



Vida y milagros de santa Tecla (ed. Ángel Narro Sánchez). BAC, Madrid 2017, 324 pp. ISBN: 978-84-2201-951-0.

Vida y milagros de santa Tecla edited by Á. Narro –who has been working on Saint Thecla for a long time– is a neat and careful volume with an extensive introductory essay, an accurate and fluid Spanish translation and some useful commentary notes. The introduction contains all the necessary information on the context of the work which is composed of two parts: the *Life*, that is a paraphrase of an apocryphal text of the 2nd century (*Acts of Paul and Thecla*), and the *Miracles*, an original text that illustrates the prodigies of the Saint in the city of Seleucia. According to Narro's reconstruction, the latter is a unitary hagiographic work composed by a rhetorician of the 5th century, who then became a presbyter, in Seleucia. Good evidence of the writer's rhetorical skills is an elevated style and his numerous references to classical authors¹ (for instance to Homer and the Greek tragic authors). In the introduction to the *Miracles* there is also a long passage that refers to a text by Herodotus that probably reached the rhetorician through Eusebius' *Praeparatio evangelica*.

Narro provides interesting details about Thecla's cult in Seleucia, where the Saint had supplanted local divinities and then become the town's patroness. Moreover, Narro shares the hypothesis according to which Thecla substituted the cult of Artemis Sarpedonia. The first four miracles tell how Thecla defeated and supplanted the gods venerated in Seleucia. Initially, the way in which Thecla silenced the oracle of Sarpedonios is narrated, then the suppression of Athena Kanetis' shrine, later Aphrodite's banishment and finally Zeus' defeat are also described. These episodes are of symbolical importance as they underline the superiority of Christianity to all previous religions. They also show how Thecla's cult came to supplant that of local deities.

As to the volume's contents, it is worth observing that the text of Thecla's biography constantly underlines her unusual choice of abandoning her old life to follow the Apostle Paul. The exceptionality of her deeds clearly emerges from the narration of the miraculous episodes when she is saved by divine intervention after being condemned to martyrdom. This can be seen in fact as a typical example of hagiographic, or rather martyrologic text.

In the section of Thecla's *Miracles* we can notice –as Narro had already pointed out in one of his earlier essays²– that the longer part is constituted by the tales of the pilgrims who travelled to Thecla's shrine. The tradition was to overnight inside the

¹ For the reference to classical sources see also Narro, Á., 2010, "Lo scontro tra formazione classica e pensiero cristiano: La Vita e Miracoli di Santa Tecla", *Graeco-latina Brunensia* 15 (2), 127-138 and Id., 2012, "Nouvelles réminiscences littéraires décelées dans la Vie et les Miracles de S. Thècle (BHG 1717-1718)", *Analecta Bollandiana* 130, 303-305.

² Narro, Á., 2013, "L'origine e lo sviluppo dell'agiografia greca nella tradizione popolare cristiana. La storia di Tecla di Iconio", in V. Gheller (ed.), *Ricerche a confronto. Dialoghi di Antichità Classiche e del Vicino Oriente*, Milano.

temple and wait for the Saint to visit them in their dreams thus healing them from their diseases. This religious practice was certainly the continuation of the custom of *incubatio* that was common in the places devoted to Greek hero-cults.

The connection between the Saint and the previous polytheistic culture emerges from the tradition reported in the *Life of Saint Thecla* (Chapter 28): when she arrived in Seleucia, she was attacked by a group of outlaws sent by the town's physicians to rape her, as they believed that her healing power derived from Artemis. She was in fact a 'virgin' (παρθένος) like the goddess priestesses.

The cult of Saint Thecla flourished particularly around the monastery of Hagia Thekla in Meriamlik near the ancient Seleucia and originated from the legend of the Saint's disappearance into a rock fissure not far from the town. Going back to the continuity between the Saint's devotion and the older forms of veneration in the Greek world –that Narro himself had already underlined³–, it is interesting to observe that the adoration of martyrs' tombs closely resembled that for ancient heroes or philosophers, as well as other expressions of the cult of the dead.

In conclusion, we can say that this recent edition of the *Vida y milagros de santa Tecla* offers interesting and fruitful material –from the perspective of religious studies– on several motifs connected both to the «mythical» narrations of the Saint's biography and to the relevant religious practices. Therefore, Narro's philologically accurate work is a valid instrument for those who are interested in expanding their knowledge of hagiographic issues.

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³ Reference is again to “L’origine e lo sviluppo dell’agiografia greca nella tradizione popolare cristiana. La storia di Tecla di Iconio”, *op. cit.*