

Gods and the City. Approaching Urban and Suburban Religious Landscapes in the Western Roman World (1st-6th century AD)

While framing their relationship with the divine, men have always tried to mark special locations, and to differentiate them according to their own conception of what is sacred. This process can be observed both in the countryside and in the urban sphere; nevertheless, under Rome's *imperium*, the Western world experienced an urbanization process that affected the relationship between men and their land, leading to mutations in the religious landscape.

The *polis* organization of territories was not self-evident, and it was rather the result of complex negotiations between different actors who did not share the same conception of what was sacred. On the other hand, during its first centuries of existence, this model went through many transformations that can be seen in the political, social, cultural or religious spheres. So looking at the topography of sacred places offers a stimulating field of analysis to understand both continuity and innovation in the changing Western societies:

- On the one hand, building an empire through a network of cities linking an urban centre to a rural territory had some impact on the control exerted by power on religion. This led to a civic model of religion, or «*polis*-religion», that bound together gods and the institutional life of cities, and implied that rituals were to be carried out in public, within sanctuaries that were clearly marked in the urban and suburban landscape. But to what degree this model, deeply connected to 'romanization', can be applied to different regions in the Western Roman world, and what were its spatial implications? Were sacred spaces located mainly in the civic centre, or in other parts of town, both urban and suburban? Can we trace ritual itineraries, or can we recognize the course of processions? And which place should we assign to those cults that were not part of *sacra publica*, but relied on private religious practice?
- On the other hand, the large chronological and geographical frame chosen for the workshop will offer a unique opportunity to watch for another process in the cities of the Roman Empire, that is the change from a civic model of religion, where everyone acted as citizens or residents, to a community model of religion, where devotion was to some degree the result of personal choice. This phenomenon cannot be restricted to the sole christianization, and it had to have spatial consequences, visible both in the urban and suburban spheres. Where were the different cults located in the changing urban landscape? Is a spatial reading of religious cohabitations possible? Can we find traces of religious new appropriations, or new consecrations of former temples?

To all these questions, all kinds of archaeological evidence, jointly with literary sources, inscriptions and images, can bring many qualified answers, and this workshop is open to doctoral candidates whose research work run along the same lines of inquiry, with an open mind.