

“Una bella copa salamonata” = потирь Соломоня дѣла?

The subject of this paper is dangerously far from my usual field of research and I am aware that I might be led to draw hurried and far-fetched conclusions; I will therefore confine myself to facts which I think would have aroused the curiosity of Michele Colucci, who was always so interested in Slavo-Romance contacts and parallels, and would have surely engaged in a discussion and perhaps proved me wrong.

The long-standing discussion on the episode of Solomon’s chalice in Chapter 13 of the *Vita Constantini* is still far from its conclusion and it is not my aim to resume it here¹; I will only briefly recall a few points. Back from the Chazar mission and before leaving for his next mission among the Slavs of Moravia, Constantine gives further proof of his God-inspired erudition by translating and explaining the inscription written on a richly decorated chalice (потирь), the work of Solomon (Соломоня дѣла), which he interpreted as a prophecy about the birth of Jesus Christ. As is well known, the story can also be found in commented variants, like the *Slovesa svjatykh prorok, Paleja chronografičeskaja* and others² where the reading of the inscription is not always attributed to Constantine, but sometimes to a “Philosopher” or to even less definite personalities. Interpretations of the chalice story vary: some consider it historically authentic, like many other passages in the *Vita*, others regard it as an adaptation of pre-existent material, which may even have been absent from the original text of the hagiography. An important addition to this picture was the publication by I. Ševčenko³ of the Greek text of an *Ἐπίγραμμα εἰς τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ Σολομῶντος*, from a manuscript (of the 11th-12th centuries) of the Escorial Library; this text corresponds almost literally to the Slavic text of the inscription, without any reference to Constantine. The question is open, at least theoretically, as to whether the Slavic story of the chalice was translated from the Greek and adapted to the

¹ The story of the chalice, its interpretation and related questions have been recently reexamined and discussed by M. Capaldo in a long and detailed article: see M. Capaldo, *Rispetto del testo tràdito o avventura congetturale? Su di una recente interpretazione di VC 13, “Europa orientalis”*, IX, 1990, pp. 541-644.

² For a full list and evaluation of variants see M. Capaldo, *op. cit.*, pp. 545-556.

³ I. Ševčenko, *The Greek Source of the Inscription on Solomon’s Chalice in the Vita Constantini*, in: *To Honor Roman Jakobson. Essays on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, III, The Hague-Paris 1967, pp. 1806-1817 (repr. in: Id., *Byzantium and the Slavs in Letters and Culture*, Cambridge-Napoli 1991, pp. 285-298).

life of Constantine, or the Greek translated from Slavic, leaving aside the deeds of Constantine.

In the Prologue of an Italian *Bestiary*, probably written at the end of the 13th century and known in different versions⁴, one reads the puzzling phrase “una bella copa salamonata”⁵. Its general meaning is explained by the context, which lists a number of manufactures that the modern are likely to achieve better than the primitive, due to increased knowledge and skills: “una bella nave, uno bello palagio, una bella copa salamonata”; nevertheless, the rather obscure epithet is substituted elsewhere by a more explicit *finemente lavorata*⁶; and the word *salamonato* is not recorded in any of the big Italian dictionaries.

In his review of L. Morini’s edition, C. Del Popolo singled out the word, which he had thought to be an *hapax* in a *lauda* to St. Catherine of Alexandria (probably written in the 13th century), where it is to be found in the phrase “una croce salamonata”⁷. This text, originally published by G. Bertoni⁸, was part of a collection of *laudi* of various origins and belonged to the Battuti Confraternity in Modena. Bertoni probably wrongly made up one *lauda* (No. LVIII in his edition: *Se intendere me voli per cortexia*) of two different texts, but this is not relevant to our case. The composition describes a procession of saints, among whom Saint Ursula with her companions, who in verses 27-29 is said to carry *una bandera ultramarina / Cum una cruxe d’ora salamonata...*

All commentators refer for explanation to Du Cange’s *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis*, which in the entry *Salomon* associates the name of the King with precious vases that, according to Procopius (*De bello gothico*, I, 12), had been transferred by Alaricus to Carcassonne after the sack of Rome. Curiously enough, Procopius does not mention vases as part of Solomon’s treasure, but more indefinite *κειμήλια*, wrought with precious stones and brought to Rome after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Nor is the Old Testament a direct source for the story of a cup or chalice belonging to or made by Solomon, although many passages about the construction of the Temple may have suggested such an association.

A significant thing about Du Cange’s entry *Salomon* is that it is exclusively concerned with objects characterized by a cup shape: *cantharam* (but this example is dubious), *urceolis*, *vasos*, *vasos vel forteras* (this last being defined as “vox Hispanica vetus”). It begins straightaway by introducing “Vasis spe-

⁴ The published Tuscan manuscript goes back to the 14th century: see *Il ‘Libro della natura degli animali’ (bestiario toscano)*, in: L. Morini (a cura di), *Bestiari medievali*, Torino 1996, pp. 425-486. I am indebted to Luigina Morini for her patient explanations of this *Bestiary* and for reference to the review quoted below.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 432.

⁶ See the commentary by L. Morini, *ibid.*, n. 10 on p. 468.

⁷ C. Del Popolo, review of *Bestiari medievali*, *cit.*, “Studi e problemi di critica testuale”, LIV, 1997, p. 199. See also: Id., *Per il Laudario di Modena*, “Studi e problemi di critica testuale”, LII, 1996, p. 35.

⁸ G. Bertoni, *Il laudario dei Battuti di Modena*, Halle 1909 (= Beihefte zur “Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie”, 20), p. 77.

cies, operis pretiosioris, forte cujusmodi fuere vasa Salomonis in Templo ab eo aedificato, quaeque in urbem Carcassonensem in Galliis, Roma capta, transtulerat Alaricus [...] unde forte manavit ut pretiosa vasa Salomoniacae appellarent nostri”. The hesitation about the origin (twice the adverb *forte!*) does not extend itself to the explanation of the word, which clearly stems from the examples listed in the dictionary.

My hypothesis, which I propose but cannot hope to demonstrate, is that the words *salamonata*, like *Salmonaticas*, *Salomoniegos* (in Du Cange) may represent a fragment of a story about Solomon’s chalice that had existed also in the Romance area. All Slavic texts that contain the narrative frame in which the chalice is introduced (Chapter 13 of *Vita Constantini* and to a major extent the works where the story is commented) emphasize its richness, sometimes its decoration with precious stones. This is probably the way through which the word *salamonata*, after losing its original context, may have been understood as “richly decorated” and applied to a cross in the *Laudario di Modena*. The form of the word, with the suffix *-ata*, remindful of a Passive Participle, may be due to popular etymology, which reinterpreted the *-t-* that appears in the Greek declension of the name Σολομών -ῶντος (-ῶνος is also possible among other variants) if compared with the Italian *Salomone*. In this case, of course, a Greek source must be admitted, but so far nothing is known in this respect. It should not be forgotten that the Greek manuscript *Scurialensis* published by Ševčenko contains only the text of the inscription, not the narrative frame in which the chalice is introduced.

In this connection, another detail must be considered. One of the examples quoted in Du Cange goes as follows: “cum duobus urceolis pretiosissimis ex operibus Salomonis”⁹. In the *Vita Constantini* the chalice is said to be “Соломоня дѣла” [the work of Solomon]; the coincidence is interesting, as these words seem to underline the fact that the chalice was made by Solomon, and was not just a part of his treasure. In some of the Latin examples one has even the impression that the epithet might refer to a particular fashion of vase-making.

As already stated, the Italian occurrences of the word *salamonata* go back to the 14th century, though these texts were compiled about a century before. Other examples in Du Cange must be ascribed to the 11th-12th centuries, but two (from the Spanish area) are quite early (781 and 1060)¹⁰, the former even earlier

⁹ R. Dodsworth, W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum. Editio secunda et emendata*, I, 1682, p. 210. This passage relates to the removal of precious objects from Hyde Abbey (Winchester) after the fire that had destroyed it in 1141. This happened at the time when Henry of Blois was Bishop of Winton (between 1121-1179). The document is interesting as it shows the presence of our phrase in still another area (but after the Norman conquest).

¹⁰ The first is the foundation charter of a monastery in Asturias by Aldegaster, son of King Sylon, and his wife Brunilde, and is dated January 18th, 781 (see *Historia de Idacio Obispo, que escrivio poco antes que España se perdiere [...]. Recogidas por don Fray Prudencio de Sandoval*, Pamplona 1615, p. 132; the second is the testament of Queen Stefania, the wife of Garcia, King of Navarra; see P. de Sandoval, *Catalogo de*

than any known Greek and, of course, Slavic occurrence. This does not imply an ‘influence’ or filiation in the Eastern area; but, if we could accept that the object referred to is one and the same, then we would be allowed to think of a vastly diffused legend about *vasa Salomonis*, to which the text of the inscription may have been adapted later¹¹. But this is mere speculation.

What is the relevance of all this if for the time being? None, I am afraid, for the Slavic story of the chalice; for the historians of Romance languages, on the contrary, it would suggest a context for a rare and obscure word.

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los Obispos que ha tenido la santa Iglesia de Pamplona, Pamplona 1614, p. 61. I do not know how Du Cange established the date of this document, as on p. 62 Sandoval says that it is undated. Queen Stefania died in 1093.

¹¹ The hypothesis that the chalice and the pseudo-Solomonic inscription may have different origins has been advanced by many scholars; see M. Capaldo, *op. cit.*