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Editorial

With the first issue of 2009, «Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni» («Studies and Materials in the History of Religion», abbreviated as «SMSR») presents not only a new typographic format, but also a renewed and expanded editorial board. This transformation is meant to show our readers the desire to change and to be receptive to the most diversified perspectives of research while remaining faithful to the scientific heritage and values of both Raffaele Pettazzoni and the «Dipartimento di Studi Storico-Religiosi» of the Sapienza Università di Roma.

It is opportune to remark that, when he published the first volume of «SMSR», Raffaele Pettazzoni did not provide strict guidelines for the new cultural product that he offered to Italian intellectuals. The repetition on the inside cover of his programmatic statement already employed in the past to “mark” symbolically every volume of the journal that Pettazzoni founded in 1925 despite innumerable problems and difficulties is meant here not only as homage, but also as a scientific and methodological commitment to the scholar who passed away fifty years ago this year – he will be commemorated, together with others, by the ninth convention of the «European Association for the Study of Religions», which is to take place at Messina on 14-17 September 2009. All the journal’s subsequent directors have been members of the «Scuola di studi storico religiosi», then «Istituto», and lastly – since 1983 – «Dipartimento». Consequently this scientific institution is really the heart of the journal as well as of other cultural enterprises. We are grateful to the retiring director, Prof. Sergio Zincone, for the work that he performed unstintingly and with dedication. The same holds true for the authors and editors who have made possible the journal’s regular publication over the years. Some of them are still engaged in important and meaningful work for its continuation and renewal.

As of the current issue, the journal will be published by Morcelliana. We present ourselves to our readers – faithful and new alike – after having redesigned the journal’s format. Nonetheless, the numbering continues that of the previous series. Moreover, there has been a complete restructuring of the group of scholars involved in the journal’s production. As will be clear from the list published on the interior of the cover, the scientific work will be divided into two levels: next to a group of scholars from the Sapienza Università di Roma and long-term collabora-

SMSR 75(1/2009) 7-11

tors with the journal, there will also be scholars of international fame who are active in the field of Religious Studies. These scholars have been organized into an advisory board («comitato scientifico») and an editorial committee («comitato di redazione»).

Naturally rooted within the Roman environment to which the journal belongs, the new editorial committee aims at engaging afresh in dialogue with the wider world of “religious studies”. Although the subject of discussion both within and without the circle of scholars dedicated to this area, “religious studies” are to be understood as the specific cultural and intellectual milieu of scientific reflection upon religious phenomena. The repute and high scientific level of the individuals involved give us reason for thinking that the directions of research to be hosted by «SMSR» in the years to come will be appreciably enriched. It is our hope that the journal will ever more be a crossroads for diverse experiences and a meeting-place between Italian and foreign scholars.

The methodological equipment for the historical study of religious phenomena is not at question here. But readers, scholars, and authors and collaborators will perhaps find it useful if we outline what will henceforth be the journal’s formal structure. Every issue will contain a thematic section. This is already the case with the present issue, which consists of papers delivered at a scholarly meeting held in Rome in July 2007. As is the case here, the thematic section can come from a gathering of scholars, or can offer the results of research projects currently being overseen by members of the two committees of «SMSR», or of other projects presented to the editorial committee. This will foster contact with structured, collective research that is being undertaken. The journal will also host individual contributions that are independent of the thematic section; notes and reviews of work on specific topics; a “religious observatory” of debated issues such as methodology of religious sciences, current questions in monotheism, religions and politics, Oriental religions, ancient religions, cinema and religion; a brief listing of the activities of the Department; reviews and a list of books received. In addition to the journal, the current editorial board also aims at resuming the publication of the «Quaderni di SMSR», which, as in the past, will host monographs, documents, and acts of congresses. It will also serve to create a productive network of interdisciplinary relations, the specific aim being that of fostering relations between the Sapienza and its institutional partners as well as individual scholarly encounters.

The current issue of «SMSR» presents the results of the meeting entitled «*Città pagana / città cristiana. Tradizioni di fondazione*» («*Pagan city – Christian city. Foundation Traditions*»), which was held jointly

EDITORIAL

9

by the Sapienza Università di Roma and by the Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum in July 2007. This meeting arose from the convergence of various lines of research conducted in religious studies and in Christian history and literature. The overall context was that of the Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) entitled «Christianity and the Mediterranean world: plurality, coexistence, and religious conflicts between cities and peripheries (1st-8th centuries)», which project was directed by Mauro Pesce (at the national level) and financed by the Ministero per l'Università e la Ricerca Scientifica for the years 2006-2008. The meeting held in 2007 was organized by the Roman research group and benefited from an additional financial contribution made by the Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum. So as to provide the reader with a clear idea of the meeting's work, we reproduce here the brief programmatic statement that was offered by the organizers, A. Camplani, G. Piccaluga, A. Saggiaro, at the opening of the meeting:

«Coeval with advanced ancient civilization and simultaneously its presupposition and objective, the city is immediately perceived as an absolute good already within the Fertile Crescent and therefore within the Classical world. Its origins are ascribed to agents possessing extra-human qualities – divinities, heroes, mythical ancestors – who materially create it in the time of origins and subsequently entrust its management to humanity, even while continuing to provide sacred protection over the course of history. A substantial body of foundation myths bears witness to this. Conferring a sacred value upon the city's origins, they in essence already determine its destiny and relations with the unknown external world, with the potentially hostile cities of the "other". The ruin of the enemy city is already foreseen in the sacred tale and can thereby be organized on the basis of procedures established at that time (cfr. the cases of Troy, Thebes, Carthage, Capua, etc.), whereas for one's own city (e.g. Rome) guarantees of eternity are readily discerned therein.

An inalienable cultural achievement, the city seems destined to survive despite its demonization by early Christianity. Indeed, it reappears at the end of time as the city of God, though always with the features of a terrestrial urban centre (walls and *agora*) even when there will be "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). Progressively re-evaluated by a religion poised to assume temporal power, as was the case with Christianity, the Roman and Late Antique city repropounds the fundamental themes of its foundation myths. However, it reworks and adapts them to the needs of the new spirituality. The element of the miraculous is substituted for the initial situation that determined the city's appearance in history. The saint as patron replaces the founder of previous history. The veneration of this patron, his tomb and his relics superimposed upon the complex ritual that formerly guaranteed the city superhuman protection. The complementary relationship posited between the city's ecclesiastical structure and countryside sanctuaries replaces the dialectic that existed between urban temples and shrines outside the city walls.

In the specific instance of Christianity, it is also to be remarked that the first foundation traditions are especially concerned with the birth and formation of Christian communities. These were small groups destined to increase over time so as to take control of the key points of civic life. In these traditions, the community's foundation is attributed to apostles and disciples of Jesus or, more rarely, to other figures such as saints, clergy or monks belonging to subsequent generations. In a large number of cases, these evangelists suffer martyrdom and become the object of cult, especially in urban peripheries and frequently outside the city walls. It is also to be remarked that there exist traditions regarding historical individuals, such as priests and bishops, who contribute in a more authoritative manner to the refounding of the Christian presence within the city. Doing so, they guarantee its orthodoxy and sanctity (e.g. fourth-century bishops such as Peter of Alexandria, Paul of Constantinople, and Eustathius of Antioch). Yet other traditions deal with the relationship between the city and its territory. As in the case of the *Acts of Mark* concerning the jurisdiction of Alexandria over the cities of the Pentapolis, their aim is that of establishing ecclesiastical rights over the surrounding region. Lastly, there is a progressive sacralization of the area immediately outside the city. This area is enriched with sanctuaries dedicated to the cult of the saints. For these shrines, too, foundation stories are fashioned, often in dialectic with those relating to the churches within the city. Many of these traditions present a noteworthy evolution over the course of time, both in the Classical period and in Late Antiquity. Traces of re-writing that is ideological by oriented, or rather real variants, seem to have the function of responding to political and religious problems in which the city or some of its social and religious groups find themselves involved on occasion».

Sezione monografica / Theme Section

Atti del convegno
Citta pagana ~ citta cristiana
Tradizioni di fondazione

Acts of the Meeting
Pagan City ~ Christian City
Foundation Traditions

(Roma, Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2-3 luglio 2007)

