

Luca Arcari

Description of the Research Project

Title: “Communication Practices and Early Christianity in Alexandria (2nd cent. CE). The Treatise on the ‘Divine Monarchy’ (*De Monarchia*) as a ‘Test Case’.”

With this project, I aim at analysing the appearance of the first groups of Jesus’ followers in the urban context of Alexandria starting from some of the methodological assumptions of the project “Religion and Urbanity. Reciprocal Formations”. The first question concerns what we mean with the term “religion”. As regards the Alexandrian urban context, this term implies a wide range of communication actions, which are more or less in connection with the hegemonic media system patronized by the Hellenic conquerors; in such a system, two elements appear as very relevant, the reinvention of a Greek-Athenian past as an instrument of self-definition, and the connections between this process of reinvention and some divine actors assumed as instruments of legitimation.

The second question concerns the problem of the presence of early Jesus’ followers in the Alexandrian media framework. It is widely agreed that everything that concerns the first Christian groups of the city is surrounded by myth, that it to say, nothing more than a later reconstruction without any historical foundation; it is not a chance that many scholars acknowledge that the history of early Christianity in Alexandria belongs to “dark” times. With this project, I aim at underling that it is impossible to debate about early Christianity in Alexandria separately from Jewish groups; for this reason, the communication system in use among the Jewish writers stands as a key element for the study of the early Christian presence in the city.

The third question concerns the typology of sources under discussion. The analysis of literary sources as media of communication implies their use as hegemonic symbols in a well-determined urban space. Literary works like commentaries, exegetical treatises, florilegia and other instruments of reinvention of the Greek past present only a limited, biased picture of that past, but they reveal what aspects of themselves people want to emphasize, which is in itself interesting enough, according to the specific audience to which a text is implicitly or explicitly directed. Alexandrian literary materials—or the supposed texts originated in the city—emerge as a kind of ‘test case’ for the study of connections between hegemony and the ‘local’ reactions to such a communicative framework.

The last question of my project concerns the relationships between cultural history and urban studies in light of communicative productions and/or actions; with this research project, I intend to cast light on such an aspect of the cultural history of the city between the Hellenistic and the Roman period. I aim at analyzing the presence of Alexandrine Jewish systems of communication in a very intriguing document, considering it a mirror of communicative actions carried out by the first Jesus’ followers in Alexandria: i.e. the treatise on the divine monarchy (*De monarchia*) later on included in the corpus attributed to Justin the Martyr, as well as its re-use and/or re-modulation in other Alexandrian texts of the Roman period.