

Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, eds., *Texts, Practices, and Groups: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the History of Jesus' Followers in the First Two Centuries* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2017). Print, 918 pp. €131.37, ISBN: 9782503569017.



Review

There are many exegetical sources on the teachings of Jesus and canonical traditions, but this volume is comprehensive and informative on the socio-political environment of Jesus' followers and their communities, explored through the multidisciplinary scientific structure of sociology, cultural anthropology, history, philosophy, and cognitive studies. Thirty-nine articles, presented at the first annual meeting of Berrinoro (2014) used ancient literary materials for a historical reconstruction of the first two centuries. Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce (the editors) 'consider the close connection with the new epistemological and methodological perspectives in the field of human science' (p. 11), to underline the developed interpretations of Jesus and early Christianity in the modern age.

Texts, Practices, and Groups is divided into two parts: 'Texts and Groups' and 'Anthropology, Methodologies and Modern Historical Perspectives'. For dating early Christian texts, documentary papyri and archaeological dates are quoted to reconstruct the basic social situations, the civil and political organisations, the economic conditions, and the rituals and the religious practices. Marcion's Gospel is considered as having a close relationship with Luke, even though he was a cult-founder of Christianity. Simone Paganini supports the insight that the Dead Sea scroll text of 4Q521 parallels *Lk* 7:22, like the relationship between *Mt* 21:31c-32 and *Q*. It is argued that the ancient texts should be read in the light of socio-anthropological and historical perspectives, in order to rebuild the urban and rural environments, to highlight all the conditions of characters and to examine the close

relationship between social practice and symbolic systems. The organizational aspects of the fishing industry surrounding the lake of Galilee is reflected in the context of the era, when day-workers possibly had a low income, but owners of boats and nets or fishing contractors were certainly in a much better economic position.

The case studies of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (11:2–6 and 12:7), the sayings cluster of Mark (11: 22-25), the *Logion* 71 of the Gospel of Thomas, and three intertextual connections ('Mt 27: 49 and Jn 19:34', 'Mt 27: 55-56 and Jn 19:25–27,' and 'Mt 5:32 and Jn 7: 53–8:11') are seen as the early texts of Jesus' followers and their groups. The famous Areopagus speech of Paul (*Acts* 17: 16-34) is analysed to identify the original intention of the author (Luke) within the dual concept of sharing Judaic heritage and Hellenistic philosophy. The gnostic text of the *Adversus Valentinianos* is, likewise, maintained to be close to the Greek Irenaeus proved by Tertullian's *De Carne Christi*.

As religious practices reflect the social practice of early Jesus' followers, Luca Arcari regards the view of selective memories, in that Revelation 1:7 as a narrative process is based on the traditional memorial frame of Zechariah 12:10, and that emotive memories of the visionary Jesus are referred to *Rev* 1: 4–7, 11, 16–17 and 5: 6–10. The figurative studies on Marcus' Thiasoi, Theodotus' death (*Hist. eccl.* V,16,14–15), the first vision in the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, the Pythia and the ancient action of dance, are demonstrated in the ritual perspectives of 'magician,' 'gnostics,' 'Montanism,' 'ecstasy and heavenly journey,' 'vision,' and 'body'. The history of Jews and Judaism in the Roman-Hellenistic period is also explored by Dario Garribba (on the *vexata quaestio*), Marco Vitelli's images of Jesus and James in Josephus' *Antiquitates Iudaicae*, Laura C. Paladino's interpretation (of the *Acta*

Alexandrinorum), and Maurizio Marcheselli (on Boyarin's view of the relation between Christianity and Judaism).

The subject of religious forms and identities at the beginning of the second half of the volume is approached by the methodology of anthropological studies. For example, the individual characters (Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the centurion) placed at the centre of the stories are considered as part of the literary transposition of a memorized 'past world' for narrating the death of Jesus. Despite its irrelevance to the narratives of the first two centuries, the Wichí versions of believing, called *testimonios*, have been understood as re-establishing the order of things in a convert's life and the surrounding world in the Argentine Chaco. Similar to the Italian building narrative of Clarisse Eremite Monastery, the two monastic studies of Canadian Dominus Tecum and French Notre-Dame, from an economic perspective, 'apply a production rationale, not only for survival, but also for production, investment, and rationalization' (p. 624).

The contributions of two scholars (Fabrizio Vecoli and Emiliano Rubens Urciuoli) are devoted to the current methodological debate on the history of early Christianity. Especially, Urciuoli sustained the six styles of (pre-Constantinian) Christian political subjectivation: 'the vocation politician,' 'the man of the world,' 'the *loyalist sub condicione*,' 'the untrustworthy subject,' 'the apocalyptic opponent,' and 'the ideological endorser of the empire'. Among them, the first, second and last style of political subjectivation are argued to fit well with the public sphere. The method of Christian archaeology has been applied in the four articles of Carlo Carletti, Paola De Santis, Antonio Enrico Felle, and Maria Amodio. The epigraphic productions (including Flavia Sophe's epitaph, Didascalic inscription of the 'wedding feast', Ancotia Irene's epitaph, Ancotia Auzesis' epitaph, and Licinia Amias' stele) are depicted as 'a direct indicator of endogenous and exogenous

dynamics, characterizing in space and time the formative processes of one or more Christian identities' (p. 716).

The last section focuses on the modern interpretation of Jesus in which 'the characterization of the contemporary state of research as a period after the 'third quest' is understood as misleading' (p. 19). The study of the historical Jesus before H. S. Reimarus was seen as being attested from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Here, Mauro Pesce maintains that the historical figure in the modern age should 'be understood not in the frame of a linear historical evolution that proceeds by subsequent phases, but in the light of a social history that takes into consideration the conflicting attitudes of different intellectual and academic institutions' (p. 793), such as Catholic faculties, Protestant faculties, and independent institutions. The early modern text of Caesar Baronius' *Annales ecclesiastici*, as an example, was analysed in the historical context of counter-reformation. The religio-cultural conflict was also supported by the case study of Baruch Spinoza's (Jewish philosopher) approach to the historical Jesus, for he was traditionally known as an atheist and 'denier' of God and Providence. Thus, this volume that approaches the historical figure of Jesus and the new religion created by his followers from a multidisciplinary perspective, creatively providing a wider knowledge of the social and cultural context of the first two centuries for those readers who are interested in social science, comparative studies, history of biblical interpretation, cultural studies, systematic theology, and modern philosophy.

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