

CLAUDIAN, CHRIST AND THE CULT OF THE SAINTS*

I

Current scholarly opinion holds that the poet Claudian was a pagan who was able to hide sufficiently his personal views at a largely Christian court.¹ This opinion is not unanimous: Claudian has in the past occasionally been considered a Christian,² and recently that view has reappeared in print.³ That Claudian wrote *carm. min.* 32, *de salvatore*, should not be doubted; yet this collection of stock phrases cannot be considered Claudian's *credo*. As Gniska has shown, Claudian's treatment of the traditional gods and goddesses displays warmth and fondness beyond the requirements of epic and consequently reveals his true beliefs.⁴ The poem is an Easter card for Honorius, displaying not religious convictions, but an instinct for survival at a Christian court.⁵ The exegesis of *Carmina Minora* 50 here proposed suggests that Claudian was familiar enough with Christian ideas to criticise them. Nothing hinders him from repeating them when it proved advantageous.

The interpretation of *carm. min.* 50 depends in some measure on the literary relationship between Claudian and the Christian poet Prudentius. Specifically, it is important to ascertain whether Claudian was aware of the work of his contemporary. Several studies have argued that Prudentius read and used Claudian,⁶ but only recently has Cameron suggested Claudian also read and used Prudentius.⁷ His arguments and example are convincing and conclusive, revealing at the same time the nature of Claudian's use of his contemporary's words and ideas. Because similar echoes of Prudentius' poetry will appear in the interpretation of *carm. min.* 50, it will be useful to cite the example here. At *Apo.* 111–12, Prudentius writes of God:

pater est, quem cernere nulli
est licitum.

In his unfinished *Gigantomachia*, Claudian makes Echion look at Athene and her aegis (106–7):

te, dea, respexit, solam quam cernere nulli
bis licuit.

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¹ See especially A. Cameron, *Claudian. Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (1970), Ch. VIII 'The Pagan at a Christian court' [hereafter Cameron].

² For a survey of the problem and the views, W. Schmid, *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum*, 3 (1957), 158–65.

³ J. L. Sebesta, 'Claudian's *Credo*: the *de salvatore*', *CB* 56 (1980), 33–7.

⁴ 'Götter und Dämonen in den Gedichten Claudians', *A & A* 18 (1973), 144ff.

⁵ So Cameron, 215–16. F. J. E. Raby, *Secular Latin Poetry*² (1957), i. 96, calls the poem 'coldly orthodox'.

⁶ For discussion, see Cameron, 469–73; also the important study of C. Weyman, 'Zur Chronologie der Dichtungen des Prudentius', *Berl. Phil. Woch.* 17 (1897), 977–86 = *Beiträge zur Geschichte der christlich-lateinischen Poesie* (1926), 64–71.

⁷ Cameron, 470–3.

Echion, of course, turned to stone, and a second look was impossible. Cameron argues convincingly that Claudian had Prudentius in mind here and that he was ‘(as it might seem) deliberately (and humorously) transferring the notion of *never* being able to gaze on the person of God the father into being able to gaze on Athene – but only once’.⁸ This parallel shows a similarity of phrasing combined with a twist of the idea in the poem of Prudentius.

II

Carmina Minora 50

IN IACOBVM MAGISTRVM EQUITVM

Per cineres Pauli, per cani limina Petri,
 ne laceres uersus, dux Iacobe, meos.
 Sic tua pro clipeo defendat pectora Thomas
 et comes ad bellum Bartholomaeus eat,
 sic ope sanctorum non barbarus inruat Alpes, 5
 sic tibi det uires sancta Susanna suas,
 sic quicumque ferox gelidum transnauerit Histrum
 mergatur uolucres ceu Pharaonis equi,
 sic Geticas ultrix feriat romphaea cateruas
 Romanasque regat prospera Thecla manus, 10
 sic tibi det magnum moriens conuiua triumphum
 atque tuam uincant dolia fusa sitim,
 sic numquam hostili maculetur sanguine dextra,
 ne laceres uersus, dux Iacobe, meos.

Clearly, this poem is a reply by Claudian to an attack on his poetry. Just as clearly, the invasion of Italy by the Goths and the cult of the saints are important for an understanding of the poem. More important, however, are lines 11 and 12, the most badly misunderstood lines of the poem. A literal translation of these lines might read: ‘So may the dying guest give you a great triumph and the emptied wine-jars quench your thirst, . . .’. Consequently, it has been thought that Jacobus may have been in his cups during a Roman victory over the Goths, when, as a general, he should have been on the field, an explanation which illuminates neither *moriens conuiua* nor these lines.⁹ Moreover, the use of *sic* in this poem precludes such a view, as it is used to present a series of wishes whose fulfilment is conditional upon compliance with Claudian’s request that Jacobus not attack his poetry.¹⁰ In other words, a *moriens conuiua* may give the victory as far as Jacobus is concerned, but Claudian reserves the right to express a different view in his poetry. Since Claudian had already expressed his view in *De bello Getico* (see section III below on dates), the problem is one of differing interpretations of a previous victory, not one anticipated at some future time, which would be more normal in a conditional wish. The focus on interpretations rules out any reference to specific actions of Jacobus at the battle in question.

⁸ Cameron, 472, his italics.

⁹ See e.g. F. Paschoud, *Roma Aeterna* (1967), 138. In his Loeb edition of Claudian, ii. 279, M. Platnauer also seems to understand these lines in this way.

¹⁰ Cf. *OLD* s.v. *sic* 8 d; also Nisbet and Hubbard on Horace, *Carm.* 1.3.1.

Line 11, and particularly *moriens conuiuia*, demand an alternative explanation. Prudentius may help to establish an identity for this figure. At *Ps.* 529–31, he writes,

nonne triumphum
egimus e Scarioth, magnus qui discipulorum
et conuiuia Dei,

and goes on to mention Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Christ and subsequent suicide. In the lines quoted, there are verbal parallels to line 11 of Claudian's poem, specifically *triumphum*, *magnus* and *conuiuia*, and Judas' death in the succeeding lines may help to explain *moriens*. Claudian seems to have had in mind these lines by Prudentius or at least the idea contained in them. But as far as is known, the Goths were not betrayed before the Romans defeated them. Rather, the imperial armies had great difficulty with Alaric, and consequently Judas Iscariot may seem irrelevant in this context.

Another participant at the Last Supper, where Judas was a *conuiuia Dei*, also died shortly after the event: Christ himself. Contemporary Christian propaganda heralded Christ as the source of imperial victories. From many possible examples, one will suffice. At *Cont. Symm.* 2.709–11, Prudentius writes:

dux agminis imperii que
Christipotens nobis iuuenis fuit, et comes eius
atque parens Stilicho, Deus unus Christus utriusque.

In this discussion of the imperial victory at Pollentia in 402, Prudentius gives as much credit to Christ as to the emperor Honorius and the commander-in-chief Stilicho. The fact that the battle at Pollentia occurred on Easter Sunday, 6 April 402,¹¹ in the context, therefore, of the Last Supper and Good Friday, gives further and sharper point to Claudian's use of Prudentius' description of the last days of Judas Iscariot. It also suggests the interpretation that Claudian's *moriens conuiuia* is Christ himself, the other participant who died shortly after the Last Supper. In other words, Claudian is referring to Christian propaganda and sets himself apart from the Christian view represented in line 11 by *tibi* (Jacobus).

In the context of Easter, line 12 also becomes transparent. In some way, *dolia fusa* and the quenching of thirst must represent the Eucharist. Paulinus of Nola expresses the Christian view of the Eucharist with the following words (31.435–6 = *CSEL* 30.322):

te, domine, ergo, deus, panem fontemque salutis
semper et esuriant et sitiant animae.

Claudian need not even have read these lines of Paulinus, as the idea that the Eucharist, in the symbolic eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood, satisfied the Christian's hunger and thirst was probably well known. Since the Roman army attacked the Goths on Easter Sunday, Claudian may be suggesting that in 402 Christians thirsted for real, rather than symbolic, blood.

The use of *dolia* to describe the vessels of the Eucharist may be thought surprising. Explanations can, however, be offered. Both Augustine (*Tract. in Ioh.* VIII. 3 = *CCL* 36.83) and Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 2.29.1 = *GCS* 12.174) note that the changing of water into wine at the marriage-feast in Cana, where jars were used and the object was to quench thirst, is symbolic of the Eucharist. More important, however, is the historical situation to which Claudian's poem refers. I will argue at

¹¹ O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste* (1919), 304; T. D. Barnes, 'The historical setting of Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum*', *AJP* 97 (1976), 374, where Good Friday should be Easter.

greater length (section III below) that the Roman army attacked the Goths while these were in the midst of celebrating the Eucharist. Granted the large number of Goths in Italy, *dolia* might be regarded as suitable vessels. Moreover, an attack during the celebration would very likely cause the vessels to be overturned in the confusion, making *fusa*, with its dual meaning of 'poured out' and 'thrown to the ground', a suitable description in the circumstances.

This interpretation of lines 11–12 reveals that Claudian was aware of some of the ideas of contemporary Christianity and did not accept them. The rest of the poem confirms both impressions. In line 1, Claudian swears by the ashes of Paul and the threshold of old Peter. It should not occasion surprise that Claudian cites the two apostles here and that they appear together. They were the quintessential Roman martyrs, having received their crowns of glory through the agency of Nero. According to Prudentius, Peter and Paul were martyred exactly one year apart (*Peri.* 12.5), though other traditions hold that they died on the same day.¹² Be that as it may, the festival commemorating this was held in the West on 29 June, with the bishops celebrating at the Church of St Peter on one side of the Tiber before crossing the Pons Aelius to St Paul's on the Ostian Road and repeating the procedure there (ib. 63–4). Peter and Paul appear together elsewhere. The separate prefaces to the two books of Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum* discuss Paul and Peter. Ambrose preached a number of sermons on this festival and is credited with an hymn on the subject of their martyrdom (*PL* 17.736–9, 1215–16). Damasus, as bishop of Rome (366–84), increased the popularity of the festival and renovated the Church of St Peter. In the 390s, the reconstruction of the Church of St Paul gave some prominence to that foundation. The rebuilding was begun by Valentinian II in 391, but most of the refurbishing was done during the reigns of Theodosius and Honorius.¹³ A poet at a Christian court might thus know about the two apostles without research and without being a Christian himself. In addition, Claudian was probably aware that Rufinus, his subject in two invectives, had managed in 389 to procure some share of the relics of these apostles. The prefect housed these relics at his palace at Chalcedon in a shrine where he intended his own remains to be buried.¹⁴ Commenting on his death, Claudian writes (*Ruf.* 2.447–9):

triuuii calcandus spargitur ecce,
qui sibi pyramidas, qui non cedentia templis
ornatura suos extruxit culmina manes.

This indicates knowledge of the tomb Rufinus built for himself. Knowledge of its other use can reasonably be assumed.

In line 2, Claudian castigates a *dux Iacobus* who had made derogatory remarks about his poetry. Very little is known about this man. The manuscript heading to the poem indicates that he was a *magister equitum* and the content suggests that Jacobus held this position during the invasion of Alaric and the Goths in the first years of the

¹² On the joint importance of Peter and Paul at Rome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, see now J. M. Huskinson, *Concordia Apostolorum: Christian Propaganda at Rome in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries. A Study in Early Christian Iconography and Iconology*. BAR International Series 148 (1982), esp. 77–107.

¹³ On the renovations of the two churches, see J. Ruysschaert, 'Prudence l'espagnol poète des deux basiliques romaines de S. Pierre et de S. Paul', *RAC* 42 (1966), 267–86.

¹⁴ H. L. Levy, *Claudian's in Rufinum: An Exegetical Commentary* (1971), 233–4, and J. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court A.D. 364–425* (1975), 134–6, both citing J. Pargoire, 'Rufinianes', *BZ* 8 (1899), 429–77.

fifth century. The only other reference to Jacobus occurs in a letter of Vigilius, bishop of Tridentum, to John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople. Vigilius mentions that he is writing about the martyrs of Anaunia and notes (*PL* 13.552):

Iacobus etenim, desideriorum coelestium uir fidelis, comitiuam reclinaturus in Christi comitibus dignitatem, sanctorum recentium et uapores fumantium reliquias postulauit. Reclinaturus dixi, quia deponi non potest, quae apud Dominum dignitas cumulata.

A heading in a manuscript reports that Jacobus brought the relics to John at Constantinople.¹⁵

PLRE ii., following an earlier study, argues that Jacobus was a *comes* when he transferred the relics.¹⁶ This is based on *comitiuam* in the letter of Vigilius, as there is no other evidence. The adjective modifies *dignitatem* and means ‘pertaining to a chief officer’. The words *comitiuam...cumulata*¹⁷ are imprecise, but indicate that Jacobus was a Christian officer of some sort, possibly a *comes*. The heading also records that Jacobus was a *uir illustris*, leading the editors of *PLRE* ii. to the conclusion that he delivered the relics between 402 and 404 after he had been *magister equitum*. But Jacobus is not called *uir illustris* in the letter itself, a surprising omission if he in fact held that rank. Only the heading, therefore, and not the transfer of the relics, needs to be dated after Jacobus achieved the rank.

The evidence of the letter is more relevant to the date of the transfer. Near the end of this covering letter for the relics, Vigilius writes (*PL* 13.558):

Suscipe nunc, frater, trium munera puerorum aut tres pueros de camino, anhelis ignis adhuc propemodum ambulantes incendia.

Both this and the passage quoted earlier indicate that the bodies of the martyrs had recently been burnt.¹⁸ Since the martyrdom occurred in 397 and Chrysostom became bishop of Constantinople on 26 February 398,¹⁹ the letter can be dated as early as the spring of 398. A notice in Paulinus’ *Vita Ambrosii* (52) reports that the relics passed through Milan, without, however, a firm date, but subsequent to the death of Ambrose and perhaps before the end of 397.²⁰ Further confirmation for an early date for the transfer may come from events in the East. Chrysostom transferred some relics of martyrs from a temporary deposit in Constantinople to the martyr chapel of St Thomas at Drypia, a short distance outside the city. In a recent book, K. G. Holum argues that this occurred between 9 January 400 and 10 January 402.²¹ These relics may well be those of the martyrs of Anaunia. If so, Jacobus must have delivered the relics by about 400 and probably earlier. Given the somewhat unusual gift of western

¹⁵ The letters of Vigilius, which I quote as edited in *PL* 13, also appear at *Acta Sanctorum, Maii Tomus Septimus* (1866), 41–4, with an introduction and other accounts at 37–41. The manuscript heading reads: ‘Incipit Epistola S. Vigili, de laudibus beatissimorum martyrum Sisinnii, Alexandri, et Martyrii, quorum reliquiae per Iacobum uirum illustrem ad Ioannem Episcopum urbis Constantinopolitanae peruenerunt.’

¹⁶ G. Brummer, ‘Wer war Jacobus? Zur Deutung von Claudian C.M. 50’, *BZ* 65 (1972), 339–52; *PLRE* ii. 581–2.

¹⁷ ‘going to deposit upon the companions of Christ his authority as an officer... I say “going to deposit” because authority built up with God cannot be laid down’, a periphrasis for Jacobus’ ultimate destination in heaven.

¹⁸ T. D. Barnes, ‘Late Roman prosopography: between Theodosius and Justinian’, *Phoenix* 37 (1983), 267.

¹⁹ See K. G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses. Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (1982), 57, 69. Socrates, *HE* 6.2.11, provides the date.

²⁰ A portion of the relics remained at Milan, while other parts went to Ravenna and Brescia; see H. Delehaye, *Les Origines du culte des martyres*² (1933), 326, 334–5.

²¹ (Above, n. 19), 56f.

relics to a prominent, but recently consecrated, bishop in the East, Jacobus' real mission was probably diplomatic,²² with or without the connivance of Vigilius. After his return to the West, Jacobus received as a reward the office of *magister equitum* and Claudian's *carm. min.* 50. There is no evidence for his earlier or later career.

Obviously, the man was a Christian who believed in the efficacy of saints. In the next few lines Claudian expresses his view on that devotion, attacking the Christian view that saints were helpful in battle. In line 3, Claudian suggests that Thomas might prove useful as a shield in battle. The poet may have in mind the behaviour of *Fides* at Prudentius, *Ps.* 25–6. Stirred up by an ambition to enter the battle, *Fides*

nec telis meminit nec tegmine cingi,
pectore sed fidens ualido membrisque retectis...

If Claudian has this passage in mind, with Thomas replacing *Fides*, he is brilliantly satirical and hardly polite. The apocryphal *Acts of Thomas* records that he died in India, pierced by the spears of four soldiers.²³ Claudian seems to be suggesting that Thomas could not even save himself and that shields would be a better defence than reliance on the intervention of this saint. Contemporary representation of Thomas' death in art may have given the poet the idea expressed in this line.²⁴ While there is no firm evidence for any church dedicated to Thomas in the West at this date, some portion of his relics is attested at Ravenna at a later date.²⁵ Moreover, Thomas achieved a certain prominence in the period surrounding the year 400. As noted above, John Chrysostom translated some relics to a shrine of St Thomas at Drypia in the early years of the fifth century. More importantly, the relics of Thomas himself had travelled to Edessa a few years earlier,²⁶ and a sermon, ascribed to John Chrysostom, invokes the aid of Thomas in keeping Alaric and his Goths from the gates of Constantinople.²⁷

The reason for the presence of Bartholomew in the next line is similar. In the apocryphal writings on the acts and martyrdom of Bartholomew, this apostle, like Thomas, travelled to the East. Traditions differ, but he apparently went to India as well, though he died in Armenia.²⁸ His death was gruesome. He was first beaten with rods and flayed, and then, as if this were necessary, was beheaded.²⁹ Some traditions are kinder, recording only one of the methods for his martyrdom. Claudian may have known both. Two of the martyrs of Anaunia died deaths similar to those of Bartholomew and Thomas. In his letters to Simplicianus, the successor to Ambrose at Milan, and Chrysostom, Vigilius describes their deaths (*PL* 13.550–8). One, Sisinnius, refused to offer sacrifice to the gods of the barbarians. He was beaten with a trumpet and disfigured by axes, a close parallel to the martyrdom of Bartholomew.

²² T. D. Barnes (above, n. 18), 267.

²³ M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924), 434–8.

²⁴ J. Hall, *Dictionary of Signs and Symbols in Art*² (1979), 301, reports that Thomas is sometimes depicted with spears in his body.

²⁵ Delehaye (above, n. 20), 326.

²⁶ On 22 August 394, according to the *Chronicle of Edessa*; cf. L. Hallier, *Untersuchungen über die Edessenische Chronik. Texte und Untersuchungen* 9 (1893), 103. Cf. also Delehaye (above, n. 20), 212–13.

²⁷ Edited at *PG* 59.497–500. Cf. P. Fargues, *Claudian. Étude sur sa poésie et son temps* (1933), 161–2.

²⁸ James (above, n. 23), 468.

²⁹ H. Delehaye, *Les Passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*² (1966), 197ff., points out that the cruelty experienced by martyrs is a *topos*. The beating and flaying seem to represent different traditions.

His comrade Martyrius was pierced by stakes, an execution similar to that of Thomas. Because the martyrdoms occurred in 397 and within the bounds of the Empire, it is not at all surprising that Claudian knew of the event.

If this is correct, Claudian is making a very pointed identification. The choice of Bartholomew is otherwise inexplicable. While Ravenna offered a church dedicated to this apostle,³⁰ it may not have been built at this early date. Nevertheless, typical scenes from later art include depictions of the apostle refusing to offer sacrifice to idols, like Sisinnius in 397.³¹ If Christians in the late fourth century compared the martyrs of Anaunia with the apostles,³² Claudian's choice of saints for his invective has a direct contemporary relevance, while Jacobus' association with these martyrs is apposite. The fact that both apostles went to India as missionaries corresponds closely to the activities of the later martyrs as missionaries among the barbarians, perhaps the Alans, who were still pagan at this time. The fact that both sets of missionaries died confirmed Claudian's view on the uselessness of relying on saints. Line 5 is a general statement on this point, effective because the Goths had in fact crossed the Alps.

The application of the adjective *sancta* to the *Susanna* in line 6 indicates that she is the legendary virgin martyred during the reign of Diocletian and not the Susanna of the Old Testament Apocrypha.³³ This young girl was supposedly a niece of Caius, the bishop of Rome at the time, and was killed because she was a Christian. More importantly, she had refused to marry a relative of the emperor, variously named Maximinus or Maximianus in the hagiographical tradition. She was venerated immediately, and at some later point an important church at Rome honoured her and her uncle Caius. The precise date of the founding of this church is not known, though it is not usually placed as early as the late fourth century. On the other hand, Claudian's line, the earliest reference to Susanna,³⁴ suggests that contemporary Christians did venerate Susanna, perhaps at a private shrine if the church was not yet built.³⁵ Even if the accounts of her martyrdom are to be regarded as suspect, the crucial element is the willingness of Christians to view her as a legitimate martyr.

Lines 7 and 8 need little comment. Claudian refers to the Christian view that divine aid in the form of a miracle might prevent the Goths from crossing the Danube. The comparison is to the drowning of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea.³⁶ The Goths had in fact crossed the river many years earlier, an occurrence used by the poet to point out that reliance on miracles was no more beneficial than reliance on saints. Claudian's specific target here may be the Christian view of the cause of the dust-storm that aided Theodosius in his final battle with the forces of Eugenius at the Frigidus

³⁰ Delehay (above, n. 20), 325.

³¹ Hall (above, n. 24), 41.

³² Contemporary references to the martyrs, including Augustine, *Ep.* 139 (*CSEL* 44.152), two sermons of Maximus of Turin (*PL* 57.695–8) and a sermon of Gaudentius of Brescia (*PL* 20.959–71 at 963), as well as the writings of Vigilius, do not make the comparison. Cameron, 218, cites the church at Ravenna as a possibility for understanding the poem.

³³ See *Acta Sanctorum, Augusti Tomus Secundus* (1867), 624–32, and J. J. Delaney and J. E. Tobin, *Dictionary of Catholic Biography* (1961), 1091. The *de lapsu Susannae*, on which see n. 43 below, calls the Old Testament Susanna (12) 'fortissima illa Susanna'.

³⁴ A. Amore, in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, 12 (1969), 78–80, discusses the evidence for the cult of Susanna and suggests a number of possible identifications.

³⁵ C. Pietri, *Roma Christiana* (1976), 498–501, doubts the existence of an early cult of Susanna, but (501) allows the possibility of a cult in a private foundation.

³⁶ Prudentius refers to this event with some similarity of phrasing at *Cath.* 5.54–5: *currus pars et equos et uolucres rotas] conscendunt celeres, ...*

in 394. Christians soon proclaimed this a divine miracle, while pagans regarded it as fortuitous.³⁷

In the Septuagint, the sword placed at the entrance to the Garden of Eden is called a *φλογίνη ρομφαία* (Gen. 3.24). In Greek patristic writings, *ρομφαία* very frequently refers to this particular sword, and the word was taken into Latin in the same sense.³⁸ Claudian is suggesting in line 9 that God might perhaps have given the Christians such a sword to drive or keep out the Gothic hordes.³⁹

The reason for the appearance of Thecla in the next line must be found in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Thecla was a young woman of Iconium who heard Paul's preaching. At once, she refused to marry the man to whom she was engaged, having decided on a course of chastity. The flames burning the pyre on which she stood after being condemned to die were extinguished by timely hail and rain. Subsequently, she was twice thrown to beasts. Each time, they left her alone, though the intervention of selective lightning was extremely useful on the second occasion, killing seals in a ditch into which she had jumped to baptise herself. This must be the reason that she is called *prospera*. Moreover, a peculiarly Roman tradition records that she travelled to join Paul at Rome through an underground passage beginning at the cave in which she lived.⁴⁰ Such a person might prove extremely useful in any attempt to ambush the Goths.

The site of a church dedicated to Thecla at Rome was occupied by Christians as early as the third century, and at some point she received a church at Milan as well. Her importance at Milan is evident in the Ambrosian liturgy. She appears as one of the saints mentioned by name in the *Nobis quoque* of the Ambrosian mass, but is absent in other versions.⁴¹ The church at Rome is perhaps more important here, since it was refurbished about the year 400.⁴² A further indication of her popularity at this time can be found in a contemporary treatise, the *de lapsu Susannae*, in which a consecrated girl named Susanna is chastised for involvement with a lector. Thecla is one of the heroines to whom the backsliding Susanna would need to offer an explanation. Niceta of Remesiana, almost certainly the author,⁴³ writes (11):

³⁷ For a recent discussion, see F. Paschoud, *Zosime. Histoire Nouvelle*, Tome II, 2 (1979), 474–500.

³⁸ See G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (1961–8) and W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*² (1979), s.v. *ρομφαία*. For Latin, see e.g. Tertullian, *An.* 55.4, where *romphaea* is the *paradisi ianitrix*, and J. H. Waszink's comments *ad loc.*, and Jerome, *Ep.* 60.3: *flammea illa romphaea, custos paradisi*.

³⁹ Claudian may have derived his idea of an *ultrix romphaea* from Prud. *Peri.* 5.189–192: *romphaea nam caelestium | uindex erit uoluminum | tanti ueneni interpretem | linguam perurens fulmine*.

⁴⁰ On the peculiarly Roman tradition, see G. Dagron, *Vie et Miracles de Sainte Thècle* (1978), 49–50. In the version which became the basis for the Roman version, Thecla is joined in her ascetic life by numerous other women, *id.* 48.

⁴¹ V. L. Kennedy, *The Saints of the Canon of the Mass*² (1963), 71.

⁴² U. M. Fasola, 'La basilica sotterranea di S. Tecla e le regioni cimiteriali vicine', *RAC* 46 (1970), 209–11, 229–31, 258.

⁴³ In the manuscripts, this work is ascribed to Niceta, Ambrose and Jerome. For the claim of Niceta, see A. E. Burn, *Niceta of Remesiana. His Life and Works* (1905), cxxxi–cxxxvi, and K. Gamber, *Niceta von Remesiana. De lapsu Susannae. Textus Patristici et Liturgici* 7 (1969), 18–22. E. Cazzaniga, *Incerti auctoris de lapsu Susannae* (1948), lvi–lxii, is more cautious. I cite the text from the edition of Gamber.

Sed dictura es forsitan: 'non potui sustinere, quia carnem fragilem circumferebam.' Respondebit tibi beata Thecla cum suis innumerabilibus sociis: 'et nos eadem carne amictae fuimus, nec tamen plenum propositum castitatis nostrae aut fragilitas carnis potuit mutilare aut saeuitia tyrannorum per uaria tormenta deicere.'

The reference to the *innumerabiles socii* of Thecla helps to explain Claudian's line. This saint might be regarded as useful because she could call upon additional forces against the enemy (see n. 40).

Lines 11 and 12 have received sufficient comment earlier, though it is worth noting that the poet has worked through a series of saints before rising to a crescendo with a reference to Christ himself. In line 13, Claudian summarises his earlier remarks. Had any or all of these miracles occurred, Jacobus would never stain his hands with enemy blood. Prudentius may provide the reason why this was desirable. At the end of the battle between the Virtues and the Vices, *Fides* announces the one remaining task (*Ps.* 804–10):

unum opus egregio restat post bella labori,	
o proceres, regni quod tandem pacifer heres	805
belligeri, armatae successor inermus et aulae,	
instituit Solomon, quoniam genitoris anhelis	
fumarat calido regum de sanguine dextra.	
sanguine nam terso templum fundatur et ara	
ponitur auratis Christi domus ardua tectis.	810

If Claudian had this passage in mind, especially line 808 with its ending *sanguine dextra*, he is suggesting that Jacobus and his associates would rather build churches than fight battles. Throughout the poem, he has pointed out that the saints and miracles are not as useful as some Christians wanted them to be. In other words, Christians needed to fight if they wished to be free from fear of the enemy. Line 13 may represent, at least in part, the common pagan charge that Christians refused to perform military service.⁴⁴

This interpretation establishes Claudian's religious viewpoint without possibility of doubt. His awareness of Christian ideas and events, particularly those that were current about the year 400, does not detract in any way from the view that he was anti-Christian. Similarly, his knowledge of some of the poetry of Prudentius means only that he was interested in contemporary as well as older poetry.⁴⁵ For Claudian, anything less would be surprising. Claudian's use of the ideas that he found at a Christian court is much more relevant. At best, he was tolerant of Christianity, as the tone of *carm. min.* 50 perhaps indicates. He will allow Jacobus to hold a different view, but will not submit to an attack on the ideas expressed in his own poetry. While he finds Jacobus' view unacceptable, the latter had attacked first.

⁴⁴ Cf. Fargues (above, n. 27), 162.

⁴⁵ The earlier view that little, if any, of Prudentius' poetry was published before 405 has been superseded by several studies: K. Thraede, *Studien zur Sprache und Stil des Prudentius*. Hypomnemata 13 (1965), 76–8 with nn. 184–6; Cameron, 470–1; Barnes (above, n. 11), 377, and I. Rodríguez Herrera, *Poeta Christianus. Esencia y misión del poeta cristiano en la obra de Prudencio* (1981, translation of *Poeta Christianus. Prudentius' Auffassung vom Wesen und von der Aufgabe des christlichen Dichters* [Diss. Munich, 1936; unavailable to me]), 16–19, who argues that the *Psychomachia*, the most important poem for the present paper, is referred to in the preface to the omnibus edition and belongs to 398–400, contra J. Bergmann, *Aurelii Prudentii Clementii Carmina* (1926 = CSEL 61), 11–13, who dates *Ps.* to after 405. M. Smith, *Prudentius' Psychomachia. A Reexamination* (1976), 3, accepts the view of Bergmann without argument.

III. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Alaric and his Goths invaded Italy in November 401 and spent the winter on the south side of the Alps. In the spring of 402, an imperial army went to meet him. On 6 April 402, Easter Sunday, Stilicho defeated the Goths at Pollentia. In spite of propaganda to the contrary, the Goths remained strong, since another battle was necessary, this time at Verona, probably in the summer of 403.⁴⁶ That the battle at Pollentia occurred on Easter Sunday is clear from Orosius, who writes of the pagan and barbarian general Saul, by whose impiety (7.37.2) *sanctum pascha uiolatum est*.

The sources record very little about the battle at Pollentia, a strange occurrence for a battle where an imperial army under a Christian emperor gained a victory. A number of scholars have suggested that the victory was not really decisive, as the need for another battle indicates.⁴⁷ Cassiodorus, writing favourably toward the Goths,⁴⁸ states that the Romans lost (*Chron. Min.* 2.154), and Jordanes follows suit (*Get.* 155). But this is only part of the reason for the silence of the sources. Orosius' discussion of the battle clarifies the situation. He writes (ib.): *taceo de infelicibus illis apud Pollentiam gestis*. A few lines further, he notes: *cedentique hosti propter religionem, ut pugnaret, extortum est*. At this point, it is necessary to remember that the Goths were Arian Christians.⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, they had withdrawn because they wished to celebrate Easter.

Stilicho probably masterminded this battle, possibly following the example of an event in 368. Ammianus Marcellinus reports (27.10.1) that a prince of the Alamanni named Rando entered Mainz, discovered that the inhabitants were celebrating a Christian festival (perhaps, though not necessarily, Easter), and was able to plunder at will because the citizens were defenceless. Stilicho, however, was careful enough of his reputation to entrust the original attack to the pagan general Saul, who must be the *gentis praefectus Alanae* who began the battle and died during it in Claudian's short description of the event.⁵⁰ Stilicho seems to have suggested to Saul that he attack while the Goths were celebrating Easter and probably in the midst of the Eucharist. The fact that the imperial army appears on the scene almost immediately gives Stilicho away. Indeed, Claudian implies as much at *Get.* 588–9:

ille tamen mandante procul Stilichone citatis
acceleravit equis Italumque momordit harenam.

The problem for Christian propaganda is obvious. The imperial regime and Christians were fond of declaring that victories were given by God, an argument strained to the limit when a Christian enemy was defeated in the middle of celebrating one of the most important feast days of Christendom. This is the reason for Orosius' desire to remain silent about the battle and for his description of the events as unfortunate. This is also the reason for Claudian's short description of the battle itself. In his poem on this battle, he writes of almost anything but the events themselves. Only 17 lines of 647 (581–97) are devoted to the description. He knew enough to leave the events alone.

Claudian wrote his *De bello Getico* shortly after the battle and recited it in Rome in the summer or autumn of 402.⁵¹ As usual, he has much to say about the pagan

⁴⁶ Barnes (above, n. 11), 373–6 with notes.

⁴⁷ Cameron, 180ff., Barnes (above, n. 11), 383–4.

⁴⁸ J. J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (1979), 36–43.

⁴⁹ E. A. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila* (1966), 86ff., 107ff.

⁵⁰ See now Barnes (above, n. 18), 269, correcting *PLRE* ii. 981.

⁵¹ Barnes (above, n. 11), 376. Cameron, 180 and 184–5 suggests May/June 402.

gods and the omens preceding the battle. Shortly thereafter, Prudentius published for the first time his *Contra Symmachum*. Symmachus had travelled to the court again in the winter of 401/402 to plead the cause of the pagan cults. Prudentius' poem is an attack on the pagan cults, and though he has before him a copy of Symmachus' *Relatio* of 384 and the reply of Ambrose, he has the more recent embassy in mind as well.⁵² But in addition to arguing against Symmachus, Prudentius appears to have had Claudian's latest poem in mind, as some literary echoes or imitations indicate the priority of Claudian's effort.⁵³

More importantly, he appears to be attacking Claudian's view of Pollentia. At *Cont. Symm.* 2.708–20, he gives his description and view of the battle:

numquid et ille dies Ioue contulit auspice tantum uirtutis pretium? dux agminis imperique Christipotens nobis iuuenis fuit, et comes eius	710
atque parens Stilicho, Deus unus Christus utrique. huius adoratis altaribus et cruce fronti inscripta cecinere tubae; prima hasta dracones praecurrit, quae Christi apicem sublimior effert.	
illic ter denis gens exitiabilis annis	715
Pannoniae poenas tandem deleta pependit. corpora famosis olim ditata rapinis in cumulos congesta iacent. mirabere seris, posteritas, saeculis inhumata cadauera late, quae Pollentinos texerunt ossibus agros.	720

Prudentius is attempting to place a better light on the battle. He confirms the view that the armies were busy with the Eucharist, since *huius adoratis altaribus et cruce fronti inscripta* cannot mean anything else. He carefully avoids any mention of the religion of the Goths and the day of the battle, and it is now the Roman army specifically which celebrated the feast. Prudentius too could write propaganda: no pagan god was responsible for this victory.

At some point after Claudian's recitation of *De bello Getico*, Jacobus attacked the viewpoint expressed in that poem. Probably, he did this after the publication of the *Contra Symmachum* and based his criticisms on Prudentius' views. Jacobus will have understood that Prudentius was attacking both Symmachus and Claudian. Since Claudian was still alive and Symmachus had recently died, the latter became the ostensible target.⁵⁴ To these criticisms by Jacobus, Claudian responded with *carm. min.* 50.⁵⁵ If the suggestion that the Goths were celebrating the Eucharist when attacked is correct, *moriens conuiuia* and *dolia fusa* in lines 11 and 12 are extremely relevant phrases. Claudian is suggesting that Jacobus, following Prudentius, distorted the truth in an effort to avoid embarrassment.

In the literary sequence, the last word belongs to Prudentius. His *Contra Symmachum* was republished as part of an omnibus edition in 404 or 405. T. D. Barnes has shown

⁵² Barnes (above, n. 11), 378–83. J. Harries, 'Prudentius and Theodosius', *Latomus* 43 (1984), 74ff., now argues that Prudentius wrote *Cont. Symm.* I in 394 or 395 and that the purpose of Symmachus' journey to the court in the winter of 401/2 was not to plead the pagan cause once again. For my purposes here, it is immaterial whether the real or only the dramatic date of *Cont. Symm.* I falls in 394/5.

⁵³ Weyman (above, n. 6); Cameron, 248, 473. Harries (previous note), 76 agrees that Claudian's effort precedes *Cont. Symm.* II.

⁵⁴ Barnes (above, n. 11), 386.

⁵⁵ Cameron, 218 on other grounds also dates the poem to 402/403. For my reconstruction of the publishing sequence, 403 (but before the battle of Verona) is more suitable.

that the prefaces to the two books of that poem were written for the second publication, noting that the preface to the second book interrupts the progression of thought from the end of the first book to the beginning of the second.⁵⁶ The subjects of the prefaces are interesting when compared to the opening line of *carm. min.* 50. In the preface to the first book, Prudentius discusses the occasion when Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake and suffered no harm. The preface to the second book tells of Peter's adventures when he walked on the water. Is Prudentius not responding to Claudian's poem by showing that these saints were indeed capable of miracles? This impression, which gains force if the prefaces were written after the battle of Verona,⁵⁷ is perhaps confirmed by the fact that the apostles usually appear in the order Peter and Paul. Both Claudian and Prudentius name Paul first. The Christian poet must have chosen this order deliberately, as he was not constrained by metre.

Understood in this way, *carm. min.* 50 is another document indicating the scope of the struggle between paganism and Christianity at the end of the fourth century. Each side actively promoted its own views, but just as actively attempted to destroy the arguments of the other. As regards Claudian and Prudentius at least, these exercises were based on knowledge of specific works of the other poet, not merely on general impressions.

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⁵⁶ (Above, n. 11), 376–8. Harries (above, n. 52), 78–9 also regards the prefaces as later than the rest of the poem.

⁵⁷ As Harries (above, n. 52), 79 suggests.