Introduction

The Second century played a key role in the development of ancient Christianity. From Pliny’s perception of the *nova superstition* as separated from its Jewish roots to Celsus’ powerful attack on Christianity under Marcus Aurelius and thereafter, this period saw the wide social diffusion of Christianity, the flourishing of its early literary production according to the standard patterns of classical literacy¹ and above all its institutionalisation, centred on the emerging figures of the monarchic bishops². On the other hand, the Roman empire from Trajan to the Antonine dynasty enjoyed a relative political and military tranquillity (lasting almost until the last three decades of the century) and a great cultural effervescence, evidenced by phenomena such as the Neo-sophistic movement³ or the philo-Hellenistic attitude of emperors like Hadrian.

The aim of this book is to examine the connection between these two historical processes in order to figure out whether any specific factor within this broader context eased or accelerated the affirmation of Christianity in the Second century Roman world⁴. The emergence of Christian identities and ecclesiastical institutions and of Christianity’s relationship to the social and cultural reality of the Empire has received great attention in recent scholarship, from the point of view of which, the making of Christianity must be considered as a long term phenomenon, lasting three centuries or more; following the methodological suggestions of authors such as Foucault or Bourdieu, recent scholarship has stressed the role of discursive analysis and other socio-cultural hermeneutical tools in order to explain such historical transformation⁵.

However, such an approach should not lead us to underestimate the effective role played by concrete historical subjects (namely the emperors or the upper levels of the ruling elites), who held the policy-making power within a

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¹ On this topic see Grant 1988; Rizzi 1993; Edwards – Goodman – Price 1999; Wlosok 2005.

² On this much debated issue see the classical surveys by Dix 1955; Faivre 1977; and the annotated anthology by Cattaneo, esp. 93–109; more recent are Lampe 1989, 301–345; Brent 1995 (but see the criticism by Simonetti 1996, 33–36).

³ See Anderson 1993. See also Schmitz 1997 on the “political” aspect of the Neo-sophistic movement.

⁴ Assuming that the “Second century” stretches from Trajan’s death (117) to Commodus’ death (192) and coincides with a period of major political stability for the empire.

⁵ See for instance Lieu 2004; Perkins 2009 (with an up-to-date bibliography), who interweaves the making of Christian identity with that of the Greek and Latin elites in the new context of the Roman domination, as reconstructed respectively by Ando 2000 and Hingley 2005. See also Huskinson 2000.
society which was far less differentiated and articulated than a modern one, thus their actions heavily influenced social and cultural trends, alongside strictly political ones. In other words, if in the Second century climate of cultural, social and religious flourishing, Christianity found a special and effective means of integration within the more general transformation of the empire, and if this special integration allowed the emerging religion to establish and root itself in Roman society, can we identify in imperial policies a moment or an undertaking which favoured Christian diffusion?

The hypothesis this book investigates is whether and to what extent the reign of Hadrian opened a door to Christianity, as well as to other social and religious agents, in the form of new possibilities for self-definition and external self-presentation. In contrast with other agents, however, Christian communities fully seized this opportunity, and in so doing gained a more relevant space in Greco-Roman society which ultimately led to the first Christian peace under the Severan dynasty. As a matter of fact, Hadrian’s twenty-years reign constitutes a decisive turning point for the Roman imperial oikumene on the political, social, cultural, artistic and, as importantly, religious levels, as Mario Attilio Levi has shown in a series of influential studies. Some aspects of Levi’s assumptions have been softened by subsequent scholarship; nevertheless it is possible to individuate a distinct ideology which directed Hadrian’s efforts in changing Roman imperial oikumene, as Alessandro Galimberti’s monograph has recently pointed out.

Of course, Hadrian could build on his predecessors’ actions, especially on those of Trajan. Moreover, Hadrian’s policies were neither consistent nor homogeneous during his reign. In actual fact, many innovations that became established during the reign of his immediate successor, Antoninus, or even that of Marcus Aurelius, and that seem to be consistent with Hadrian’s original strategy, may be different from his original intentions (likewise, the judgment on Hadrian’s impact on Christian history should be measured, according to the

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6 On this topic, Dal Covolo 1987 is still the best account.
7 See Levi 1994, and in a summarised form Levi 1994/2000. On further developments in scholarship, see the monumental (although diffuse) commentary to Hadrian’s life in the Historia Augusta by Fündling 2006. Specific contributions will be cited below. Birley 1997 remains important for the reconstruction of Hadrian’s biography; for a biographical account and a general survey on Hadrian’s reign see also Speller 2003; Mortensen 2004; Roman 2008.
8 See, for instance, Le Bohec 2003, who better qualifies the relevance of Hadrian’s innovations in Roman military doctrine and practice.
10 Fell 1992 and Bennett 1997 have emphasised the innovations introduced by Trajan in the administration of the empire and in the relationship with the new emerging provincial elites, referring also to the “inauguration of a new era” (Bennett 1997, 75–86). See also Fernandez Uriel 2009.
extant sources, on phenomena spread over a wider temporal span, which takes in the period up to the middle of the Third century\textsuperscript{11}). However, in comparison with Hadrian, neither Trajan, nor Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius showed an equal breadth of political vision and radicalism in restructuring Roman administrative and military apparatus.

Proceeding from the assumption that Hadrian was not only one actor among many, but the architect of the effort toward a reorganisation of the Roman world, the contributions collected in this book explore from different perspectives and with different forms of historical evidence some aspects of Hadrian’s political, cultural and religious policies and, specifically, the impact they had on the religious world of the Second century. Central to this project was the political legitimisation of what has been called the “multifaceted identity”\textsuperscript{12}, in which differences in ethnic and local as well as religious and cultural identities were fully accepted and encouraged within the empire in the name of direct loyalty to the emperor. In accordance, the emperor was to be considered the central political institution of the Roman \textit{oikumene}, rather than the Senate or the traditional administrative apparatus, which provoked both diffidence and hostility, as shown by the dramatic conflict between Hadrian and the Senate at the very beginning of his reign and by the hindrance posed to his deification. For this reason, the cultural effervescence which characterised Hadrian’s years provided Christianity with a chance to legitimate its religious identity as one component among others in the religious world of the Second century. This chance was welcomed by contemporary Christian groups (among which we must also number those who were considered “heretics” thereafter, like the “Gnostics”) and recorded by subsequent Christian generations, even attributing to Hadrian actions or intentions which now sound dubious to us. This point will be illustrated in the first contribution in this book, after its short introduction summarises Hadrian’s main political and cultural innovations\textsuperscript{13}. The final contribution will investigate the works of three Christian writers of the Second century (Aristides, Justin, and Ignatius of Antioch) in this respect.

\textsuperscript{11} See below for the reference to the \textit{Encomium of Origen}.

\textsuperscript{12} See \textsc{Borg} 2004, 3, and in the same volume especially \textsc{Jones} 2004. Here the term “multiple identity” will be preferred in order to emphasise the relevant impact on the level of personal identity-making produced by Christianity as a more exclusive religion than the Greco-Roman.

\textsuperscript{13} These are not the focus of this book, which rather considers the general framework, as reconstructed by the studies quoted above and \textit{infra}. In any case, although judgement on the novelty of Hadrian’s policies may vary, it remains the case that only with Hadrian did Christianity start to present itself explicitly as a philosophical movement and to openly address an external audience or Emperors (even if fictionally) according to the standards of Greco-Roman literacy. These are two of the main points considered in the first chapter.
Hadrian himself was an example of such a composed identity – an ancient source defines him as *varius, multiplex, multiformis* – as shown here by Marco Galli, who explores the close connection between *paideia* and politics in Hadrian’s view and criticises some recent developments in Hadricanic studies.

The process of multiple identity-making initiated by Hadrian, and its lasting effects, are examined by Livia Capponi with regard to Egypt – a region that occupied a significant place in Hadrian’s interests.

It is even possible to point to a precise date (124/5) for the decisive shift in Hadrian’s politics, as shown by the significant convergence of Elena Calandra’s new interpretation of Hadrian’s *Villa* at Tibur in the light of recently published archeological data and the new reading by Alessandro Galimberti of the witnesses to Hadrian’s religious policy. This date is extremely significant for its implications for the debated issue of “the parting of the ways” between Christians and Jews. The Bar Kochba revolt in 132–135 is commonly accepted as the *terminus post quem* for the definitive separation; Bar Kochba is reported to have executed Palestinian Christians who refused to follow him in the war against Rome. However, if we place Hadrian’s first attempt to incorporate all ethnic, religious and cultural identities (including the Jews) within the new framework of his empire in year 124/5, the Bar Kochba revolt can be considered as the very (and bloody) end, rather than the starting point, of the debate between Christians and Jews – and among the Jews themselves – over this new situation, as demonstrated by Giovanni Bazzana’s reading of the historical and literary sources about the revolt.

The Jews’ disregard of the possibility offered by Hadrian was probably caused, on the one hand, by the link between the religious and ethno-political aspects of the Jewish identity which had already led to the failure of Philo’s program of conciliation between Judaism and Hellenism under Roman patronage in First century Alexandria, and on the other hand, by the strong autocratic intention of Hadrian’s politics. The refusal of the Jews remained the only failure in the ambitious project for a Roman empire as *varius, multiplex, multiformis*, imagined and fostered by Hadrian as a mirror of himself: in this way, he started a process which represents a crucial turn in the history of the ancient Mediterranean *oikumene*.

This book is the result of a collaboration between some Italian scholars, who have tried from a multi-disciplinary perspective to overcome well-established, but no longer satisfactory, historical and hermeneutical paradigms used to explain the development of Christianity in the Second century; their task was to combine institutional issues and social-cultural processes as they has been made possible by Hadrian’s initiative. Rather than assemble a miscellaneous volume, the authors therefore aimed to write a unitary study to which each has contributed a chapter strictly related to the others by means of a long and amicable sharing of ideas. Other friends also took part in this process: Domitilla
Campanile, Chiara Carsana, Roberta Mazza, Maria Teresa Schettino, Fabrizio Slavazzi and, in many ways, this book is indebted to them. The editor and the contributors are particularly grateful to the Editorial Board for accepting to have it published in the Millennium Series and especially to Professor Wolfram Brandes, who first considered the project.

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