VITAGRAZIA PISANI, Universität Hamburg

Dissertation abstract

Il culto di San Qirqos nell’Etiopia storica: analisi storico-filologica, con edizione critica della “Passio” (Gâdlâ Qirqos)

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by Alessandro Bausi
in cooperation with
Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig
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VITAGRAZIA PISANI, Il culto di San Qirqos nell’Etiopia storica: analisi storico-filologica, con edizione critica della “Passio” (Gādlā Qirqos), Ph.D. Dissertation in African Studies, Curriculum Literatures, Philology and Studies on African Antiquity and Middle Ages, Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, defended on 26.03.2013.

The dissertation is principally dedicated to the philological reconstruction with critical edition, translation and concise commentary of the critically unpublished Ethiopic version of the Passio of Saint Qirqos (Gādlā Qirqos). This main part is accompanied by a historical introduction aimed at investigating through literary and historical evidence the fortune of St Qirqos veneration in Ethiopia, with also considering the universal Church tradition and the texts in languages other than Ethiopic.

Qirqos (ܩܳܪܟܘܨ̄) is the Ethiopian name also known in the form Qurqos or palatalized into Čarıqs/Čarıqs etc. for Quiricus or Cyricus, a saint native of Asia Minor who, according to the tradition transmitted in his Passio attested in several languages, was almost three years old when he endured the martyrdom at Tarsus, in Cilicia, together with his mother Julitta (in Ga’süz h,čn-čĮ Iyāluta) during the time of Diocletian’s persecution (early 4th century).

The original name of the saint is Κܹ̌ܰܘܨ̄ or Κܹ̌̌ܘܨ̄, whence the Latin Cyricus (or Quiricus, also Chiricus). He is definitely not to be confused with Cyriacus (Greek Κυριακός; Latin Cyriacus; Ga’süz h,čbň, Kirakos, but also չՂԲն, Haryakos), the name of several other saints with whom he is sometimes wrongly assimilated.

The veneration of St Qirqos expanded soon in the whole Christian world immediately after his martyrdom, although his Passio (Passio Cyrici et Iulitae) was regarded as apocryphal by the Decretum Gelasianum at the end of the 5th/mid-6th century and therefore dismissed and banned in the Roman Church. His worship is particularly rich and popular in the Ethiopian Orthodox (Tawabado) Church, in the calendar of which Qirqos is commemorated together with his mother on the 15th of Ḥamle (the Ethiopian Synaxary mentions also the dates 19th, 20th and 21st of Ḥamle). In the “historical” Ethiopia, where his worship seems to be extremely ancient and attested at the time of the Zagwe dynasty (12th–13th cent.), the name of Qirqos is widely attested in a huge number of placenames and church names, from Asmāra in present day Ėritrea to Addis Abāba to the islands of Lake Tana to various churches of Ṭgray; actually many historical places bear his name, some of them, e.g., Wəqро Ąqroqs in East Ṭgray, with evidence of pre-Christian settlements and South Arabian antiquity.
Extremely rich is also the Goṣaz hagiographic literature written in his honor, testified by a multitude of codices transmitting translations and original compositions dedicated to him, like his Passio, the various collections with his posthumous miracles (Tāʾamārā Qirqos) and hymns that praise his holiness (Mālkēʾa Qirqos, Sālam lā-Qirqos).

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter outlines the historical context of the Christian persecutions in the period of the martyrdom of St Qirqos, with some viewpoints on the modern historiographical debate. A second part of the chapter deals with the worship of the saint in general, in the East and in the West, and the literary tradition attested in hagiographic collections (martyrologia, calendars, menologia, synaxaria), and, more extensively and in detail, in the various versions of his Passio (Greek, Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Arabic, etc.).

The second chapter deals with the fortune of the worship of St Qirqos in Ethiopia. In particular, it gives an account of important churches dedicated in his name, more in detail for those personally visited, followed by a presentation of the literary hagiographical Ethiopian tradition (Sonkossa and Gādlā Sāmaʿat).

The third chapter lists and describes the manuscripts used in the critical edition of the Passio, with some remarks on the respective palaeographic features. Some of the manuscripts result from the field researches personally carried out in North Ethiopia within the Ethio-SPaRe project, headed by Denis Nosnitsin, whereas others come from European and North American libraries. The total number of 21 manuscripts considered here, dating from the 14th to the 20th century, come from different regions of Ethiopia and show a different arrangement of the texts. The second part of the chapter is devoted to the textual traditions on St Qirqos: in addition to the martyrdom (Gādl), here compared with other versions, his miracles (not less than 95, some of them performed in the Ethiopian regions) are inventoried, listed and shortly summarized, with detailed references to the manuscripts containing them. The chapter is enriched with a series of commented sample pictures illustrating the story of the saint taken from some of the manuscripts used in the edition.

The edited text of the Passio is the core of the dissertation and with its critical apparatus and some philological notes occupies the whole fourth chapter. It results from the work of text criticism on the basis of the 22 witnesses (in 21 manuscripts). The following fifth chapter contains the Italian translation with annotations.

The oldest attainable text has been philologically reconstructed by a comparative analysis of the 22 witnesses with the application of a neo-Lachmannian approach. Besides the preliminary finding of the codices and the systematic collatio, the recensio was long and laborious due to the length of the text and the number and physical state of the manuscripts, which were often incomplete, not clearly legible and sometimes disarranged. As a consequence of a quite complicated textual tradition, the textual choices, the emendatio and the translation of the text were fairly difficult at different points.