

TIBERIUS AND PONTIUS PILATE IN ETHIOPIAN TRADITION AND POETRY

By E. CERULLI

Vice-President of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei

Read 11 April 1973

THE Nativity of Christ and the divine tragedy on Mount Golgotha have influenced human history so deeply that it is easily understandable how persons more or less directly or even indirectly connected with those great events became, in the course of following centuries, the subjects of pious legends and tales. This development begins, of course, with legends about both the Roman Emperors Augustus and Tiberius: Augustus, because during his reign Jesus was born and the name of the first Emperor is expressly quoted in the Gospel (Luke, 2: 1); and Tiberius, who was on the throne during the preaching of Jesus and at the time of the Crucifixion (Luke, 3: 1).

A legend about Augustus, which I have examined in detail elsewhere, was imported into Christian Arabic literature in the final period of the Crusades and then into Ethiopia at the end of the fourteenth century A.D. with the great collection of the 'Book of the Miracles of Mary'. The Sibyl of Tibur, according to this tale, shows to Augustus, in a heavenly vision, the Virgin and the Child whose mission it is to be the salvation of humanity. Augustus then orders a sanctuary to be built on the Capitol itself to honour the Virgin and the Child, and that the sanctuary shall be called 'Ara Coeli', which becomes the well-known church still existing. The legend is linked also with a preliminary tale about Augustus refusing to be adored as a god; and these details, like many others, are derived in Eastern literatures from the History of Paul Orosius, who had coupled here two passages of the life of Augustus by Suetonius. Besides the literal translation from the Arabic text of this legend, there is also in the Ethiopian collection another version, where the original tale is adapted to local customs and thus Augustus becomes a Sovereign in the Ethiopian style, giving lands and feudal

grants to churches and monasteries after being converted to Christianity.¹

A second tradition concerning Augustus is found in the standard commentary of the Ethiopian Church on the Gospel of St. Luke (2: 1). This tradition too, in my opinion, is derived from Arabic sources. In fact it is rather surprising that in it Augustus is not the first, but the third Emperor of Rome, after two other Sovereigns called respectively: Gabyos Qēsār and Belyos Qēsār; but it is easy to recognize in these two strange names two erroneous readings of the Arabic script: Gabyos for 'Gaius' and Belyos for 'Julius'. Under two wrong names Julius Caesar is here considered as the predecessor of Augustus. The same tradition, indeed, confirms this hypothesis because it illustrates also the origin of Caesarian birth, referring it to Belyos Qēsār, namely Julius Caesar. Augustus then is said to be the son of Gabyos Qēsār and heir of the Empire.²

A third tale about Augustus is found in a chapter, which is possibly a later addition of the 'Chronography' of the Egyptian monk Abū Šākir, who lived in the thirteenth century A.D. His 'Chronography', whose original Arabic text seems not yet to have been found, was translated into Ethiopic during the second half of the sixteenth century. Its final chapter (or rather, as I have supposed, its more recent addition) contains a tale, which is said there to be quoted from a work by a 'Manbughawi'. I suppose that this 'Manbughawi' is not the Syrian writer Philoxenus of Mabbugh (who died in A.D. 523), but Maḥbūb ibn Constantine, whose short treatise on the 'Wonders of the World' was added to the same work by Abū Šākir, e.g. in MS. Or. 809 in the British Museum. The tale concerning Augustus, whoever its author may be, is as follows: The Roman Governor of Antioch in Syria writes to Augustus that some Persian Magi had arrived in Palestine to present gifts of homage to a child just born in Bethlehem, who, according to Persian prophecies, would become in the near future the Sovereign of the whole world. Augustus then sends a message to Herod asking him for some information on the matter. Herod, after the flight of the Magi, who had been advised in a vision not to go back to him, orders the massacre of the Innocents, and then replies to

¹ *Il Libro Etiopico dei Miracoli di Maria e le sue fonti nelle letterature del Medio Evo Latino*, Rome, 1943 (Università di Roma, Studi Orientali, vol. i), pp. 408-20.

² *Wangel Qeddus za-Egziena Iyasus Krestos*, Addis Ababa, 1916 [eth], p. 287 (*ya-Ityopyā liqāwent enda šafut-ennā enda toraggwamut*).

Augustus telling the Emperor how he had taken the necessary severe action to avoid the menace to the peace of Palestine by suppressing the Boy prophesied by the Persians. Augustus is then very pleased and approves what Herod has done. Here we may perhaps note that the attitude of Augustus and, before him, of the Roman governor in Syria, both considering with mistrust the mission of the Persian Magi to Palestine, seems inspired by the long rivalry between the two great Empires of Antiquity—the Roman and the Persian—so that the approval given by Augustus to the action of Herod, namely the massacre of the Innocents, should be seen as an episode of that rivalry, however cruel it might have been.

Tiberius is the leading person in many complicated legends and traditions in the Western and Eastern Christian World. Tiberius, however, is generally shown in those legends as favourable to Christianity, or even more as converted to the new religion. This trend amongst the legends is very ancient. It is already testified to by Tertullian, who was writing his 'Apology of Christianity' in the year A.D. 196, during the reign of Septimius Severus. Tertullian, in a passage strenuously defending the Christians accused of being enemies of the Empire, quotes various cases when the new religion had been considered favourably by some Roman Emperors. Among these cases, the statements concerning Domitian and Marcus Aurelius have recently been proved to be distortions of historical facts.¹ The same could also be believed about the reference to Tiberius, because even an experienced advocate like Tertullian might not have renounced the colourful rhetorical effect of showing Nero as the first Emperor to persecute the Christians, and by doing so as the cruel Sovereign who first changed the milder policy established by his predecessor Tiberius. But finally, it now seems to me somehow difficult to deny totally the allusion of Tertullian to Tiberius, though the facts may certainly have been distorted for use as arguments in the 'Apology'. Let us say rather that we are here not within the field of history, but on the borders of it. However, the existence of such a tradition in the second century A.D. explains how legends later went further in the direction of fantastic imagination and made Tiberius not only favourable to Christianity, but also a converted Christian and, even more, aided in his sorrows by a miracle of God. Thus, in medieval Western literatures there is a widespread

¹ Cfr. E. Paratore in Tertullian, *Apologetico*, Bari, 1972, p. 34 n. 12; p. 35 n. 13.

tale about Tiberius, who was healed from a mortal disease by touching the veil of St. Veronica. And in Egypt and in Ethiopia a small work attributed, perhaps wrongly, to Cyriacus, Archbishop of Oxyrhincus, tells how Tiberius was sorrowful when his only son and heir died. Then, having heard about the Resurrection of Christ, he sends to Jerusalem the corpse of the young prince. Thus, the prince is miraculously brought to life again, and he and Tiberius become Christians and the Emperor pays reverent homage to an image of Christ prepared for him by St. John the Evangelist. An Ethiopian version of this legend was edited by M. Van den Oudenrijn¹ from MS. Or. 690 in the British Museum; another Ethiopian version was later edited by myself from five manuscripts in Paris, Uppsala, Berlin, and Veroli;² I would refer to two passages of this second version. In the first place, a significant feature is the style of the imperial letter asking for the miracle for the dead prince: this is addressed: 'From Tiberius, King of the Earth to the King of Heaven' and the conclusion is 'Therefore I believe that Thou art the Son of God and art in Heaven and Earth, O my Lord Jesus Christ'. But it is even more important that the presumed Emperor Tiberius mentions the miracle of the marriage in Cana of Galilee, when Jesus miraculously made wine and water appear together in the vessels 'to rejoice the guests at the marriage after their distress' and compares it with a supposed final miracle when Christ in the Last Judgement will say 'I am giving to the Faithful blood and water which were overflowing from my side at the Crucifixion, in order that those who believe in me can drink it for the remission of their sins' and be free from their distress. This idea of the blood and water flowing from the side of the Crucified and 'collected in the vessel of the saving Cross', like the wine and water at the miracle of Cana, was widespread in Ethiopia, possibly from gnostic doctrines, in the official Church and in the writings of the heretic Mikaelites. And it may be connected, at least in a tentative hypothesis, with the well-known legend of the Grail. Also possibly, as additional evidence of the diffusion of some elements of the Grail myth in Eastern literatures, I would quote the Persian drama where the Moslem mystic al-Hallāj is crucified and his

¹ M. Van den Oudenrijn, *Gamaliel. Aethiopische Text zur Pilatus Literatur*, Freiburg (Switzerland), 1959.

² E. Cerulli, 'L'Oriente Cristiano nell'unità delle sue tradizioni' in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale: L'Oriente Cristiano*, Roma, Accademia Lincei, 1964, pp. 14-29 (= *Storia della letteratura etiopica*, iii, ed., Milan, 1968, pp. 202-7).

blood is collected at the foot of his cross in a vessel and afterwards it gives birth to Shams-ed-din Tabrizi, the new leader of Persian mysticism.¹

Now again here is another case of interchange between Eastern Christian and Western literatures and cultures. I have already discussed elsewhere the introduction, into Ethiopian literature, of the legend of Abgar. Abgar, King of Edessa in Syria, who was within the sphere of influence of the Roman Empire and is mentioned by Tacitus in his *Annals* during an episode relating to the reign of Claudius, was said in a tradition already recorded by Eusebius, to have exchanged letters with Jesus. The tale of Abgar, apparently of Syrian origin, was adapted by an eastern gnostic author to his heterodox doctrine and we have his text in Syriac and Armenian. The Ethiopic translation, as I have shown, retains some passages clearly inspired by gnosticism, e.g. where Jesus says that He has been sent to this world 'to find the living Creature who was stolen from Paradise and to release her from the abyss of darkness where she is fallen'.²

But according to another Ethiopian version, so far unpublished, namely the additional chapter to the work of Abū Šākir, which I have already quoted, the exchanges of letters took place between King Abgar and the Emperor Tiberius. In his letter Abgar says that, after the dreadful news of the Crucifixion of Jesus, he had decided to punish the Jews; and he had therefore advanced with his army as far as the Euphrates. There he stopped, in order not to violate the border of the Roman Empire. So now he asked Tiberius to act against the Jews as required by justice and right. The Ethiopian text adds that Tiberius, after reading the letter, was amazed and shocked and in his indignation decided to punish the Jews. But he replies to Abgar, with Roman prudence, that, although he agrees to the urgent necessity of punishing the Jews for their crime he, cannot do it for the moment, because his army is engaged in a difficult campaign in Spain. After the end of that campaign and after taking some rest, he will act against the Jews. He adds that in the meantime he has deposed Pilate from his office in Palestine.

The Ethiopic text contains clear evidence of being a translation from Arabic. The name of Abgar, well known in its right spelling in Ethiopian literature, in this legend is spelt

¹ See note 2 on page 144.

² E. Cerulli, *L'Oriente Cristiano*, cit. pp. 30-2 (= *Storia della letteratura etiopica*, cit., pp. 209-11).

'Abḥar', an erroneous reading of *ḥ* for *g*, a mistake easily made in Arabic script; and Spain is spelt 'Asfānyā', with the gloss 'which means Endelus', to be compared with the Arabic name Andalus.

We have now seen that these traditions connect Tiberius with the Crucifixion of Jesus. There is yet another Oriental legend where Tiberius acts rather to avenge St. John the Baptist. In fact, according to the Arabic Synaxaire of the Egyptian Church and the Ethiopian Synaxaire, Tiberius hears the news of the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist, executed by order of Herod. The Emperor is very angry about this crime and decides to deprive Herod of his authority. He calls Herod and his wife Herodias to Rome and finally condemns both of them to be exiled in Spain ('Andalus', again).¹

We shall consider later on the tradition concerning Pilate and Tiberius. Here I would only note generally that in many Western legends Tiberius is asked to punish Pilate for his weakness towards the Jews. So Tiberius condemns Pilate to death by decapitation, as in the *Anaphora Pilati* and the historians Glyka, Nicephoros, George Cedrenos, or to exile in Umbria in the small town of Ameria (today Amelia), as in the *Cura Sanitatis Tiberii*, or to prison in Damascus, as in the *Vindicta Salvatoris*. Another version of the *Cura Sanitatis Tiberii* says that Pilate, tormented by remorse, commits suicide; and Tiberius orders that the corpse of Pilate be thrown in the Tiber, whence it is brought miraculously by devils to Vienne on the Rhone and finally near Lucerne at the foot of the mountain which to this very day has kept the name of the unfortunate Roman magistrate (Pilate-Berg).

In conclusion, I would remark that in all these Western and Eastern Christian medieval legends Tiberius appears as the supreme Sovereign who defends the law in his Empire. There is emphasis on his justice against the Jews responsible, so it is said, for the Crucifixion or the death of St. John the Baptist, and full reliance is shown on his equity. On the other hand, Tiberius is strongly impressed by the Resurrection and so he becomes favourable or even converted to Christianity. This means, I venture to suggest, that in some way Tiberius was considered with great benevolence by medieval popular tradition,² and,

¹ J. Forget, *Synaxarium Alexandrinum* (text), Paris 1905, vol. i, pp. 285-6; (transl.) Louvain, 1921, vol. i, pp. 285-6; E. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, Cambridge, 1928, pp. 658-60.

² This is a constant tradition in European medieval literatures. I would

indeed, even earlier, as is proved by the passage from Tertullian, while official history was certainly less benevolent towards the severe and reserved Emperor.

After Tiberius let us consider his magistrate in Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate. The majority of Western traditions are not well disposed towards him, censuring his weakness, which is held to make him more or less responsible for the Crucifixion.

On the contrary, in Eastern Christianity, Pilate not only becomes a Christian converted after the Resurrection but also a saint, confessor, or martyr of his faith. But, first, there is a story, in the Egyptian Arabic Synaxaire and in the corresponding Ethiopian book, which makes Pilate responsible, again owing to his weakness towards the Jews, for the martyrdom of Longinus. Longinus, the soldier who pierced Jesus' side on the Cross with a stroke of his spear, has been sanctified by both Eastern Christian Churches. According to the Arabic and Ethiopic Synaxaires,¹ he was denounced by Pilate to Tiberius, who sent orders to Cappadocia, where Longinus had taken refuge, to put him to death as a deserter from the Roman army. So Longinus was beheaded and his head was brought to Pilate in Jerusalem; and Pilate showed the head of the martyr to the Jews to placate them because the Jews hated Longinus, who had been a witness of the Resurrection of Christ.

The asserted weakness of Pilate, in the whole tragedy of Jesus, which after all is not very far from what the Gospels show, led, according to the Eastern Christian legends, to the Roman magistrate's deep repentance, and his repentance is the starting-point for his salvation. Already the Synaxaire of the only quote, e.g., Godfried of Viterbo (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, xxii, p. 152:

Tiberio Romae nunc subiciuntur honores;
cuius ad imperium saevus damnatur Herodes,
Pilatus capitur, gens homicida dolet;
idola deficiunt, templa profana ruunt.
Tiberii lepram divina Veronica sanat.

(Godfried of Viterbo was writing in the second half of the twelfth century A.D.)

And so on, until Jean d'Outremeuse, who wrote about 1390, 'Sachiés que l'Empereur Tybur estoit un grant philosophe de philosophie morale et naturelle. Si enquist à Veronique, quant elle estoit deleis ly, de la fourme et de la faction Jesu Christ; et elle ly dist et en telle manière le divisait sant Pierre l'Apostle; si fut mis en escrit.'

¹ J. Forget, *Synaxarium Alexandrinum*, cit. (Ar. text), vol. i, p. 90; vol. ii, p. 236; (transl.) vol. i, p. 99; vol. ii, p. 232; E. Wallis Budge, op. cit., pp. 209-10; and 1145-6.

Ethiopian Church commemorates Saint Pilate on the 25th day of the month of *sanē* with these verses:¹

Salutation to Pilate who washed his hands
 so he himself was pure of the blood of Christ
 and salutation to Procula, his wife,
 who sent him the message: Do not condemn Him
 because that man is pure and just.

The verses are preceded, at least in MS. Or. 660 in the British Museum, by the note 'On this day is commemorated St. Pilate, the martyr'.

But a long tale concerning Pilate and his martyrdom, as I have already said, is attributed to Cyriacus, Bishop of Behnesa (Oxyrhincus); and is contained in MS. Or. 690 in the British Museum, written in the fifteenth century. Pilate and his wife Procula are hated by the Jews for their conversion to Christianity after the Resurrection. Pilate is captured by the Jews and crucified by them on the same Cross of Jesus. But he is saved by a miracle while on the Cross and two crowns descend from Heaven for him and for Procula. Later on he is called to Rome by Tiberius, who had sent to Jerusalem his envoy Petronius; and, when in Rome, Pilate is beheaded as responsible for the Crucifixion of Jesus. This becomes in Ethiopia the standard account about Pilate, also in poetry, as we shall see later on.

A story, different in some ways, about Tiberius and Pilate is found in an Ethiopic manuscript of the sixteenth century in the British Museum (Or. 534). In one of the short poems added to the 'Psalms of Christ', the Ethiopic author, after quoting a verse of the Psalms of David (67:2) 'Let the Lord be resurrected from the dead and his enemies be dispersed', explains it with the following verses:

He (David) said that (verse) prophesying about Thee, o Lord;
 because he was seeing thy death and Resurrection in the mirror of his
 spirit
 one thousand and forty years before thy Incarnation.
 He said so owing to Caesar:
 because Caesar will disperse those who had crucified Thee.
 So Caesar dispersed them;
 because Pilate had sent him a report and account
 telling him the news of Our Lord and of St. John, his beloved disciple,
 and how Herod had killed him.

¹ Cfr. *Patrologia Orientalis*, vol. i, pp. 674-5. These verses are wanting in the MS. of the British Museum Or. 661 translated by E. Wallis Budge (op. cit., p. 1034).

Tiberius then had sent his envoys
 to bring back Pilate and to exile him in Spain;
 and, instead of Pilate, he gave the government to Agrippa.
 Then he deposed Pilate, ordered him to come to Rome and killed
 him;
 because Tiberius was believing in Thee, o Christ,
 when St. John made the son of him (Tiberius) arise from the dead
 three months after he had been buried.
 Then he (Tiberius) killed many Jews
 and many others of them were dispersed among the Gentiles.

These verses, which I would call 'verses' only because of their metrical rhythm and were certainly not inspired by any poetical feeling, diverge in some points from the tradition usually accepted in Ethiopian literature. First: Tiberius appoints a magistrate named 'Agrippas' (i.e. Agrippa) to be Pilate's successor. As far as I know, no Western sources describe Agrippa as Pilate's successor in Jerusalem. What was the source for the author of these verses? Agrippa appears in Ethiopian literature only as *praefectus urbis* at the time of the martyrdom of St. Peter, although his name, which our verses spell as 'Agrippās', is spelt in the (apocryphal) Acts of the Apostles and in the Synaxaire as 'Aqreppos'. Rather it might be supposed, although *prima facie* it appears preposterous, that in these verses there is a confusion with Herod Agrippa, who was in reality appointed in A.D. 41 by the Emperor Claudius to the tetrarchy of Judaea. Herod Agrippa is mentioned in Ethiopian literature because he condemned St. Bartholomew, the Apostle, to death. Chronologically Herod Agrippa is far from Pilate; but in Western literature—to be precise, in some manuscripts of the *Acta Pilati*—Pilate writes a letter to the Emperor Claudius advising him to mistrust the Jews; and again Eusebius in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (written in the fourth century) tells how Pilate killed himself during the reign of Caligula. So another mistake of chronology about Agrippa is, after all, not as strange as it may seem.

But, on the contrary, it is very strange that the author of these verses qualifies St. John the Baptist as 'the beloved disciple' of Jesus confusing him with St. John the Evangelist. The Ethiopic text of MS. Or. 534 in the British Museum leaves no doubt about this absurd mistake: St. John is called *rad'u fequr*, as the rhyme in *-r* requires, and the following verses allude to the condemnation of the Baptist by Herod and the subsequent exile of Herod in Spain, while the final verses of the poem quote the

miracle granted to Tiberius through the intercession of St. John the Evangelist. Such a confusion seems absurd and especially in a work by a devout Eastern Christian author. Here, then, we need only note for the moment that this small problem would probably be solved only by the finding of other manuscripts of the Psalms of Christ.

Pilate is duly celebrated as a Christian saint in two Ethiopian poems, so far unpublished, which I have found in a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (D'Abbadie 170). Both poems have, of course, retained some allusions to details of the legend of Pilate as accepted by the Ethiopian Church; and this makes them interesting to us here.

The first poem, which is by far the more important, is also a good example of a typical (and I would add, unique) genre of poetry in Ethiopian literature. It is called in Ethiopic '*malke*', which literally means 'effigies'. Such a poem is divided into several strophes and each strophe is intended to celebrate a part of the body of the hero so exalted, from his head to his feet, so that the poem may represent a full image of the holy person. Each strophe is embellished with all the flourishes of the complicated local rhetoric and particularly with the figure which the Ethiopians call 'wax and gold' (*sam-enna warq*). According to very strict Ethiopian rhetorical rules—like the goldsmith who works by putting his molten gold inside the wax mould he has prepared and by doing so shapes a figure—a poet may put the real meaning that he wants to express in a secret position inside another image which represents only an external form and the two different images are developed in parallel, one beside the other, without any apparent connection, so that the deeper and richer meaning of the verses is concealed in the interior of the external proposition. Hence the name 'wax and gold'. This artificial construction and, beside it, the allusion to the rarest passages of the Bible, skilfully hidden in the verses, justify the proverb of the Ethiopian schools: 'The Creature is fully known only by his Creator and the poem is fully known only by its poet.'

In a translation, some of this rhetorical ability and skill is, necessarily, lost; but I will try to give you a translation of the 'Effigies of Pilate' from the Paris manuscript as closely as possible to its complicated Ethiopic text:

I have put as foundation of my will, like a learned master builder,
the stone of thy name in order to build a tower of celebration,
O Pilate, magistrate of Jerusalem, the holy city.

But a further stone from thyself

could accelerate the completion of my building.

Salutation to the mention of thy name, written on the Table of Heaven,
and to thy soul, full of divine grace: dew in the night of spiritual strife.

O Pilate, whose glory has passed beyond the limits of glory,
because thy body has received the retribution of Christ, the torture;
the torture by Emperor Tiberius who then condemned a thousand.

Salutation to thy head which was hit, like the head of Christ,

While the Holy Ghost anointed thy face with the ointment of the beauty
and glory.

O Pilate, although thou art a stranger, yet because the way of thy
behaviour was right,

the master of the house invited thee to the wedding banquet;

likewise let me be thy companion in the invitation to the banquet and
wedding.¹

Salutation to thy brows, frontiers of thy eyes: like an ocean
whose sand in its depth is a mirror of the secret mystery.

O Pilate, thou showest to the Lord of Heaven and Earth
thy behaviour, in its details: beauty of faith and love,

because thou art a wise man and man of good sense.

Salutation to thy ears, which had heard thy examination (in court),
a retribution for thy examination of Christ in the court of the Cross of
Golgotha.

O Pilate, thy son shall not be an orphan,

he who visited thee with the Word inside the prison

may visit me each time in many turns.

Salutation to thy cheeks, which were slapped by the Jews,

like thy God, the Son, at the time of Caiaphas and Hanna.

O Pilate, like thyself from the ruin of my folly

raise me so that I can stand, o Lord, at the voice of thy speech in the
Judgement.

Clay I am and I am ashes.

Salutation to thy nostrils, which were created between thine eyes,
and salutation to thy lips in words of glory, voice of lyre.

O Pilate, when thou wert whipped by the soldiers of Herod's army,
thou didst not wonder that thou wert alive, in the torture that thou
suffered,

because thou wert killed by love of the heavenly kingdom.

Salutation to thy mouth, which exchanged words with the mouth of
Christ

and to thy teeth, which were disposed with such a beauty of whiteness.

O Pilate, before thou hadst acquired wisdom in Christ,

thou wert satisfying the people and thou wert in friendship with Herod;

and then thou foughtest against Herod for Christ

Salutation to thy tongue and to thy words too,

¹ Cfr. Luke, 14: 8-11.

because it is convenient that thou receivest peace,
 when Procula, beloved by God, told thee her dream:
 do not condemn to death Him who created the world!
 By His blood thou wert purified and spilledst thy blood.
 Salutation to thy breath which was exhaling faith
 and to thy sweet throat which was open to the taste of the Gospel.
 While thou hadst contented the assembly of the Jews,
 how they afterwards whipped and bound thee,
 until they crucified thee, like the Son who died on the Cross.
 Salutation to thy neck, o Pilate, soldier and magistrate of Rome,
 crowned with thorns like the Master, the Nazarene.
 When the descendants of Simon and Levi afflicted thee,
 no worldly thought troubled thee.
 Salutation to thy shoulders which had carried the Cross,
 and to thy back, wounded by the scourge of the Jews;
 O Pilate, because thine ascetic struggle had been very good,
 the Lord, whom thou hadst scourged, desisted from vengeance
 and sent food to thee from Heaven.
 Salutation to thy breast, a treasure of deep understanding,
 and salutation to thy bosom, which was troubled by the vine of tor-
 ments.

O Pilate, Herod was punished by a flame from Heaven,
 condemned because of thee by the Angels of the only begotten Son,
 and even the Jews burnt his houses.
 Salutation to thy hands which were loaded with chains
 and I say also: salutation to thine arm and fore-arm,
 thou Pilate, becomest a companion of the ascetic struggle
 of Joseph of Arimathea and the wealthy Nicodemus,
 who in evening time, begged from thee the corpse of Christ, the Word.
 Salutation to thine elbow, measure of fullness against deficiency
 and to thy palms extended to receive benevolence and grace.
 O Pilate, when Petronios caused the knees of Caesar to rise
 from the sepulchre of the body of Christ,
 he (Caesar) rose to the mount of adoration before the people assembled,
 honouring thee.

Salutation to thy fingers which wrote on the table of the Cross
 the kingship of Jesus, who died through the advice of Caiaphas.
 O Pilate, do not stay at the eternal Judgement with the people of the
 Jews,
 because by thy repentance thou wert equal to the repentance of Peter
 and the hope of Peter: the Kingdom (of Heaven) became also thy hope.
 Salutation to the nails of thy hands which were placed
 over thy ten fingers in equality.
 O Pilate, thou remainst before Tiberius with serene mind,
 as, before thee, had been He who makes the Universe remain,
 while the people of the Jews shouted: crucify Him! crucify Him!

Salutation to thy side transpierced by the spear of sorrow
and to thy belly which did not enjoy the bread of this world.
O Pilate, who hadst suffered wonder of torments from the people of
rage and anger,

remove through thy sufferance the tears of my mind,
and comfort by a miracle the sorrow of my heart.

Salutation to thy heart, full of righteous love,
and to thy kidneys, torrents of water: that is understanding.

O Pilate, thou followest the King. They bound him on the Cross
and the Jews did not repent or acknowledge His dignity,
so they abandoned their country to the Apostle, Mathias.

Salutation to thy mind, which was excited by the thought of God
and to thy entrails, iron which was melted by the fire of divine love.

O Pilate, when thou hadst spared the life of Barabbas
and hadst condemned Christ, thy judgement was our life,
but if thou hast condemned Barabbas too, we should have celebrated
thy judgement.

Salutation to thy internal organs: thy interior kept the knowledge of
the Gospel, the Law;

and to thy navel, a circle on the breadth of the house, i.e. thy belly.

O Pilate, as thou ledst her towards grace and virtue,
so forgive me quickly according to the saying of Peter: his preaching
after (the) faith there comes the lead to act the goodness

Salutation to thy loins encircled with linen cloth, like the loins of
Christ

and to thy legs, columns of living flesh.

O Pilate, who wert Eliseus, follower of Elias and his companion:
with the water of repentance, which is admonition,
purify me, who am thy beloved Naaman, from the sin, which is leprosy.
Salutation to thy knees, means of prostration

and to thy feet, which stood upright before God who had created them
to stand.

O Pilate, as thou wert protected by the power of the Angel Gabriel
by command of Christ the blessed, while thou wert inside the prison,
so thou protect me against the Enemy, morning and evening.

Salutation to the soles of thy feet in their prodigious running, faster than
a hurricane,

and to thy step which was ready for the ascetic struggle.

O Pilate, as the Creator, without planning any revenge,
replied to thee with His words as thy word has asked Him,
now reply to me when I present my prayer to thee.

Salutation to the toes of thy feet: branches of cedar
and to the nails of thy feet too, signs of sweet feeling and acting.

O Pilate, when thou hadst revealed the miracles of Christ,
from the country of Judaea, the country of sweet prophecy,
thou wert called to Rome by an astonishing order.

Salutation to thy stature, which stood in the same measure as the
stature of Adam,

and to each one of thy images;

O Pilate, thou wert martyr twice in Judaea and in Rome,
therefore thou wert crowned with a perfect crown of grace:
blessing be to thee from all the world!

Salutation to the departure of thy soul by the sword, after the cross,
and to thy bodily corpse, illustrious with great honour,

O Pilate, companion to the assembly (of the martyrs) of the Only Son,
namely the thousand,

my mouth cannot be silent from reading

the book of thy glory nor the beautiful explanation of that book.

Salutation to the funeral of thy body

and to thy grave which was the famous tomb of Christ.

O Pilate, thou wert a prince and acceptedst the Cross as a tribute:
the thunder of thy hymn during the month of thy feast in the season of
the rains

was heard from the heaven of the tongues of men and now let the
trumpets be played.

The second poem in the Paris manuscript is very short and perhaps less interesting. I would only outline here three allusions contained in its verses. The first is the mention of Pilate with his wife Procula (well known from the Gospel) 'and his two sons', which is the only quotation I know about the sons of Pilate. Then in another strophe the Ethiopian poet says to Pilate 'thy glory was declared by the mouth of the Virgin Mary' and this is another new legendary detail. In another verse 'Gamaliel' is named as the author of the story of Pilate and we know that the so-called homily of Cyriacus of Oxyrhincus quoted Gamaliel as its source.

Both Paris poems on Pilate are appended to the *Laha Māryām*, the homily attributed to Cyriacus. The Paris manuscript was written at the end of the eighteenth century; the MS. Or. 660 in the British Museum, which has retained the mention of 'Pilatus martyr' in the Synaxaire, was written in the middle of the eighteenth century; and we go far earlier than that date when considering the MS. Or. 690, also in the British Museum, which contains the homily by Cyriacus of Oxyrhincus on Tiberius and Pilate, because it was written in the fifteenth century. The legend of Pilatus in Ethiopic literature has, therefore, a long tradition; and the allusion of the Parisian poems to the season of the rains testifies too that the date of the 25th of the month of *sanē* for the commemoration of Pilate is ancient.

Here, in concluding my lecture, I would give you a last

example of a typical reception and assimilation, in the Ethiopian cultural world, of isolated data from foreign traditions. In 1957 the Ethiopian Bishop of Jerusalem, Philip Mangestu, published a book in Amharic entitled *God with us. The mystery of the Incarnation and Unification of Our Lord*. The text is illustrated by an image of Jesus and a note states that this is a portrait of Our Lord carved on an emerald by order of Tiberius according to a description of the physical figure of Jesus, contained in a letter of Publius Lentulus to the Emperor. Then Bishop Philip gives an Amharic translation of the letter.

As a matter of fact, the letter by Publius Lentulus, praeses of Judaea, is a well-known false medieval Latin document, a pious falsification of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, widely diffused in Western European literatures of that age. On the contrary, this letter had not entered any Eastern

FIG. 1. The letter of Publius Lentulus printed in Rome for the pilgrims.

LETTERA DI P. LENTULO A TIBERIO

A TIBERIO CESARE, SALUTE. - ECCOTI MAESTA' LA RISPOSTA CHE DESIDERI. E' APPARSO DA QUESTE PARTI UN UOMO DOTATO DI ECCEZIONALE POTENZA, E LO CHIAMANO IL GRANDE PROFEIA. I SUOI DISCEPOLI LO APPELLANO FIGLIO DI DIO. IL SUO NOME E' GESU' IN VERITA' O CESARE. OGNI GIORNO SI SENTONO COSE PRODIGIOSE. I QUESTO CRISTO, CHE RISUSCITA I MORTI, GUARISCE OGNI INFERMITA' E FA STUPIRE TUTTA GERUSALEMME CON LA SUA DOTTRINA STRAORDINARIA. EGLI E' DI ASPETTO MAESTOSO, CON UNA SPLENDEnte FISIONOMIA PIENA DI SOAVITA' TALCHE' COLORO I QUALI LO VEDONO, LO AMANO E LO TEMONO A UN TEMPO. DICONO CHE IL SUO VISO ROSEO, CON LA BARBA DIVISA NEL MEZZO, E' DI UNA BELLEZZA INCOMPARABILE, E CHE NUSSUNO PUO' FISSARLO A LUNGO PER LO SPLENDORE NEI LINEAMENTI NEGLI OCCHI CERULEI; NEI CAPELLI BIONDI-SCURI EGLI E' SIMILE ALLA MADRE, CHE E' LA PIU' BELLA MEST'A FIGURA CHE SIASI MAI VISTA DA QUESTE PARTI, NEI SUOI DETTI RECISI, GRAVI INOPPUGNABILI E' L'ESPRESSIONE PIU' PURA DELLA VIRTU' E DI UNA SAPIENZA CHE SUPERA DI GRAN LUNGA QUELLA DEI PIU' GRANDI GENI. NEL RIPRENDERE E RAMPOGNARE E' FORMIDABILE, NELL'INSEGNARE ED ESORTARE E' MITE, AMABILE AFFASCINANTE. CAMMINA SCALZO, A CAPO SCOPERTO E IN VEDERLO A CERTA DISTANZA, MOLTI RIDONO, MA IN SUA PRESENZA TREMANO E STUPISCONO, NESSUNO LO VIDE MAI RIDERE, MA MOLTI LO VIDERO PIANGERE. TUTTI COLORO CHE L'HANNO PRATICATO DICONO DI AVERNE RICEVUTI BENEFICI E SANITA' PERO' IO SONO MOLESTATO DA MALIGNI, CHE DICONO EGLI SIA A DANNO DELLA TUA MAESTA' PERCHE' AFFERMA PUBBLICAMENTE CHE RE E SUDDITI SONO UGUALI AVANTI A DIO. COMANDAMI IN PROPOSITO E SARAI PRONTAMENTE OBBEDITO.

VALE

P. LENTULO

Christian literature before then. How did the Ethiopian Bishop know it in 1957? The problem, potentially difficult, was easily solved by a mere piece of good luck.

I found in Rome some time ago a holy image which was privately printed to be sold to the pilgrims and especially to the bishops and priests coming to Rome for the Vatican Council summoned by Pope John XXIII. The image so printed in Rome is exactly the same as that reproduced in the book by Bishop Philip; and again at the foot of it is included the letter by Publius Lentulus in Latin and the short note on Tiberius.¹ Now Bishop Philip was a member of the Delegation of the Ethiopian (Monophysite) Church to the Vatican Council; and he must have found the image, which he had bought in Rome, so interesting that he translated it and used it as an illustration to his book.

Here is, therefore, a fact which, in its plain simplicity, implies an interesting problem of methodology.

Some time ago I examined this question of method from another angle. Among the plays written in Latin in the tenth century A.D. by Hroswitha, a German nun of Brunswick, there is a drama inspired by a Spanish legend on the martyrdom of Pelagius, a young man born in Galicia and killed by the Khalifa of Cordova, Abd ar-Rahman. How could a German nun in a monastery so far from southern Spain have possibly known that local Spanish legend? I found that there had been a complicated negotiation between the German Emperor, Otto I of the Saxon dynasty, and the Khalifa of Cordova, owing to the attempt of the Emperor to obtain the aid of the Moslem Sovereign to limit the activity of the pirates against shipping in the Mediterranean area.² The Khalifa, after some mistakes in the protocol of his diplomatic missions, sent to Germany with his second mission a Christian bishop, his subject, as interpreter. He was also a scholar, and this Spanish Christian spent some time in a German monastery, where he could have told his hosts the holy legends of his country, since he also gave some news about Moslem Spain to the well-known historian Liutprand of Cremona, who quoted him and dedicated his book to him.² The drama of the German nun Hroswitha is, therefore, the consequence of a casual personal contact, and due to circumstances far from any parallel development or systematic influence of one literature on another.

¹ See Plate I.

² E. Cerulli, 'Le Khalifa Abd ar-Rahmân III de Cordoue et le martyr Pélage dans un poème de Hrotsvitha' in *Studia Islamica*, Paris, xxxii, 1970, pp. 69-76.



VERO RITRATTO DI GESÙ

FIPRODOTTO DA QUELLO FATTO INCIDERE DALL'IMPERATORE
TIBERIO SU SMERALDO, GIÀ PROPRIETÀ DEL TESSORO IMPERIALE
E DAL SULTANO RAJJAZZI, CADUTO IN MANO AI TURCHI NEL 1680.
INSIEME CON LA SIDA DELLA BIBLIOTECA VATICANA È STATO
SICURO IN LE MANI CRISTIANE A ROMA.
QUESTO DOLCISSIMO RITRATTO ICONOGRAFICO FA RISONANZA
FRONTALE LETTERARIO DELLA CELEBRE LETTERA DI P.
LENTULUS PROCOSOLE NELLA GIUDEA, ALLO STESSO IMPERATORE
TIBERIO.

a. Image of Jesus according to the letter of Publius Lentulus (printed in Rome for the pilgrims)



የኢየሱስ ግልጽ ጽሑፍ ለግል

ታዩ ስልጠና የተሰጠው ጠባቂዎች ግንባታ ጽሑፍ ስለነበር ደንጋጋኑ ለፍጥ
ሰ.አ. 1680 ዓ.ም. ስለተጠቀሰ ምሳ. ለደ. ጽሑፍ ስለጠቀሰ ምሳ. የተሰጠው
ይቅ. ማንም ነው ስለነበር ስለነበር ስለነበር ስለነበር ስለነበር ስለነበር
ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ
ለጽሑፍ ለጽሑፍ ለጽሑፍ ለጽሑፍ ለጽሑፍ ለጽሑፍ ለጽሑፍ ለጽሑፍ ለጽሑፍ
ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ ጽሑፍ
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b. The Ethiopian image of Jesus with the Amharic text of the letter of Lentulus (printed in the book by Bishop Philip Mangestu, Addis Ababa 1957 ethl.-A.B. 1964-1965)

The case of the letter of Publius Lentulus that arrived in Ethiopia is certainly similar and it is now clear that it was due to circumstances again outside a direct cultural influence, and resulted from the presence of an Ethiopian Bishop at the Vatican Council and his purchase of a holy image in Rome.

Both cases show that, while scholars sometimes feel obliged to make elaborate investigations to find evidence for relations or reciprocal influences of cultures or sources of single works of art, the truth is often nearer and can be found less systematically; it lies in fortuitous opportunities for individual contacts.

Lastly I would conclude my lecture by proposing for your consideration the following points:

1. The legends I have here dealt with concerning Augustus, Tiberius, and Pilate, and the tales which I had collected elsewhere about the Emperors of the Theodosian dynasty, may show the value of further research into the literatures of the Christian East to ascertain and appreciate the attitude of popular, and sometimes ecclesiastical, opinion in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire towards the acts of the central power and the Sovereigns. It is also possible—or rather by now, in my opinion, demonstrable—that sometimes eminent persons or exceptional events in the Roman Empire may have caused the formation of cycles of tales, and this is important both for cultural history and even more for research into the origin of epic poetry.

2. The eastern Christian peoples, from Georgia and Armenia through Syria to Egypt and Ethiopia, make up a cultural grouping and exchanges between them in literature and art have been made easier by the residence of communities of them all in Jerusalem side by side, so that the Holy City—which is also the destination of pilgrimages—has during the centuries of the Middle Ages been, I suggest, the clearing-house of the Eastern Christian cultures. No full study of any of these cultures can give final results unless these contacts are considered and the historical problems examined against a larger background.

3. Ethiopia with its culture is included within that grouping, so that major problems of the history of Ethiopia cannot be explained merely within Ethiopia itself but rather in their connections with that larger area. Moreover, Ethiopia has an important function in that area because, lying on the southern limits in Africa of Eastern Christian culture, the country may well have retained ancient works, traditions and artistic

remains which have been lost in the other countries of the group in the Mediterranean East.

The situation of Ethiopia on the maritime road to India and its consequential place in the rivalry between the Roman and the Persian Empires in antiquity, and its long contacts with Islam during the Middle Ages and up to our modern times, are other outstanding aspects of the history of Ethiopia; and to these components must be added the influence of an African substratum.

These final observations underline the complexity of Ethiopian studies and explain the true function that Ethiopia has fulfilled in history.