Massimo Villa, *Filologia e linguistica del testi gəʾəz*
di età aksumita: Il Pastore di Erma.
(Studi Africanistici. Serie Etiopica 10).
Napoli: UniorPress 2019, 285 pp. ISBN 978-88-6719-178-9

The present book is a revised version of the author's PhD dissertation entitled
La versione etiopica del Pastore di Erma. Riedizione critica del testo (visioni
e precetti) which was perepared under the supervision of Gianfrancesco Lusini
and defended at the University of Naples "L'Orientale" in 2016. It should be of
interest to at least two types of audiences (who unfortunately do not meet as
often as they should), i.e. Gəʿəz philologists and historians of early Church and
its literature.

The book consists of bibliography (pp. xi-xxxv), 9 chapters, and indexes of:
personal names, toponyms and ethnonyms, authors, quoted works, and manu-
scripts (including inscriptions).

In Chapter 1 (pp. 1-30) the author presents general information about *Ποιμὴν*
τοῦ Ἑρμᾶ (Greek *Poimēn tou* Herma 'The Shepherd of Hermas'), an early
Christian work, dating to the 2nd century and usually classified as an apoca-
lypse. After summarizing the main findings concerning the internal structure of
the work, he presents the current state of research concerning its textual trans-
mission in Greek (pp. 16-23), Latin (23-26), and Oriental languages excluding
Gəʿəz (pp. 27-30).

Chapter 2 (pp. 31-47) contains two subchapters. The first one, entitled "The re-
covery of Aksumite literary heritage" (pp. 31-42) is of great importance, as it
provides an up-to-date survey of the oldest layer of Gəʿəz literature which con-
sisted of translations from Greek and includes i.a. also *Ποιμὴν*. The second
subchapter (pp. 42-47) offers tentative hypothesis on how *Ποιμὴν* reached
Aksum/Ethiopia stating that "the picture which emerges on the basis of the few
available data is extremely lacunose" (p. 45). In the same subchapter the author
expresses his disagreement with previous opinions on the Ethiopic version of
Ποιμὴν as being a free paraphrasis rather than a reliable translation.

In Chapter 3 (pp. 49-78) the author presents meticulously analyzed textual
examples which prove that the Ethiopic *Ποιμὴν* is indeed a direct translation
from Greek, the fact already suggested in the 19th century but without providing
firmly based philological evidence. Additionally, he compares the Ethiopic text
with the previous editions of Greek, Latin, and Ethiopic texts, as well as with the

manuscript documentation, thus contributing to the issue of transmission from Greek into Ethiopic.

While Chapters 1-3 may be of interest to a reader unfamiliar with Gəʿəz philology, Chapters 4-9 will require a certain competence in Gəʿəz and a knowledge of Ethiopian tradition.

The Ethiopic textual tradition of *Ποιμὴν* is presented in Chapter 4 (pp. 79-127). This tradition is rather small as it consists of "six manuscript copies of which only three are relevant from the text-critical point of view" (p. 79). Each of the six manuscripts is generously described including textual features pertaining to the relation between them. The textual tradition is bi-fold (cf. the *stemma codicum* on p. 127) and consists of "Gundä Gunde branch" and "Ṭana Qirqos branch" (so named after the monasteries from which the text witnesses originate). It is very important to note that the "Ṭana Qirqos branch" (consisting of EMML 8508 and its two *descripti*) was unknown to any previous editor of the Ethiopic *Ποιμὴν*. Furthermore, EMML 8508 appears to be older than both main witnesses of the "Gundä Gunde branch", i.e. BnF Éth, Abb. 174 and ms. Parm. 3842.

Chapters 5 (pp. 129-143) and 6 (pp. 145-172) describe what the author calls "the indirect tradition", i.e. the indigenous Ethiopian book inventories which contain the mention of *Ποιμὴν* (Chapter 5) and quotations from *Ποιμὴν* in Gəʿəz literature (Chapter 6). A particularly interesting fragment concerns the presence of passages inspired by *Ποιμὴν* in the lives of monastic figures associated with the monastery of Däbrä Maryam Qoḥayn, a clear testimony of the *Ποιμὴν*'s importance for this community. The two chapters show how the circulation and influence of *Ποιμὴν* might have been wider than the three surviving witnesses would suggest.

In Chapter 7 (pp. 173-186) the author tackles the question why the textual transmission of *Ποιμὴν* is so limited and why it ceased altogether. Without offering any definitive answer, the author mentions several factors which contributed to the decline of the textual transmission, some of them of strictly philological nature, others connected with certain historical developments within the Ethiopian Church.

In this reviewer's opinion Chapter 8 (pp. 187-221) is the most important in the entire book and should be carefully studied by anyone interested in the Gəʿəz language. The author's attempt is, taking *Ποιμὴν* as a case study, to highlight the linguistic features of the "Aksumite" Gəʿəz (i.e. the language of the translations from Greek in the Aksumite times) as opposed to the "Classical" Gəʿəz attested from 1270 onwards. Some of the most distinctive features include:

- the lack of the final -*ä* in the accusative forms, particularly when these are an element of *status contructus*, a noun preceded by a demonstrative pronoun, a noun with a possessive suffix or a nominal phrase consisting of a noun and an attribute,
- the phonetic law /*əLa*/ → /*äLa*/ (where L stands for any laryngeal consonant) does not apply to the conjugation of the imperfective verb,
- conjunctions ending in -*e* instead of –*a*,
- oscillation *uw/əw* and *iy/əy*.

The handy compilation of such features will be an indispensable aid to researchers who will try to distinguish the "Aksumite layer" from within the vast body of translations into Gəʿəz.

Finally, Chapter 9 (pp. 230-261) contains a new critical edition of a portion of *Ποιμὴν* (Vision 3) together with an Italian translation. The edition has been prepared "according to the neo-Lachmannian" method (p. 223) and is based on the three manuscripts mentioned above. The critical apparatus consists of three levels. The first describes the testes of particular text portions, the second registers the important variants between the three manuscripts, the third records variants in the interpunction. The orthography has been normalized according to the August Dillmann's lexicon.

To summarize, while this reviewer is not qualified to assess the importance of Villa's study for the general research on *Ποιμὴν*, it is beyond doubt that the book is a very important step for Ethiopic philology. No other Aksumite text (perhaps with the exception of the Biblical books which, however, pose a whole different set of problems) had been before a subject of a book-long philological and historical scrutiny. One should hope that this contribution will stimulate further research of this type.

Marcin Krawczuk

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