athens, a period in which Greek institutions retained a degree of autonomy, though always in dialogue with Roman power. Epigraphic and literary sources are used to reconstruct the role and function of this body, without exhausting the questions that surround the episode: its historicity, the setting of the speech, the nature of its audience, and the character of Paul’s intervention. The

main scholarly positions on these issues are presented and critically discussed, with attention to the narrative framing, the structure of the speech, and the episode's internal dynamics. Finally, the study focuses on the narrative significance of this scene within the broader plot of Acts, highlighting the function played by the Athenians' rejection of Paul.

FRANCESCO FILANNINO (Pontifical Lateran University – Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)

Collegia of Brothers? The Semantics of Brotherhood in Greco-Roman Associations and the New Testament

In recent decades, there has been a proliferation of studies assimilating Greco-Roman associations and first Christian communities. One of the analogies between these groups proposed by some scholars is the use of the vocabulary of brotherhood to denote their members. The paper reviews epigraphic and papyrological sources (including some juridical ones) using this language for associations and New Testament passages in which Christians are referred to as brothers. The common use of this vocabulary is not sufficient to establish an analogy, but it is necessary to consider the different connotations it takes on.

LÁSZLÓ ODRÓBINA (Saint Athanasius Greek Catholic Theological College – Nyíregyháza; University of Szeged; University of Public Service – Budapest, Hungary)

The *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 and the Concept of Marriage in Ancient Christianity

The *Constitutio Antoniniana*, issued by Emperor Caracalla in 212 AD, granted Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants of the Roman Empire. This legal reform, thoroughly analyzed in scholarly literature, marked a fundamental elevation of legal status for the empire's provincial populations outside Italy. However, the impact of this measure on marriages under Roman law has been comparatively understudied. Roman law distinguished between *matrimonium iustum*—a lawful marriage contracted between two Roman citizens—and *matrimonium iuris gentium*, a marriage governed by the law of nations and typically contracted by free non-citizens within the provinces. Accordingly, two Christian Roman citizens would enter into *matrimonium iustum*, while free but non-citizen Christians would marry according to *matrimonium iuris gentium*, effectively following provincial legal customs. When spouses differed in status, various legal arrangements existed, the most common being *contubernium*—a form of cohabitation without legal marriage—famously exemplified in Christian tradition by Saint Augustine. Simultaneously, Christianity evolved from a Jewish sect - with its own marriage concepts and legal framework - into an independent religion. Yet, during this period, the fully developed canonical understanding of marriage seen in the Middle Ages had not yet emerged; Christians conformed to the marriage laws of the societies in which they lived. This presentation aims to explore whether and how the “liberalization” introduced by the *Constitutio Antoniniana* influenced the concept of marriage in ancient Christian writings, particularly those of Clement of Alexandria and Origen.

GIOVANNI VACCARO (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome)

Paul and Jesus before the Herods: Criminal Procedure and Literary Devices in Luke-Acts Trial

The trial of Paul, as described in the Acts of the Apostles, exhibits a notable similarity to that of Jesus, as it is reported exclusively in the Gospel of Luke: although both accused individuals are judged before Roman authorities in the province of Judea, a Jewish ruler happens to be, in some respects, considered competent to hear the case. This study seeks to demonstrate that the parallelism between Jesus' trial and Paul's trial, both including hearings before a member of the Herodian dynasty, is best understood by moving from the latter to the former. A critical analysis of Acts 25:23–26:32 – the section of the narrative in which Governor Festus involves King Agrippa II in the legal case of Paul – highlights a redactional work based on traditional materials, rather than a purely fictional creation. Furthermore, the scene contains elements that align with criminal procedure in Roman provinces and can be generally regarded as historically plausible. By contrast,

Pilate's decision to send Jesus, as a Galilean, before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12), finds no reasonable justification in first-century CE Roman Law, and appears far less likely. Once these assessments of the historical-juridical context are combined with specific literary connections, the rhetorical device of *śynkrisis* proves helpful in interpreting the relationship between the two texts, considered in the broader narrative dynamic of Luke-Acts, which does not always flow from Jesus to the Apostles, but may rather be seen as bidirectional.

Explorations of Peoplehood in the Ancient Mediterranean

(Chairs: Maia Kotrosits and Philip A. Harland)

GUY EDELSZTEIN AND ELLA KAREV (Tel Aviv University, Israel)

Conceptions of Captivity: The Christian and Non-Christian Captives of Šapūr I

Much has been written about the Roman captives taken by Šapūr I in his military campaigns of the third century AD. Scholarship has mostly focused on the Christians captured by the Persians, specifically their role in the relationship between the Zoroastrian Sassanid East and the Christianizing Roman West. Despite the continuing debate concerning the impact of the captives on Imperial dynamics, studies on the captives themselves—including the impact of this dynamic on their lives—are scarce. Consequently, discourse on the captives is often hindered by misconceptions of their identity and their status under Persian rule. Although the Babylonian Talmud has often been neglected within this discussion, it is a potentially valuable resource, and an examination of the relevant passages from it raises new questions and points of interest. While the usage of the Talmud poses unique challenges, several Sugyot allude to Jewish populations captured by Šapūr, whose perspectives—although supposedly outnumbering the Christians—have thus far remained unheard in scholarship. A preliminary examination of some of these passages, in conjunction with Christian Martyrologies of the fifth and sixth centuries, sheds light on the status of the non-Christian captives, offering unique insights into their perspective as well as a new angle from which to compare the experience of Christian captives. This new context allows an examination of self-identification methods utilized by those groups, and a discussion of the utility of the term 'captives' as opposed to 'slaves' or 'prisoners' when used to refer to Christian and non-Christian captives alike.

ARTURO MASSA (University of Bari "Aldo Moro")

Populi, Gentes, and Nationes: The Perception of "Barbarians" in the Sermons of Chromatius of Aquileia (388/389–407/408)

The study of the interactions between Aquileia and the world beyond the imperial limes provides a valuable framework for elucidating the mechanisms of communal self-determination in opposition to an external Otherness. This paper seeks to explore the perception of the so-called barbarian populations through an analysis of the homiletic corpus of Chromatius of Aquileia. Situated at a crossroads of diverse cultures and religions, the Aquileian community – comprising both Arian and Nicene Christians, as well as a substantial Jewish faction – was compelled to confront the significant Germanic presence along the borders of the patriarchal territory. An examination of Chromatius' Sermons reveals that the bishop deliberately distinguishes, through a nuanced use of terminology, the identity groups constitutive of the Aquileian community from external elements. By designating Christians and Jews as *populi* and *gentes*, while reserving the term *nationes* exclusively for the Germani peoples, the collection of Sermons invites reflection both on the semantic significance and usage of these terms in late antiquity and on how Aquileia, through the lens of its most eminent bishop, codified group membership in terms of specific ethnic, cultural, and religious identity. Furthermore, the recurrent references to *barbari* in Chromatius' sermons transcend mere categorization, serving instead as a rhetorical strategy to reinforce communal belonging by emphasizing the perceived differences between the community and the "other," who is viewed as potentially threatening.

From the History of Exegesis to Reception History and Beyond

(Chairs: Laura Carnevale and Edmondo F. Lupieri)

PAOLA STORNAIUOLO (University of Bari “Aldo Moro”)

Mary Magdalene as Hermeneutical Palimpsest: From Gospel to Goddess in Reception History

This paper explores retrospection in biblical reception history through the figure of Mary Magdalene, examining how two of her early portrayals — her depiction as the first witness to the Resurrection (*John* 20:11–18) and as the Gnostic wisdom-bearer (*e.g.*, *Gospel of Mary*, *Gospel of Philip*) — carry a symbolic capital that is continually reactivated and reworked to address contemporary concerns. Centuries after Gregory the Great (591) officially conflated her with other biblical women — eclipsing her apostolic authority in favor of a penitential model —, the *apostolorum apostola* resurfaces, catalyzed by the Nag Hammadi discoveries (1945) and popularized by Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), which reframes her as a vessel of divine femininity, rejected knowledge, and silenced authority. This reclaimed Magdalene fuels movements such as that of the one of neopagan Mary Magdalene Priestesses, who recast her as an archetype of sacred womanhood — sovereign, sexual, empowered — and perform rituals that honor the female body (*e.g.*, womb ceremonies, menstrual blessings). By blending traditions from early Christianity, Gnosticism, and Goddess spirituality, they construct a spiritually powerful figure who validates female preaching authority (through her Johannine commissioning), models sacred partnership (via her Gnostic intimacy with Christ), and embodies resistance to patriarchal suppression (reinterpreting her apocryphal conflicts with Peter). Social media further amplify these re-readings, fostering global communities that venerate Magdalene as both ancient apostle and postmodern icon. Magdalene’s case thus emerges as paradigmatic of how reception history is an active, sometimes subversive, process where sacred figures are retrofitted to satisfy evolving desires, while blurring the boundaries between exegesis, myth-making, and identity.

GIOVANNI RAGNO (University of Bari “Aldo Moro”)

Lexicon of Corporeality in the Biblical Exegesis of Hildegard of Bingen

Within the studies on medieval biblical exegesis, women’s reception and interpretation of Scripture – woven through the threads of patristic theology – constitutes a still marginal area of research, albeit one rich in heuristic potential. This paper aims to identify and reconstruct the traces of a lexicon of corporeality as an interpretive key to the biblical exegesis of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179). The investigation will focus on the historical-critical examination of some significant passages from the creation narratives, scriptural verses, and evangelical expressions. These passages will be chosen from within the Hildegardian textual *corpus* – hagiographic, theological-prophetic, and medical-naturalistic – for their relevance in outlining an interpretive model of reality as a pedagogy of life. The texts will be examined in their inspirational function in the activity of the Rhenish theologian as *magistra*, *prophetissa* and *abbatissa* in eleventh- and twelfth-century Germany. Particular attention will be paid to analyzing the originality that Hildegard’s biblical hermeneutics highlights in transposing the relationship between the divine and the human through female metaphors and images revealing creativity and interpretive sensitivity. The paper also intends to highlight how the hermeneutics of corporeality that runs through Hildegard’s work is configured as an expression of a logic of incarnation in a symbolic-allegorical key, in which the sacred page – heard or read – becomes “flesh” in the minds of those who receive it and describe it as a living word that questions the present and responds to its challenges.

Gender Issues in Early Christianity

(Chairs: Maria Dell'Isola and Mario Resta)

LUCA ARCARI (University of Naples "Federico II")

Re-inventing Traditions in Sexualized Spaces: Urbanity and Stigmatization of Non-normative Sexuality in Philo and Paul

This paper draws on the theoretical insights of Ph. Hubbard's *Cities and Sexualities* (2012) to explore how Philo of Alexandria and Paul reinterpret and reshape Jewish traditions concerning what they regarded as deviant sexualities. The analysis focuses on how these reconfigurations are informed by the relationship between sexual practices and urban life in the cities of Roman Alexandria and Rome, respectively. The concept of urban sexuality refers to the interaction between lived sexual identities and urban spaces, highlighting how urban environments shape sexual norms and roles, and how these, in turn, redefine the boundaries between religious actors and groups. These processes often lead to the invention or reinvention of religious traditions within the particular dynamics of urban settings. In addition, this paper examines how urban sexual spaces contribute not only to the redefinition and regulation of gender boundaries, but also to the negotiation of what is considered legitimate or illegitimate within religious groups. These groups, often internally diverse, are shown to be profoundly affected by the influence of urban dynamics in the construction and redefinition of sexualities.

LUANA L. ASCONE (University of Padua)

"And I Was Made a Woman": (Self-)Portrait of the Exegete as a Young Woman

This paper offers a complementary reading to the well-established interpretation of female asceticism as a process of masculinization. Rather than challenging this paradigm, the present study seeks to highlight a less explored dimension: the assimilation of the male ascetic to feminine models. Focusing on the case of Jerome, it examines how, across various letters addressed to virgins, bishops, and deacons, he adopts female imagery and postures, at times identifying with paradigmatic female figures from Christian tradition. As a hermit struggling with bodily impulses, he associates himself with the sinful woman who washes Jesus' feet (*Lk* 7:36-50); as a scholar and ascetic, with Mary reading the Scriptures, surrounded by angels; and as an exegete and translator, with the bride entering the king's bridal chamber (*Song* 1:4). These images suggest a process of inner feminization linked to spiritual purification and intimacy with Christ. A medieval legend recorded in the *Legenda Aurea*—and echoed in Renaissance art—also depicts Jerome dressed as a woman; while this may not reflect a coherent reception of the aforementioned motifs, it stands out as a telling episode in the saint's later iconographic and literary tradition. This study thus aims at contributing to broader discussions on gender roles in early Christianity, showing how male figures could also engage in symbolic feminization, thereby complicating binary models and enriching our understanding of ascetic identity and gendered subjectivity in the late antique Christian world.

MARIO RESTA (University of Bari "Aldo Moro")

Eunuchs in Late Antiquity: Gender Perspectives Starting from the First Council of Nicaea

This paper will examine the presence and perception of eunuchs in late antiquity, taking as its point of departure the first canon of the Council of Nicaea (325), which forbade those who had voluntarily castrated themselves from entering the clerical ranks. The fact that this canon opens the Nicene legislation underscores the significance of the issue, which – although recently revitalized through the lens of gender and masculinity studies – merits renewed scrutiny within the broader context of Christianity's complex development in late antiquity. The study will argue that the Nicene canon not only constituted the first official pronouncement on voluntary castration but also emerged from a long-standing critical discourse shaped by pervasive hostility towards eunuchism, perceived as a disruption of the prevailing gender binary. The essay will explore the multiple dimensions

underlying this hostility through an interdisciplinary engagement with a wide range of sources (scriptural, literary, legislative, epigraphic, and canonical) both prior to and following the Council of Nicaea. In so doing, it will seek to illuminate not only the rationale for opposition to eunuchs but also the persistence of their presence within the clergy and their enduring commitment to the Christian faith, following quite literally the example proposed in *Matthew* 19:12 of making themselves eunuchs for the sake of the “kingdom of heaven”.

KATE WILKINSON (Towson University, USA)

Marriage as Bondage but Not Slavery: The Case of an Absent Metaphor in Early Christian Feminine Pro-Chastity Rhetoric

Fourth-century Christian ascetic proponents urged women to lives of virginity and widowhood by emphasizing the freedoms of sexual renunciation. In one line of argument, authors including Ambrose, Jerome, Eusebius of Emesa, and John Chrysostom contrast the freedom of unmarried life and the bonds of marriage, invoking the language of Genesis 3:16, I Corinthians 7, and Romans 7:2-3. Why does this language of domination, bonds, and yokes not lead to comparisons between the wife and the slave? After all, the institution of slavery was omnipresent in the late Roman Christian world and metaphors of slavery abounded in both Christian and non-Christian literature. Yet direct comparisons of marriage to slavery in pro-chastity writings are rare and almost entirely reserved for men. Despite a desire to mark unmarried women as uniquely free, early Christian authors avoid opportunities to compare marriage, especially the married life of women, to slavery. I will explore several possible reasons, both rhetorical and practical, that fourth-century male authors avoided presenting women's married life explicitly as a form of slavery and suggest that a contemporary female audience would have appreciated this tactic. Women attracted to the freedom of the unmarried life would not necessarily have been persuaded by a description of married life as slavery.

Gospel of Thomas, Nag Hammadi, and Gnosticism

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

PHILIPPE THERRIEN (Laval University, Canada)

References and Allusions to the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament in the Long Version of the *Secret Book of John* (NH II,1; IV,1)

This contribution stems from my current research project, which is to make a new edition and French translation of the long version of the *Secret Book of John* (NH II,1; IV,1), accompanied by an introduction and commentary. One of my goals is to identify and explain its specificities, in relation to the short version and other gnostic treatises. With this in mind, this communication proposes to examine the references to the Jewish Scriptures and to New Testament writings, especially the Gospel according to John. Building on previous scholarship, I will present the results of my own research to generate new insights into the originality of the long version. The *Secret Book of John* is well-known to recount and reinterpret the Genesis account of creation in a platonic frame. Motifs such as the “blasphemy of the Archon” and the fall of Sophia are common to all versions of the treatise, but have their own distinctive features in each version that must be accounted for. In that regard, the references to the Gospels, perceptible in the narrative frame, the title, the Pronoia hymn, and other allusions, suggest that the long version seeks to establish a deeper connection with the Gospel according to John. In sum, the study of scriptural references can yield a renewed comprehension of the theological and philosophical background and intentions of the long version.

LAVINIA CERIONI (Sapienza University of Rome)

Gendered Divinity: Female Imagery in Gnostic Christologies

This paper examines the role of female figures in Gnostic Christologies, with a particular focus on the interplay of gendered imagery and theological doctrines. The diversity of Christological models

found in the Nag Hammadi library and other Gnostic texts has generated considerable scholarly debate. Unlike more conventional Christologies of the early centuries, Gnostic Christologies are often composite in nature, integrating Christological attributes into other mythological figures beyond Christ himself. A prime example is the Valentinian figure of Sophia, whose suffering is portrayed as an archetypal parallel to Christ's passion on the cross—most notably in Irenaeus' account of Ptolemy's teachings and in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*. Similarly, the depiction of blood dripping from Pronoia during the theophany above the waters in *The Origin of the World* exemplifies the fusion of gendered symbolism and Christological themes by alluding to the soteriological value of Christ's blood. This study argues that gender imagery is not incidental but fundamental to the articulation of Gnostic Christologies. It serves as a theological language that captures the nuanced and innovative nature of these alternative visions of Christ.

DAVIDE MOCELLIN (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)

Nag Hammadi Codex I in the Context of the Origenist Controversy

The present paper is based on my PhD research project on Nag Hammadi Codex I and its connections with the Origenist Controversy, or first Origenist crisis, that emerged at the end of the fourth century. My research will be developed along two main lines: first, the analysis of the texts of the Codex I, highlighting the interconnections between each one of these writings and supporting a comprehensive vision of this codex as a collection of texts coherently organized on specific thematic criteria; second, the attempt to propose a contextualization of this codex and of other codices related to it, taking into account the religious debates and disputes, especially the first Origenist Controversy, that affected Egyptian Christianity between the late 4th and early 5th century. During my speech I would like to focus on specific passages of the texts of Codex I that might show conceptual affinities and parallels with some elements and ideas characteristic of the writings of Origen and/or which were at the center of the debates related to the Origenist controversy. One example will be the use of the image of the divine fragrance and of the cold-warm dialectic in the *Gospel of Truth* (NHC I,3), precisely in 34,10-34, which can be related in some way with Origen's doctrine of the pre-existence and fall of the souls. During my speech, further examples of this type of connections will also be provided in relation to *Treatise on the Resurrection* (NHC I,4) and *Tripartite Tractate* (NHC I,5).

Historical Jesus: New Paths and Historiographical Issues

(Chairs: Miriam Benfatto and Cristiana Facchini)

CRISTIANA FACCHINI (University of Bologna)

The 'Historical Jesus' and the Holy Land: The Impact of New Media and Technology in Historical Writing

This paper examines the emergence of *historical Jesus* scholarship in relation to the technological and cultural transformations of the nineteenth century, particularly those that enhanced mobility and visual representation. The construction of railways, the expansion of steamship routes, and the improvement of roads facilitated travel to the Eastern Mediterranean, while the growth of print culture and the development of photography and early cinema introduced new ways of documenting and imagining distant places. Within this context, journeys to the "Holy Land" became pivotal not only for scholarly reconstructions of Jesus but also for shaping modern religious sensibilities through spatial and emotional engagement. Focusing on the intersection of geographical imagination, emotional response, and textual production, this paper analyzes how experiences of place influenced the writing of historical Jesus narratives. A central case study is Ernest Renan's journey to Palestine and Syria, which profoundly informed his *Vie de Jésus* (1863). Renan's work exemplifies how travel and landscape shaped religious historiography in the modern era. The paper also considers early visual media—such as photography and silent film—as new

modes of religious visualization, exploring how they extended and transformed the modern image of Jesus. By situating historical Jesus's research within a broader media-ecological and technological framework, the paper argues for a rethinking of modern biblical scholarship as deeply embedded in the material and visual cultures of modernity.

DARIUSZ PNIEWSKI (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń, Poland)

'New Jesus': The Rhetorical Figure of Jesus in the Rhetoric of Utopian Socio-Political Movements of the First Half of the 19th Century

The "New Jesus" is a rhetorical figure that has been in use since the 1830s outside the genetic context of the Christian religion. At the time, it was an extremely popular way of arguing for new social and political concepts (Saint-Simonism, Etienne Cabet's Icarian movement). It quickly became a "travelling motif" with a different purpose: it was used by the "proto-nations" (a term coined by Thomas Eriksen in *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, 1993) to define their national identity. The immense popularity of the figure of Jesus in the literature and art of the first half of the 19th century produced a world-famous cultural code used by nations struggling for existence (Polish Romantic Messianism – Ludwik Królikowski, Adam Mickiewicz, methodology: Paul Hamilton's "realpoetics") or nations with a newly established statehood (for the *longue durée* of the motif in the 20th century, see the poetry of Senegalese president and intellectual Léopold Sédar Senghor). Themes analyzed in the proposed paper: a) political writings and literary works of the Saint-Simonists (E. Cabet, L. Królikowski, A. Mickiewicz, L.S. Senghor Senghor), b) iconography: the "Polish Jesus" in the 19th-century French press (lithographs), French and English reception of the "Senegalese Jesus" (Senghor's poetry), c) variants: the pragmatism of the French "new Jesuses" (Saint-Simon, Napoleon Bonaparte, E. Cabet) and the metaphoricity of the figures of the "Polish" and "Senegalese Jesus".

JONATHAN ELUKIN (Trinity College, Hartford, USA)

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.

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

(Chairs: Roberto Alciati and Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli)

CHIARA CREMONESI (University of Padua) AND LUIGI WALT (University of Naples "L'Orientale")

Mr. Smith's Cabinet of Wonder: On Data, Examples, and Scale in the Scholarly Imagination of Religion

"There is no data for religion," Jonathan Z. Smith famously argued in his programmatic introduction to *Imagining Religion* (1982)—but what kind of imagination is required to make data out of religion? This paper seeks to revisit Smith's provocation by comparing his theoretical project to the logic of the

Wunderkammer: the early modern cabinets of curiosity where *naturalia* and *artificialia* were assembled, juxtaposed, and classified in ways that were both idiosyncratic and generative. As in those cabinets, the scholarly imagination of religion, for Smith, does not discover but actively produces its objects, through the scholar's "imaginative acts of comparison and generalization." A telling illustration is offered by the two micro-experiments proposed by Smith in his 1980 essay "Fences and Neighbors," where discussion of the taxonomic value of male circumcision serves as a testing ground for evaluating both academic and normative definitions of early Judaism. What emerges is a sharp critique of any monothetic definition of "religion," whether formulated at a generic or specific level, and a compelling argument in favor of polythetic, data-driven models in the analysis of religious "species." At the heart of this effort lies a disciplined play of scale, and an understanding of translation not as a search for congruence, but as a construction of difference—a difference that, for Smith, simply marks our shift from territory to map, from a language that is intelligible, yet not of our own making, to another language that is more intelligible because we have made it ourselves.

EDUARD IRICINSCHI (University of Erfurt, Germany)

On the Joys of Chaos in the Study of Religions: Jonathan Z. Smith and Mircea Eliade in the 1970s Chicago

This paper outlines the micro-history of a significant period in the development of the history of religions in Chicago, spanning from 1966 to 1980. Although Jonathan Z. Smith met Mircea Eliade for the first time on February 14, 1968, he engaged the Romanian-born historian of religions in a series of publications from the 1966 article "The Garments of Shame" to the search for meaningful incongruities in his 1972 "Wobbling Pivot." Between November 1966 and February 1968, Eliade had published his research on Australian religions in a five-part editorial installment in the journal *History of Religions*; in 1967 he also published the first volume of a sourcebook for the history of religions, titled *Gods, Goddesses, and Myths of Creation*, which will become part of the better known *From Primitives to Zen*. The paper will consider the above publishing activity as reflecting Eliade's early attempts to consolidate his phenomenology of religion into an academic discipline, only ten years after he moved to Chicago, and consider both Edmund Leach's 1966 rebuttal ("Sermons by a Man on a Ladder") and J.Z. Smith's series of articles as forms of "anthropological resistance" to Eliade's "archaic ontology." It will finally explore J.Z. Smith's conceptual transference from "reversal and rebellion" to "locative and utopian" as a possible influence on Bruce Lincoln's early publications.

ANDERS KLOSTERGAARD PETERSEN (Aarhus University, Denmark)

Evolutionary and Cognitive Approaches to the Study of Religion: Discrepancies, Continuities, and Overlaps

In recent years we have witnessed a number of new methods, models and theories in the study of the humanities in general and the study of religion in particular. Among the most prominent are evolutionary and cognitive approaches. They are often seen as two sides of the same coin, but this is not the case. On the contrary, they can be very different, depending on what kind of evolution one advocates and envisions. In this paper I present an overview of approaches, focusing on discrepancies, continuities and overlaps. In the final part I try to demonstrate their inevitable character for any scientific study of religion worth its name by applying them to the study of early Christian religion.

Jewish History, Hellenistic Judaism, and Septuagint Studies

(Chairs: Davide Dainese, Dario Garribba, Anna Mambelli, Marco Vitelli)

ANDREA DI LENARDO (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

The Fourth Philosophy and the Sicarii in Early Christian Literature

This contribution examines the so called Fourth Philosophy (founded by Judas the Galilean) and the Sicarii (led by his descendants) in the New Testament, in patristic sources and in apocrypha. What do these texts add? How do they rework the information from Josephus? The name “Iscariot” has sometimes been associated with that of “Sicarii.” John 18:40 speaks of Barabbas as a ληστής, a “brigand.” Acts 5:37 records the census and Judas the Galilean, adding a reference at his end, but erroneously places him after Theudas (Acts 5:36). Acts 21:38 attributes four thousand Sicarii to the Egyptian’s entourage, although Josephus seems to distinguish the Egyptian prophet from the Sicarii (*Bellum Iudaicum* II:254-263). Furthermore, whereas in Acts 21:38 there are four thousand people, in Bell. II:261 there are thirty thousand. Justin Martyr lists the Galileans among the Jewish “sects” (*Dialogus cum Tryphone* 50:4): they could simply be the inhabitants of Galilee or the followers of Judas the Galilean. Pseudo-Hippolytus, unlike Josephus, identifies the Sicarii with the Zealots and considers them a branch of the Essenes (*Refutatio omnium haeresium* IX:26,2). Finally, the *Praedicatio Simonis Cananaei* speaks of Judas the Galilean as a follower of Jesus who preaches the gospel in Samaria after Jesus’ death and seems to identify him with the apostle Simon the Canaanite.

FRANCESCA LORENZINI (Roma Tre University)

It’s Time to Fight against Rome: The Theocratic ‘Manifesto’ of the First Jewish Revolt

The determinism that often accompanies the modern interpretations of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 makes the rebels’ decision to fight against Roman power desperate. For the majority of the νεωτερίζοντες in 66 CE, however, it was a matter of grasping the *καιρός* as the hope of liberation from the *Imperium Romanum*. Beginning with Caligula, relations between Rome and Judea had in fact seen the rise of tensions. Not least – besides Philo and Josephus – Tacitus informs us (*Hist.* 5. 9. 2: *Dein iussi a. C. Caesare effigiem eius in templo locare arma potius sumpserere*). From the account of the *testis-auctor* Josephus (but also from Cassius Dio 65. 6. 2-3), it is clear that the Temple – the beating heart of the ἔθνος τῶν Ἰουδαίων – was until the end the symbol of the Jewish rebels’ resistance and the theatre of war against the Romans. This contribution focuses on the rebellious ideology examining the meaning of two acts par excellence of the ‘theocratic declaration of war’ starting from the *Locus Dei*: the voluntary rejection of the ‘Jewish-Roman compromise’, that means, the interruption (since the time of Augustus) of daily sacrifices *pro salute Romae ac Caesaris* (*BJ* 2. 409-410; cfr. *BJ* 2. 197; *C. Ap.* 2. 77 ≠ *Phil. Leg.* 157; 317), and the minting of coins. Although Josephus in his narrative obscured as much as possible the political-religious motivations, the first priestly rebels fought – as their response – against the ‘romanisation’ of the Temple (τὸ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἡγεμόνων ἔθος; cfr. e.g. under Gessius Florus *BJ* 2. 293-296) contrasting the (old) conniving ruling class (cfr. *BJ* 2. 411-416: οἱ δυνατοὶ, οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ τῶν Φαρισαίων γνώριμοι). In this way, they declared the ἐλευθερία and αὐτονομία for the Temple-State. In the eyes of the ‘young’ priestly *élite* led by Eleazar b. Ananias, Rome was now ἀλλότριος.

LAURA BIGONI (University of Bologna) AND ISABELLA PIGNOCCO (University of Catania)

Scriptural Continuities in the Alexandrian Tradition: A Computational Approach to the Septuagint in Philo and Clement

This paper aims to investigate the continuity in Scriptural quotations from the Septuagint within the Alexandrian tradition, both within Judaism and early Christianity, by making special reference to the textual heritage of Philo of Alexandria on Clement of Alexandria. The research is based on data collected through a computational pipeline designed to parse the textual information contained in the apparatus of the Göttingen edition to perform calculation and information retrieval. Thanks to a classification of witnesses obtained within the PRIN project “Resilient Septuagint”, it is possible to consider the instances in which Philo and Clement both appear as witnesses to a textual form of the

Septuagint. The analysis of these results brings new light on the Scriptural practices of both authors and on the nature of the sometimes-mediated biblical intertextuality in the Alexandrian milieu. The mediation represented by Philo highlights how the Christian development of biblical exegesis relies on Greek versions of the biblical texts that were influenced also by the work of Jewish scholars.

ANTONELLA BELLANTUONO (Catholic University of Lille, France)

Semantic Reconfiguration of θυμός in the Septuagint: From Classical Psychology to Religious Lexicon

This paper investigates the semantic trajectory of the term θυμός, tracing its transition from a dynamic and multifaceted concept in Greek literature to a religiously charged term within the Septuagint. The analysis opens with Euripides' *Medea*, where θυμός appears as an overwhelming force surpassing rational deliberation, and proceeds to examine its role in the works of Homer, Hesiod, Plato, and others, where it is consistently portrayed as the locus of emotional vitality, often external to the rational self and intimately linked to the inner conflict between reason and passion. By contrast, in the Septuagint, θυμός is predominantly employed to denote divine wrath, frequently paired with ὀργή. Its nuanced psychological and existential dimensions are largely subsumed under a moralized and cultic framework. Nonetheless, in certain sapiential texts, such as *Job*, *Proverbs*, and *Wisdom of Solomon*, echoes of its classical usage persist, where θυμός once again evokes a spontaneous, sometimes irrational emotional force. Through a diachronic analysis, this study demonstrates how θυμός was conceptually reshaped by the Septuagint translators to align with Jewish paradigms, while still retaining, in selected passages, the semantic resonance of classical Greek literature. This research contributes to the entry on θυμός in the second volume of the *Historical and Theological Lexicon of the Septuagint* (HTLS), (Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen), of whose advisory board I am a member.

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

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

FABRIZIO MARCELLO (Catholic University of Paris, France)

Christianizing Shamelessness: A Cynic Motif in the Parable of the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-13)

To characterize the attitude of the man who approaches his friend at midnight to obtain food for his guest, Luke employs a striking term: ἀναίδεια. From the early Imperial period onward, this word increasingly came to denote the shamelessness typically associated with the Cynic philosopher—a set of scandalous and subversive behaviors and attitudes that challenged established religious, social, and cultural norms. While many pagan and Christian authors appreciated the moral and ascetic ideals of the Cynics, they were often uneasy with this particular trait, to the point of either omitting it or explicitly rejecting it. In this paper, I argue that Luke participates in a similar negotiation of the Cynic ideal. Yet he does so in a distinctive way: by Christianizing shamelessness—that is, by implicitly purging it of its ethically problematic connotations and reinterpreting it as a posture of bold freedom, both horizontal and vertical, directed toward one's neighbor and toward God.

DOROTA M. HARTMAN (University of Naples "L'Orientale")

The Parable of the Watchful Servants (Luke 12:35-40): Where Does it Come from?

In Luke's gospel there are four parables that have no correspondence in the other Synoptics and contain an exhortation to vigilance in the face of an impending judgment (12:16-20; 12:35-38; 13:1b-5, 6b-9). The eschatology seems to be more imminent than Lukan eschatology, which is characterized by the so-called delay of the *parousia*. I will refer to Luke 12:35-38 as the parable of the watchful servants. The verses which follow, 12:39-40, are another parabolic saying about the

thief, which is often attributed to the double tradition (Q). The contention of this paper is that the two parables could have been inherited together as a cluster from pre-Lukan, and possibly pre-Synoptic, tradition. They present characteristics proper to this peculiar tradition and known to the authors of other early Christian writings.

MARIE-THÉRÈSE GERSTNER (University of Graz, Austria)

Lament as Last Appeal: Luke 23:26-32 in Literary and Cultural Context

In the Lukan passion narrative, 23:26–32 stands out as Jesus’s longest speech—remarkable for both its rhetorical density and dramatic placement. The episode introduces an unusual scene of mourning before Jesus’s death, interrupting the narrative flow and featuring a crowd of lamenting women, seemingly defying social prohibitions. Drawing on biblical and extrabiblical literature—where lament often functions as an expression of repentance and a means to achieve a “change of mind” (μετάνοια) in the divine or human judge—this paper explores the theological and rhetorical implications of the redirection of the women’s laments toward their own and their children’s destiny. Jesus’s call to lament, grounded in the prophetic tradition (especially in Jeremiah), may not be aimed at expressing inevitable loss but at forestalling destruction. Unlike Jesus’s death, which the Lukan narrative repeatedly presents as necessary according to divine plan (δεῖ), Jerusalem’s fate is depicted as avoidable—conditional upon the people’s response. This reading highlights lament—especially maternal grief—as a powerful narrative and theological device, reinforcing Luke’s concern with human responsibility in the face of divine judgment.

Oral and Written Sources of Early Christian Texts

(Chairs: Enrico Norelli and Claudio Zamagni)

CECILIA ANTONELLI (University of Geneva – University of Lausanne, Switzerland)

The *Acta et martyrium Bartholomaei* in Greek and Armenian (BHG 226z) and Bartholomew’s Death: The Mystery, the Cross, and the Door

The *Acta et martyrium Bartholomaei* are built through an interesting and original combination of narrative patterns, literary *topoi* and content elements from various ancient Christian sources, including canonical, apocryphal, and patristic writings. The present contribution will focus on the account of the apostle’s death, highlighting its connection with the role of Bartholomew/Nathanael as a repository of divine mysteries. In particular, the image of the cross as a doorway will be explored, through New Testament and Old Testament references, biblical *testimonia*, and literary parallels in texts from different geographical areas, such as the Greek *Acts of Philip*, the Syriac *Book of Hierotheus* and the Ethiopian *Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth*.

SINCERO MANTELLI (Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, Rome)

Qoheleth: Epicurean and Nihilist? Marginalizing the Letter

In his commentary on Ecclesiastes, Jerome mentions Epicurean interpretations of the biblical text. It is worth considering whether he had specific commentators of this book of Scripture or selected passages in mind, or if these were artfully designed inserts intended to preempt potential objections or stimulate the interpretative method of the *quaestio*. Certainly, the book of Qoheleth as a whole, and quite explicitly in some passages, constitutes one of the most difficult cases of *defectus litterae* for Jerome to domesticate. For this reason – while his exegesis brings out the letter of the text – it interprets it in a prophetic and Christological sense, marginalizing the immediate understanding of the text, which is clearly in contrast with the Christian vision of the scriptural message, or rather with how the ecclesial tradition receives the sacred Page.

ENRICO NORELLI (University of Geneva, Switzerland)

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

Gospel of Peter 6-9 lists the mistreatments 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 seems possible within the history of the transmission of the stories about the Passion of Jesus.

PAUL ROBERTSON (University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA)

Computational Approaches to Paul’s Letters: Surveys on Method and Future Directions

This paper summarizes notable, previous approaches to the Pauline epistles from computational perspectives, and then presents novel directions forward based on the author’s recent and ongoing work. Most previous statistical approaches focus on the frequency and location of specific vocabulary words (e.g., hapax legomena) and types of vocabulary (verbs, nouns, etc.), what we can term ‘bottom-up’ approaches. This includes early use of statistics, the still-influential technique of stylometry, and more recent work using multi-variate statistics. While important methodological steps, these approaches fail to account for and link with Paul’s rhetorical and social context, as well as suffer from methodological shortcomings by reducing Paul’s literary style to metrics such as the frequency of vocabulary words. By contrast, the present paper proposes the use of ‘top-down’ feature selection, which uses stylistic characteristics derived from Pauline scholars. These characteristics not only better reflect Paul’s literary and conceptual style but also allow for new computational approaches. The utility of such top-down feature selection is summarized with respect to previous work which shows Paul’s letters to be more proximate to Greco-Roman moral philosophy than to other forms of literature commonly asserted by non-empirical approaches (oratory; apocalyptic). Methodologically, such empirical work provides new understanding of the stylistic “shape” of Paul’s letters. It also allows for different types of computational analysis that can suggest novel questions and strengthen and/or challenge existing points of consensus in the field. Brief case studies will include statistical distributions, cosine similarity, heat maps, cluster mapping, and topology.

Papyrology and Early Christ Groups

(Chair: Marco Stroppa)

ELENI CHRONOPOULOU (Papyrological Institute “Girolamo Vitelli”, University Florence – University of Patras, Greece)

Early Christian Curative Amulets: Rhetorical Devices and the Legacy of Pagan Curses

The influence of earlier (pagan) magical traditions on ancient Christian amulets offers a fascinating example of cultural and religious continuity and adaptation. Although Christianity formally opposed magic, many early Christians continued to use amulets, charms, and incantations—much like their pagan contemporaries—often reworking traditional magical forms to align with Christian beliefs. This paper will begin by investigating the rhetorical strategies employed in early Christian curative amulets. Drawing on a corpus of papyri and inscribed lamellae from Late Antiquity, it analyzes key rhetorical features such as performative language, the personification of illness, imperative formulas, and more. In the second part, the study will explore the continuity and adaptation of these strategies from the pagan magical tradition of the Greco-Roman world. Particular attention will be given to the Christian appropriation and transformation of traditional motifs commonly found in pagan curse texts.

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

A New Fragment from a Roll of Amos (PSI XV 1575)?

In the XVI volume of Papiri della Società Italiana the number 1575 is a small fragment (cm 2,5 x 4,1) from a roll, written in the 3rd cent., with the passage Amos 6, 9-10. In the same Florence papyri collection (PSI) another very small fragment (cm 2,5 x 3,5) could be a piece from the same roll shading light on the text and transmission of the biblical work.

PETER ARZT-GRABNER (University of Salzburg, Austria)

Were Paul's Letters Really Large? A New Interpretation of Gal 6:11

In my recent book (*Letters and Letter Writing*, 2023), I have argued that – based on the evidence of papyrus letters – the passages in several Pauline letters expressing that Paul was writing with his own hand are not authentic but were inserted by the editor or publisher of Paul's letters. In this paper, I will again focus on Gal 6:11, but on the curious phrase that Paul wrote *pelikois grammasin*, which has been commonly translated as “in large letters” for decades. On the basis of documentary and literary sources and in combination with my argument mentioned above, I will tackle this translation and argue that the clause refers neither to “large letters” nor to the whole letter to the Galatians (*grammata* as a known plural referring to a whole letter). At the end of the paper, I will propose a new interpretation that is consistent with everything we know about ancient letter-writing.

Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity

Paul and Rabbinic Judaism

(Chairs: Matthias Morgenstern)

MATTHIAS MORGENSTERN (University of Tübingen, Germany)

Romans 7 and Rabbinic Marriage Law

Paul's statement in Romans 7, 1–2 that “the law is binding on a person only during his life” and that “a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives” has led interpreters to the question to which law the apostle refers. Numerous commentaries point to the rabbinic interpretation of Psalm 88, 6 in the Talmud (*Bavli Shabbat* 30a and 151b and *Nidda* 61b). The closest rabbinic parallel in the Talmud of Erez Israel (*Ketubbot* 12, 3/2), mostly forgotten in this context, offers new perspectives of interpretation. This proof text may be (indirectly) linked to the rabbinic interpretations of the seven laws of Noah (understood by the Rabbis as a later interpretation of the first law given to Adam). Can we take this as an indication that in the entire chapter of Romans 7, Paul is indeed struggling with the topic of the Adamic “I”?

DORU DOROFTEI (FAU – Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany)

The Forms and the Meanings of the Ritual of the First Bread Offering in Pauline and Rabbinic Religious Systems

In Rom 11, 26 Paul uses the ritual of the first portion of the bread (Num 15:17-21) as a metaphor for the newly emerged messianic/Christian community, a ritual broadly practiced in Second Temple Judaism and mentioned by many Second Temple literary works. The rabbinic traditions around the very same ritual, codified in the Mishna's and Tosefta's tractate *Hallah*, signal a shift in the perception and in the practice of the ritual on the rabbinic side. The paper tries to elucidate the dynamics between the two attested versions of the ritual, on one side the Pauline, New Testament understanding of the ritual as a metaphor/symbol of the Church, on the rabbinic side as a sign of the continued life of the people of Israel in the partially realized promise of the land. Additionally, the paper addresses the question, whether the discussed ritual played any role in the development of the eucharist ritual of the Church.

LUKE NEUBERT (LMU – Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany)

Paul between Philosophical Ethics and Pharisaical Halacha

Among the most difficult passages of Paul, Romans 2:17-24 takes pride of place. After having chided the Gentiles for their rejection of the one true God, Paul turns to the Jew – by this time a Jew and not merely Judean – in 2:17 and interpreters are not quite sure who is meant. I will argue that the Jew is not merely a literary figure or a foil, but Paul has specific halachic rulings in mind when he accuses the teachers of “stealing”, “committing adultery” and “robbing temples” (2:21f.) This discussion is not, however, only a Jewish discussion, as the teaching of Aristippus (Diog. Laer., *Lives* 2.99) also addresses these three vices, in the same order, and opines that they are sometimes permissible. By situating this discussion within Rabbinical thought, it will become clear what Paul is accusing the Jerusalemite Jewish teachers of doing, albeit, not outright, but through similar thinking as that displayed by Aristippus.

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

(Chairs: Tobias Nicklas and Luigi Walt)

GIULIO MARIOTTI (John XXIII Foundation for Religious Sciences, Bologna)

Narrating Destruction: The Reception of Ezekiel and Jeremiah in 4 Ezra and Revelation

This paper explores how two apocalyptic texts—*4 Ezra* and *Revelation*—composed in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, receive and reinterpret the prophetic traditions of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Through selected case studies, the analysis aims to show how post-exilic prophetic frameworks were resemanticized within apocalyptic narratives to address the theological and social crises of their respective communities. Particular attention will be given to *Revelation* 11, a passage rich in allusions to both Ezekiel and Jeremiah, which offers a complex vision of the Temple. The paper will examine how these prophetic echoes function within the text, especially in light of the growing scholarly consensus that the author is writing from the perspective of the Temple’s destruction. This will then be compared with *4 Ezra* 10, which presents a lament over Jerusalem’s fall. Although less densely packed with prophetic references, this chapter still reflects significant thematic and textual resonances with Ezekiel and Jeremiah. By juxtaposing these two apocalyptic texts, the paper seeks to illuminate how the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in the first century CE is narrated through the lens of sixth-century BCE prophetic literature. In doing so, it aims to assess the nature of dependence, reinterpretation, and innovation present in these texts’ engagements with earlier prophetic traditions, in particular about the Temple’s role in theological dynamic of these two apocalypses.

PHILIPPA TOWNSEND (University of Edinburgh)

The Cologne Mani Codex as Apocalypse

This paper reconsiders the genre of the Cologne Mani Codex (CMC), a miniature codex from the 4th-5th century CE which contains a series of stories about the life and mission of the 3rd-century prophet Mani. While the text follows a biographical timeline, it is also replete with stories of divine revelation. One section of the CMC quotes a series of (genuine or invented) Jewish apocalyptic texts in order to authorise Mani’s own revelatory experiences and the origin of these apocalyptic quotations has received a good deal of scholarly attention. But in this paper, I consider how we might understand the CMC *as a whole* as an apocalyptic text, rather than as a history or biography that merely *quotes* apocalyptic texts or contains some apocalyptic elements. This approach opens up fresh understandings of how readers might have read the CMC, or indeed experienced it as revelation in itself. In order to consider the extent to which it is helpful to approach the CMC as an apocalypse, I contextualise it through comparison to Nag Hammadi apocalypses, including Zostrianos and the Apocalypse of Paul. Exploring commonalities and differences between the CMC and these texts, I address the question of whether the connections are better explained through

Manichaean reception of earlier 'Gnostic apocalypses,' or through Manichaeans' participation in a shared apocalyptic literary culture. Finally, I explore how scholarship on the Nag Hammadi apocalypses might help us in understanding how the CMC might have been read and used as a model for experiencing revelation.

MARTA MICILLO (University of Naples "Federico II")

The Integration of Imperial Bureaucratic Elites into Christian Groups (6th Century) through the Case Study of the *Acta Pilati*

This paper offers a reinterpretation of the *Acta Pilati* as a reflection of the transformation of Christianity within the bureaucratic and administrative contexts of sixth-century Byzantium. Rather than attempting to reconstruct the historical events surrounding the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Christ, the study approaches this apocryphal text as a lens through which to examine the cultural and communicative developments of Late Antique Christianity. A comparative analysis with contemporary Constantinopolitan texts reveals a range of rhetorical and symbolic parallels, suggesting an editorial context situated within the imperial palace. These affinities highlight the adaptation of imperial political language to express a form of Christianity increasingly articulated through the idioms of the Byzantine state. Moreover, the compiler of the *Acta Pilati* displays a notable familiarity with traditional Roman legal procedure, structuring the narrative of Christ's final hours according to the formal stages of a trial—from *postulatio* to *interrogatio*, and from *altercatio* to *probatio*. This "juridical classicism" seems to reflect the normative and rhetorical culture of the period, underscoring the ways in which legal discourse served as a vehicle for religious expression.