



Research project

The fragments of Dionysius of Alexandria: a new critical edition

Dottoranda: Alice Giocondo

Tutor: prof. Carlo Martino Lucarini

Cotutor: prof. Jürgen Hammerstaedt

1 – Abstract

That in late antiquity Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria from 247/8 to 265, enjoyed considerable prestige, so much so that just a century after his death he earned the epithet *ὁ μέγας* (Eus., *Hist. Eccl.* 7, 1), is evident from the fact that he became a role model for followers of Arius' doctrine in the following century due to some controversial writings circulating under his name. Even in recent decades there has been no lack of studies and contributions aimed at investigating the position of Dionysius in the theological controversies of the third century and the contribution of Byzantine *catenae* to the reconstruction of some works preserved in fragmentary form or of which, thanks to the testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea, only the title is known. The great notoriety that Dionysius enjoyed in the first centuries of Christianity up to the threshold of the Byzantine age was not, however, matched by a similar editorial fortune: after 1904, the year of publication of the Cambridge edition edited by Ch. Feltoe, which is still the reference text, no further comprehensive edition of the Dionysian fragments has been undertaken. The present project aims to produce a new, complete critical edition of the writings of Dionysius of Alexandria in order to supplement and replace the text published by Feltoe in 1904, which has been made obsolete both by the seminal studies which, since the 1920s, have re-discussed subtle theological aspects (especially in terms of Trinitarian and Christological debates) within the works, from time to time supporting or denying their authenticity, and by the recent discovery of some fragments unknown to the Cantabrigian editor.

2 – Description of the project

Since the beginning of the modern age, the editorial fortunes of Dionysius of Alexandria's works have fluctuated between the attention shown by theologians and later by historians of Christianity, who have never ceased to examine the works of Dionysius by situating their doctrinal content in contemporary debates, and the substantial lack of interest on the part of philologists. Together with the eighteenth-century edition by S. De Magistris, which appeared anonymously at the *Congregatio de propaganda fide*, the volume published by Feltoe represents the only modern attempt to collect what survives today of the rich literary and theological production of the bishop of Alexandria, which included, in addition to numerous epistles addressed to other leading figures in the ecclesiastical life of



the third century and some writings on exegetical subjects, also the two treatises *Περὶ ἐπαγγελιῶν* and *Περὶ φύσεως*.

Although Feltoe's edition certainly has a number of merits – among which stand the undeniable proficiency in the Greek language, the in-depth knowledge of the theological reference literature, the sometimes illuminating ability to interpret texts which have been transmitted in the form of short *excerpta* – it nevertheless has some major limitations. Lacking direct access to manuscripts and early modern printed editions, it only relies on texts prepared by more recent editors (not infrequently according to less than rigorous criteria), whose errors and inaccuracies often end up being reproduced. The German translation with commentary published in 1972 by W. Bienert is also based on the text published by Feltoe. A few years later, the German theologian dedicated a significant monograph to the same author, framing his relations with Origenism in the Alexandrian cultural milieu of the third century. Partial editions are missing too, except for a few *excerpta* found in the *catenae*, published between the 18th and 19th centuries by A. Gallandi, M. Routh, A. Mai and J.-B.-F. Pitra and later flowed into the Cantabrigian edition. The only exception is a recent commentary on the *Περὶ φύσεως*, which appeared in 2016 for Brepols: along with the Greek text of the fragmentary treatise preserved by Eusebius – a Christian refutation of the Epicurean philosophical doctrine – and a new German translation followed by the commentary, K. Fleischer's doctoral dissertation is enriched by an extensive and well-documented introduction concerning the history of Epicureanism in Alexandria from its origins up to Late Antiquity.

The planned edition of an apparently 'minor' author, although central in the context of the literature and political-religious events of the third century AD, aims to fill a gap common to all the main series devoted to patristic texts (*Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, Corpus Christianorum, Sources Chrétiennes* etc.), by drawing attention to an author hitherto neglected by critics, but who, due to the complexity of the texts and the debates that have arisen regarding the authenticity and interpretation of certain theological assertions, poses methodological problems for scholars (not only of classical philology, but of *Alttertumswissenschaften* as a whole). While in early Christian literature there is no shortage of examples of later forgeries circulating under the name of a prestigious author (John Chrysostom above all, but the case is not infrequent), our Dionysius is no exception: an epistolary correspondence with Paul of Samosata, attributed to him in the two manuscripts Coisl. 299 and Vat. 1431, was already recognised as spurious by Schwartz and later dated by Simonetti to the sixth century, a good three hundred years after the death of the bishop of Alexandria. Another writing, entitled Ἐλεγχος καὶ Ἀπολογία, is ascribed to him (erroneously, according to L. Abramowski) by Athanasius, who, in an attempt to defend his predecessor's prestige against those who accused him of heresy, quotes extensive extracts from this work; the latter, admittedly, whether a genuinely Dionysian writing or a forgery composed a few decades after his death, after the Council of Nicaea, was claimed by the followers of Arius as an anticipation and foundation of the doctrine they embraced. Forgery, therefore, was already a central issue in the ancient world, especially in an environment – such as the Christian one – that placed a high value on the truthfulness of the word, but it is felt even more acutely today, in an age in which the



media wield an immeasurably greater power over the circulation and fruition of information. In such a context, it is all the more important to examine the problem of the authenticity of the texts and, in the context of the complex and intricate relations between religion and power characterising third-century Christianity (cf. Baumkamp 2014), of the reliability of the sources that transmit them, starting with the study of antiquity, which, precisely because of the hegemony of written sources over other forms of documentation (except archaeological), provides a privileged field for such a critical operation.

The methods of textual criticism will therefore be applied to the extant writings of Dionysius of Alexandria, which, with the exception of the two letters to Novatian and Basilides, transmitted by Eusebius and a number of manuscripts respectively, have all survived in fragmentary form. Firstly, the re-examination of the *catenae* which transmitted the *excerpta* and their manuscript tradition will allow to extend the inventory of witnesses to codices that have never been systematically collated and, at the same time, to amend some of the errors contained in Feltoe's collection. In the case of catenary texts, the collation of individual manuscripts is, together with a careful stylistic and theological analysis, the only means of drawing up as up-to-date and complete a picture as possible of the relationships among the different manuscripts and the transmission of each fragment, with the aim of assessing its authenticity. Secondly, after examining the texts already edited by Feltoe, the Cantabrigian edition will be supplemented with other Greek and Armenian fragments that have subsequently appeared in journal articles but have never been included in a complete edition of Dionysius' works (cf. Bienert 1973, Van Esbroeck 1984, Leanza 1985). The discoveries made in the decades following 1904, along with the scholarly contributions demonstrating the inauthenticity of some of the writings circulating under the name of Dionysius, have inevitably made Feltoe's edition partial and obsolete; moreover, such a conglomeration of texts transmitted from the most diverse types of sources, preserved by direct and indirect tradition, authentic and spurious, has given the Cantabrigian edition a certain inhomogeneity which compromises its reliability.

As for the technical aspects of the edition and the reorganization of the texts, it will be appropriate to introduce chapter and paragraph numbering where it is lacking, as in the case of the exegetical fragments, and to graphically distinguish three sections, including works whose authenticity is beyond doubt, those of uncertain attribution, and those recognised as spurious or as forgeries datable to a later period, but circulating in Late Antiquity and Byzantium under the name of Dionysius of Alexandria. Following the example of some recent collections of fragmentary texts, the edition may also include the main ancient testimonies on the author's biography and episcopal magisterium, and a catalogue of Dionysius' writings compiled on the basis of the information contained in Books VI-VII of Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*, but updated with the contribution of the most recent bibliography.

In order to provide the widest and most complete picture of the works in their historical-theological context, it will also be useful to include an *index nominum* containing the names of Dionysius' epistolary correspondents and the personalities involved in the political-religious debates of his time, as well as an *index verborum* containing the most significant theological terms that were the subject of



debate in the controversies of the third and fourth centuries.

As far as the work timetable is concerned, the investigation of the exegetical fragments contained in the *catenae*, already begun during the preparatory research for my Master's thesis, is expected to be completed within the first year: the manuscript witnesses of the *catenae* in question (*in Iob*, *in Ecclesiasten*, *in Lucam*, the *catenae in Novum Testamentum* edited by J. Cramer) and of the letter to Basilides will be examined. The second year will be devoted to the examination of the epistles transmitted by Eusebius and of the controversial writing Ἐλεγχος καὶ Ἀπολογία, attributed to Dionysius of Alexandria by Athanasius; the critical analysis of the main fourth-century sources cannot disregard a broader investigation of the major theological disputes which emerged in the third century, such as the baptismal controversy and, above all, the controversy of the two Dionysii. Finally, during the third year, after dealing with the issue of the authenticity of the so-called "miscellaneous fragments" and extending the analysis to some more recently discovered fragments, a final revision of the critical text and the drafting of a preface and index will be carried out.

Bibliography

- Abramowski 1982: L. Abramowski, *Dionys von Rom († 268) und Dionys von Alexandrien († 264/5) in den arianischen Streitigkeiten des 4. Jahrhunderts*, «Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte» 93,2/3 (1982) 240-272.
- Barbàra Valenti 2019: M. A. Barbàra Valenti, *Estratti catenari esegetici greci. Ricerche sul Cantico dei cantici e altro*, Testi e studi di cultura classica 76, Pisa 2019.
- Baumkamp 2014: E. Baumkamp, *Kommunikation in der Kirche des 3. Jahrhunderts. Bischöfe und Gemeinden zwischen Konflikt und Konsens im Imperium Romanum*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 92, Tübingen 2014.
- Bienert 1972: W. A. Bienert (Hrsg.), *Dionysius von Alexandrien. Das erhaltene Werk*, Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur 2, Stuttgart 1972.
- Bienert 1973: W. A. Bienert, *Neue Fragmente des Dionysius und des Petrus von Alexandrien aus Cod. Vatop. 236*, «Kleronomia» 6 (1973) 308-314.
- Bienert 1978: W. A. Bienert, *Dionysius von Alexandrien. Zur Frage des Origenismus im dritten Jahrhundert*, Patristische Texte und Studien 21, Berlin 1978.
- De Magistris 1796: S. De Magistris (ed.), *S. Dionysii Alexandrini episcopi, cognomento Magni, quae supersunt*, Romae 1796.
- Feltoe 1904: Ch. L. Feltoe (ed.), *ΔΙΟΝΥΣΙΟΥ ΛΕΙΨΑΝΑ. The Letters and Other Remains of Dionysius of Alexandria*, Cambridge Patristic Texts, Cambridge 1904.
- Fleischer 2016: K. J. Fleischer (Hrsg.), *Dionysios von Alexandria. De natura (περὶ φύσεως). Übersetzung, Kommentar und Würdigung*, Philosophie hellénistique et romaine 5, Turnhout 2016.
- Heil 1999: U. Heil, *Athanasius von Alexandrien. De sententia Dionysii*, Patristische Texte und Studien 52, Berlin-New York 1999.
- Karo – Lietzmann 1902: G. Karo – H. Lietzmann (Hrsg.), *Catenarum Graecarum Catalogus*, Nachrichten von der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch- historische Klasse, Göttingen 1902.



- Labate 1992: A. Labate, *Il recupero del 'Commentario all'Ecclesiaste' di Dionigi Alessandrino attraverso le catene bizantine*, «Koinonia» 16 (1992) 53-74.
- Leanza 1978: S. Leanza, *Il Commentario sull'Ecclesiaste di Dionigi Alessandrino*, in: A.A. V.V. (edd.), *Scritti in onore di Salvatore Pugliatti*, Vol. V: Scritti vari, Milano 1978.
- Leanza 1985: S. Leanza, *Due nuovi frammenti dionisiani sull'Ecclesiaste*, «Orpheus» 6 (1985) 156-161.
- Lietzmann 1897: H. Lietzmann, *Catenen. Mitteilungen über ihre Geschichte und handschriftliche Ueberlieferung*, Freiburg i. B. 1897.
- Schwartz 1927: E. Schwartz, *Eine fingierte Korrespondenz mit Paulus dem Samosatener*, Sitzungsberichte der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-philologische und historische Klasse, München 1927.
- Sickenberger 1902: J. Sickenberger, *Die Lukaskatene des Niketas von Herakleia*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 22,4, Leipzig 1902.
- Simonetti 1985: M. Simonetti, *Lettera e/o allegoria. Un contributo alla storia dell'esegesi patristica*, *Studia Ephemeridis «Augustinianum»* 23, Roma 1985.
- Simonetti 2007: M. Simonetti, *Sulla corrispondenza tra Dionigi di Alessandria e Paolo di Samosata*, «Augustinianum» 47,2 (2007) 321-334.
- Speyer 1971: W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum. Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung*, *Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft* 1.2, München 1971.
- Van Esbroeck 1984: M. van Esbroeck, *Nouveaux fragments arméniens de Denys d'Alexandrie*, «Orientalia Christiana Periodica» 50 (1984) 18-42.