

# THE PASSIO VINCENTII TRANSMITTED IN THE TEXTS OF PRUDENTIUS

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**Resumo:** O seguinte artigo analisa os textos de Prudentius, famoso poeta cristão, que apresentam a figura de Vicente, mártir do século V, e narram seu martírio em razão da sua não submissão à ordem de negar a fé cristã, sacrificando aos deuses. Tal relato se encontra numa coletânea de poemas chamada *Peristephanon*, mas especificamente nos livros IV-V, nos quais o poeta faz inicialmente um elogio aos dezoito mártires de Saragoça, para depois se deter na paixão de São Vicente, que consiste em uma série de confrontos de ordem verbal, quando seu algoz, Daciano, tenta persuadi-lo através de palavras lisonjeiras ou ameaçadoras, e de ordem física, estando já seu adversário tomado de fúria e com requintes de crueldade, mas nada disso é capaz de corrompê-lo no seu íntimo, elevando São Vicente à glória do martírio. As motivações para que Prudentius escrevesse tais poemas sobre os mártires foram seu ideal ascético, que correspondia a um tipo de martírio diário, sua estada na Itália, onde o culto dos mártires era fortemente celebrado, e o incentivo recebido de seu bispo para introduzir o culto dos mártires na Igreja da Espanha; tudo isso confluiu nesses poemas de estilo e piedade singulares.

**Palavras-chave:** Martírio. Poema. São Vicente. Culto dos mártires.

**Abstract:** The following article analyzes the texts of Prudentius, a famous christian poet, which presents Vincent's figure, a martyr from the 5th century, and narrates his martyrdom in reason to his non-submission to the order of denying the christian faith by sacrificing to the gods. This narrative is found in a collection of poems called *Peristephanon*, but specifically in the books IV-V, in which the poet initially praises the eighteen martyrs of Saragoça; afterwards

he remains in Saint Vincent's passion, that consists in a series of verbal confrontations, when his executioner, Dacian, tries to persuade him through flattering or threatening words, and of physical confrontations, being his adversary full of rage and with cruelty, but nothing of this is capable of corrupting his inner-self, thus elevating Saint Vincent to glory of martyrdom. The motivations of Prudentius's writing of those poems on the martyrs were his ascetic ideal, which corresponds to a kind of daily martyrdom, his stay in Italy, where the cult of martyrs was strongly celebrated, and his bishop's encouragement to introduce the martyr's cult in the Church of Spain; all this resulted in these poems of singular style and piety.

**Keywords:** Martyrdom. Poem. Saint Vincent. Martyr's cult.

**Resumen:** El siguiente artículo analiza los textos de Prudencio, célebre poeta cristiano, que presentan la figura de Vicente, mártir del siglo V, donde se narra su martirio por no someterse a la orden de rechazar la fe cristiana, sacrificando a los dioses. Este relato se encuentra en una colección de poemas llamada *Peristephanon*, pero específicamente en los libros IV-V, en los que el poeta elogia inicialmente a los dieciocho mártires de Zaragoza, y luego se detiene en la pasión de San Vicente, que consiste en una serie de enfrentamientos verbales, cuando su verdugo, Daciano, intenta de persuadirlo mediante palabras halagadoras o amenazantes, y de naturaleza física, siendo ya su adversario tomado de furia y con refinamientos de crueldad, pero nada de esto es capaz de corromperlo en su corazón, elevando a São Vicente a la gloria del martirio. Las

*motivaciones por las que Prudencio escribiera tales poemas sobre los mártires fueron su ideal ascético, que correspondía a una especie de martirio cotidiano, su estancia en Italia, donde se celebraba con fuerza el culto de los mártires, y el estímulo recibido de su obispo para introducir el culto de los mártires en la Iglesia de España; todo esto se resumió en estos poemas de singular estilo y piedad.*

**Palabras clave:** Martirio. Poema. San Vicente. Culto de los Mártires.

**Sommario:** L'articolo che segue analizza i testi di Prudenzio, celebre poeta cristiano, che presentano la figura di Vincenzo, martire del secolo V, e ne narrano il suo martirio dovuto alla mancata sottomissione all'ordine di rinnegare la fede cristiana, sacrificando agli dei. Questo racconto si trova in una collezione di poesie chiamata *Peristephanon*, ma in particolare nei libri IV-V, in cui il poeta loda inizialmente i diciotto martiri di Saragozza, poi soffermarsi sulla passione di San Vincenzo, che consiste in una serie di combattimenti verbali, quando il suo aguzzino, Daciano, cerca di persuaderlo attraverso lusinghe o minacce parole, e di natura fisica, essendo già il suo avversario infuriato e con crudeltà, ma niente di tutto questo è in grado di corrompere il suo cuore, elevando San Vincenzo alla gloria del martirio. Le motivazioni per le quali Prudenzio scrivesse tali poesie sui martiri furono il suo ideale ascetico, che corrispondeva a una sorta di martirio quotidiano, il suo soggiorno in Italia, dove il culto dei martiri era fortemente celebrato, e l'incoraggiamento ricevuto dal suo vescovo a introdurre il culto dei martiri in la Chiesa della Spagna; tutto questo si è risultato in queste poesie di singolare stile e

pietà.

**Parole chiave:** Martirio. Poesia. San Vincenzo. Culto dei martiri.

**Résumé:** L'article suivant analyse les textes de Prudence, célèbre poète chrétien, qui présentent la figure de Vincent, martyr du Ve siècle. Ils racontent le martyre de celui-ci en raison de sa non-soumission à l'ordre de renier la foi chrétienne en sacrifiant aux divinités païennes. Ce récit se trouve dans un recueil de poèmes intitulé *Peri stephanon*, plus précisément dans les livres IV-V, dans lequel le poète loue d'abord les dix-huit martyrs de Saragoisse, puis la passion de saint Vincent, qui consiste en une série d'affrontements verbaux, lorsque son bourreau, Daciano, tente de le persuader par des flatteries ou des menaces. Physiquement, son adversaire étant déjà pris de fureur et de raffinements de cruauté, mais rien de tout cela n'était capable de corrompre son cœur, élevant São Vicente à la gloire du martyr. Les motivations pour lesquelles Prudentius écrit tels poèmes sur les martyrs étaient d'abord son idéal ascétique, qui correspondait à une sorte de martyr quotidien, puis son séjour en Italie, où le culte des martyrs était fortement célébré, et enfin les encouragements reçus de son évêque pour introduire le culte des martyrs dans l'Église de l'Espagne; tout cela se réunissait dans ces poèmes d'un style et d'une piété singuliers.

**Mots-clés:** Martyre. Poème. Saint-Vincent. Culte des Martyrs.

## 1.1 GENERAL ANALYSIS OF PRUDENTIUS' POETRY

### 1.1.1 COMMENT ON THE PERISTEPHANON

Prudentius is considered the greatest of the Latin Christian poets of late antiquity, during the period that is considered the golden age of the patristic literature.<sup>1</sup> The poet is the author of a rich and diversified literary production.<sup>2</sup> There is little information available about the life of Aurelius Prudentius Clemens. In his work *Praefatio*, published between 404 and 405, which he wrote to introduce his collected literary works, it is possible to find limited data about the poet. It seems he was born around 348, probably at *Calagurris* (modern Calahorra on the Upper Ebro). He likely belonged to provincial Hispanic-Roman aristocracy. He seemed to have a successful career: he was initially formed as a scholar of rhetoric, after proving to be an ambitious lawyer, he became the governor of the province and later he held a high office as a private counselor to Emperor Theodosius, probably until the death of the emperor in 395. His "retirement" was the occasion for his more serious conversion desiring to live a more perfect Christian life following the path of asceticism and poetry.<sup>3</sup> Poetry became for him like a spiritual exercise in an ascetical life. His main goal was the praise of God and the service to the Church witnessing to the faith and offering a diversified literary production which greatly contributed to the poetic

<sup>1</sup> *Tutti gli studiosi riconoscono in Prudenzio—per la ricchezza, varietà e qualità della sua produzione—il più grande poeta latino dell'antichità cristiana. Non a caso, la sua maturità e la sua opera si inquadrano nel tardo quarto secolo e all'inizio del quinto, cioè al centro di quella che viene tradizionalmente definita come l'età d'oro della letteratura patristica. Prudenzio. Gli Inni Quotidiani. Le Corone dei Martiri. Introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di SPINELLI, M. Roma 2009 (Collana di Testi Patristici 209), p. 5. Il y a de belles qualités chez Prudence. Il se montre souvent un véritable poète, à l'expression pittoresque, aux images gracieuses et colorées. M. Lavarenne, Prudence, texte établi et traduit par M. Lavarenne, in *Collection des Universités de France, tome I: Cathemerinon Liber* (Livre d'Heures), Paris, 1972, pp. ix. See also *The Poems of Prudentius*, translated by EAGAN, M. Clement. Washington, 1962 (The Fathers of the Church 43), p. ix.*

<sup>2</sup> The literary production of Prudentius comprehends more than ten thousand verses and may be divided generally into lyric and didactic parts, which are introduced by his *Praefatio* and concluded by the *Epilogus*. LAVARENNE, M. *Prudence*, tome I, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>3</sup> PRUDENTIUS. *Praefatio*, 34-45 (CSEL 61, p. 4). See FONTAINE, J. s. v. *Prudentius* in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, directed by DI BERARDINO, A. Volume three (P-Z), Downers Grove, 2014, p. 341. See FONTAINE, J. *Naissance de la Poésie dans l'Occident Chrétien. Esquisse d'une Histoire de la Poésie Latine Chrétienne du IIIe au VIe siècle*, Paris, 1981 (Études Augustiniennes), pp. 146-147. See also LAVARENNE, M. *Prudence*, tome I, pp. vi-vii.

culture.<sup>4</sup> He then dedicates himself to a poetic activity aiming at the praise of God, the combat against paganism, the confrontation against heretical distortions of the orthodox faith, and the celebration of the martyrs as examples of heroes and witnesses of the faith.

Prudentius' literary project offered both a synthesis drawing from different streams of the Latin Christian poetic tradition and it may be considered as a development of the literary tradition of the late 4th and early 5th century.<sup>5</sup> He showed his knowledge of secular and Christian authors. He knew the works of Horace, Virgil, Ovid, Lucretius, among other writers. He also received the tradition of Latin Christian poetry of Damasus, Hilary, Ambrose, Paulinus, etc. His genius was the ability to provide a synthesis of different literary styles and to offer poems of very different tones and genres.<sup>6</sup> Among his literary production, Prudentius' hymns on the passion and cult of Spaniard and Roman martyrs occupies a special place among his works, and thus will receive special attention in this chapter, especially the section dedicated to Vincent.

Prudentius' *Peristephanon*<sup>7</sup> has been mainly influenced by, however not limited to, different previous literary works, such as the epigrams of Damasus, the hymns of Ambrose, and possibly the poems of Paulinus. It has

<sup>4</sup> See FONTAINE, J. *Naissance de la Poésie dans l'Occident Chrétien*, pp. 145-154-156.

<sup>5</sup> *Prudence ne fut pas le premier en date, mais il fut le plus grand de ces disciples chrétiens des classiques latins. Il montra que le christianisme pouvait inspirer des odes quasi pindariques: ce sont ses hymnes de la journée; des épopées d'un genre nouveau, sur des mètres d'Horace: ses passions de martyrs; une épopée nouvelle aussi, parce qu'entièrement allégorique, dans un style virgilien: la Psychomachie; des poèmes didactiques, en hexamètres comme le De Natura rerum ou les Géorgiques: l'Apothéose, l'Hamartigénie; une satire à la Juvénal: le Contre Symmaque. C'était prouver que la doctrine de Jésus était une source féconde d'inspiration poétique.* LAVARENNE, M. *Prudence*, tome I, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>6</sup> In PRUDENTIUS, *Praefatio*, 34-45 (CSEL 61, p. 4), it seems possible to identify allusions to the works of Prudentius: the lyric collection of *Cathemerinon*, the didactic and theological poems of *Apotheosis* and *Hamartigenia*, the two anti-pagan polemical epic books of *Contra Symmachum*, and the celebration of the passion and cult of martyrs of *Peristephanon*. However, there are neither allusions to his allegorical epic poem of *Psychomachia*, to the epigrams of *Dittochaeon*, nor to the lost poem on Creation. See FONTAINE, J. s. v. *Prudentius* in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, volume three (P-Z), pp. 341-342. See LAVARENNE, M. *Prudence*, tome I, pp. vii. ix.

<sup>7</sup> À l'exception du *Contra Symmachum*, et de la *Praefatio*, toutes les compositions de Prudence ont un titre grec. FUX, P.-Y. *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*. (*Peristephanon* 2. 5. 9. 11-14). *Introduction générale et commentaire*, in Fribourg, 2003, p. 12. The choice of a Greek title for a literary work is not uncommon among Latin poets.

also profited from prose texts like *acta*, *passiones*, *sermones*, and works on preparation to martyrdom especially from the 3rd century, which began to be read in a spiritual dimension in ascetic circles by the end of the 4th century.<sup>8</sup> When receiving the tradition of the *passio* of a given martyr, Prudentius would creatively work on the hagiographic text whenever a *lacuna* or a lack of detailed information would allow him to do it, which in certain instances the poet seemed to be tempted to follow the desire for wonderful accounts, typically found in later passions and legends.<sup>9</sup>

Among several aspects that contributed to the birth of the *Peristepahnon*, there are at least three factors within the context of the rising of the cult of martyrs that seem relevant. First, Prudentius seemed to have a personal interest in “connecting” the cult of martyrs with his recent desire to follow the ascetic ideal: *if the monk saw himself as a “successor of the martyr,” the meditation on the physical and moral heroism of the martyrs is a primordial form of asceticism for those who conceive as their ideal of life that of a “daily martyrdom.”*<sup>10</sup> Second, the Latin poet’s sojourn in Italy, probably around 401, allowed him to be an eyewitness of the cult of martyrs in Italy.<sup>11</sup> Third, he had been encouraged by his Bishop Valerius to introduce the cult of Roman martyrs into the life of the Church in Spain. Thus, it would not be unreasonable to conceive the *Peristephanon* as a contribution to the promotion of the cult of martyrs in Spain.

In regard to Prudentius’ poetic lexicon, he seems to be conscious of his word choices. He implements several examples of allegories, tropes, metonymies, metaphors, and synecdoctes which often all contribute to

<sup>8</sup> For the central importance of the cult of the saints in the late antique Christianity, see ROBERTS, M. *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs. The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius*, Ann Arbor, MI, 1993, p. 3; and see also MARKUS, R. *The End of Ancient Christianity*, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> FONTAINE, J. *Naissance de la Poésie dans l’Occident Chrétien*, p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> *Si le moine se veut “successeur du martyr,” la méditation de l’héroïsme physique et moral des martyrs est une forme primordiale de l’ascèse, pour ceux qui conçoivent leur idéal de vie comme celui d’un “martyre quotidien.” Ibid., p. 191.*

<sup>11</sup> *En se rendant à Rome, probablement en 401... Prudence semble bien avoir assisté dans la Ville [Rome] à la grande fête annuelle des Apôtres et martyrs Pierre et Paul, visité les tombeaux de divers autres martyrs romains. Ibid., pp. 190-191.*

offer temporal and spatial indeterminacy that characterizes his poetic of martyrdom: *they provide the equivalent in language to the blurring of categories experienced by a devotee at a martyr's shrine and thereby render Prudentius' account of Church history and cult practice sacred.*<sup>12</sup> Prudentius probably intended to address, mainly, *the highly educated Christian aristocrats and church-people.*<sup>13</sup> He included in his work passages of personal meditations, prayers,<sup>14</sup> and reflections on the benefits the cult of martyrs could bring to both individuals and society, especially to the Christian world in the West.

The structure of the *Peristephanon*, following the order transmitted by editors, may be divided into two groups of seven poems each. The first group of poems predominantly honors the martyrs of Spain, especially those from Calagurris,<sup>15</sup> whereas the second group of poems honors most of all Roman or Italian martyrs.<sup>16</sup> Each poem is written according to the following schema: an introduction, a martyr narrative, and a conclusion. Each part is carefully built to transmit certain relevant information, whether theological, ideological, or even specific details about the cult of the martyrs and its local and temporal dimensions. The present work will limit its scope to the discussion on the Passion of Vincent in Prudentius' *Peristaphanon*.

<sup>12</sup> ROBERTS, M. *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, pp. 6. 7. 194.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68. See also FONTAINE, J. *Naissance de la Poésie dans l'Occident Chrétien*, p. 156.

<sup>14</sup> The poems of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* also express the poet's own devotion. ROBERTS, M. *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 197.

<sup>15</sup> *Pe. I* is dedicated to the martyrdom and the cult of Emeterius and Chelidonius. *Pe. VIII* is a spiritual continuation of their passion and the building of a baptistery on the place of their martyrdom. *Pe. III* is a hymn in honor to Eulalia. *Pe. IV* is a hymn written in honor to the eighteen martyrs of Saragossa, and amongst them is Saint Vincent. *Pe. V* is dedicated to the Passion of Vincent. *Pe. VI* is a hymn to Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius. *Pe. II* is a hymn in honor of the Passion of Lawrence. *Pe. VII* is dedicated to Quirinus, Bishop of Siscia.

<sup>16</sup> *Pe. IX* is dedicated to the Passion of Cassian of Imola. *Pe. XI* is written to Bishop Valerius on the Passion of Hippolytus. *Pe. XII* is dedicated to the Passion of Peter and Paul. *Pe. XIV* is written on the Passion of Agnes. *Pe. XIII* is about the martyrdom of Cyprian. *Pe. X* is a discourse of Martyr Romanus.

### 1.1.2 COMMENT ON THE *PASSIO VINCENTII* IN THE POEMS OF PRUDENTIUS<sup>17</sup>

Prudentius dedicated two poems of his *Peristephanon Liber* to Saint Vincent. *Pe. IV* is written in honor of the eighteen martyrs from Saragossa.<sup>18</sup> The poem offers limited but significant information about Vincent's origin, his formation in the faith, and the veneration of his relic.<sup>19</sup> The poem seems to transpire a sense of Prudentius' nationalism in regard to a particular interest in Saragossa and its martyrs<sup>20</sup> compared to other areas and saints. However, this and other elements, as will be discussed, may be understood within the context of his interest in the promotion of the cult of martyrs.

*Pe. V* is entitled *Passio Sancti Vincentii Martyris*. Since it is totally dedicated to the *Passio Vincentii*, it is a valuable source for the present study. In the martyr's narrative part of the poem, the reader may contemplate not only the combat and victory sequences of the Passion of Vincent, but also the opportunity to interpret it spiritually which may have been Prudentius' intention: to offer his poem on Vincent's Passion as a model for Christian life. In order to reflect on the data offered by Prudentius in regard to the *Passio Vincentii*, it becomes relevant to provide a more specific analysis of the two poems of Prudentius' *Peristephanon*.

## 1.2 SPECIFIC ANALYSIS OF THE POEMS OF PRUDENTIUS (*PE. IV-V*)

### *Peristephanon IV*

The fourth poem of the *Peristephanon Liber* is entitled *Hymnus in honorem sanctorum decem et octo martyrum Caesaraugustanorum*. The poem is written in 50 sapphic quatrains and may be divided into three main parts: introduction (1-64), martyrs' narrative (65-144), and conclusion (145-200).<sup>21</sup> It is in the narrative part where one will find significant references to Vincent.

<sup>17</sup> The present reflection will follow Saxer's work.

<sup>18</sup> *Hymnus in honorem sanctorum decem et octo martyrum Caesaraugustanorum*.

<sup>19</sup> See *Pe. IV*, 77-90 (*CSEL* 61, p. 329).

<sup>20</sup> For instance, Prudentius clearly claims the saint as theirs, even though Vincent has suffered martyrdom in Valencia and has been buried away from Saragossa. In *Pe. IV*, 89. 97-101 (*CSEL* 61, pp. 329-330), the poet does not name Valencia as the place of Vincent's martyrdom, instead he only uses a periphrasis.

<sup>21</sup> See M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 30.

Without overlooking a general analysis of the poem as a whole, it seems more appropriate to dedicate more attention to the narrative part where it is possible to find specific data on this martyr in particular (77-108).

In regard to its *genus*, M. Roberts argues in defense of the thesis that this poem is unique for being that of *laus urbis*, though its *loci* have been Christianized.<sup>22</sup> In Prudentius' effort to promote the cult of martyrs in Spain, he seems to have attempted to synthesize all his knowledge about the saints of the Church of his country.<sup>23</sup> The following synthesis of the poem aims to assist the reader in the analysis of *Pe. IV*. Firstly, the poet enumerates the martyrs who proceed from other towns within an eschatological context. Secondly, he praises the town of Saragossa for being the homeland of eighteen martyrs. Thirdly, he lists the names of these martyrs and adds four others saints, among whom is Vincent. Finally, he exhorts his audience to venerate the tombs of the saints in the hope of receiving spiritual benefits from the martyrs' intercessions according to the cult of martyrs' theology.

In the introduction, the poem begins with a periphrasis<sup>24</sup> which reveals the main subject of the poem: the eighteen martyrs of Saragossa, whose ashes are preserved there in a single sepulcher.<sup>25</sup> At the Last Judgment at the end of the world,<sup>26</sup> when each city will present her gifts to Christ, Saragossa will

<sup>22</sup> The fullest assimilation of martyr text to *laus urbis* is *Pe. 4*. The poem is unusual as the only one in the collection that owes its structure to the enumerative principles of epideictic rather than to the temporal and spatial criteria of narration and description. Although it contains narrative elements, notably in the accounts of saints Vincent and Encratis (4, 77-140), even there details of their suffering are subordinated to the epideictic point that their names redound to the praise of 'our city.' *As a laus urbis Pe. 4 takes untypical form. Ibid.*, p. 28. Some of the *loci* are the following: location of the city, praise of the city's buildings, the major deeds of an important person of that city, comparisons and/or surpassing or outdoing of the city in regard to others, actions of a city, etc. However, the traditional *loci* have been Christianized: *literary Christianization of the laus urbis from secular to spiritual, from reges to martyrs. Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> See M. Lavarenne, *Prudence*, texte établi et traduit par M. Lavarenne, in *Collection des Universités de France*, tome IV: *Le Livre des Couronnes* (Peristephanon Liber), *Dittochaeon*, Épilogue, Paris, 1972, p. 62.

<sup>24</sup> *Bis novem. Pe. IV*, 1 (CSEL 61, p. 326).

<sup>25</sup> ... *Sub uno / martyrum servat cineres sepulcro. Pe. IV*, 1-2 (CSEL 61, p. 326). Possessing martyrs' bones would soon become a *locus* in the *laus urbis*. See M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 28. See also *Pe. VI*, 142-143.

<sup>26</sup> *Cum deus dextram quatiens coruscum / nube subnixus veniet rubente / gentibus iustam positurus aequo / pondere libram. Pe. IV*, 9-12 (CSEL 61, p. 326). See *Mat. 24*, 30. Roberts proposes the thesis that Prudentius' eschatological vision in language intended to evoke as countertype the classical world and its pagan gods. M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 31. For instance, according to the scholar, *God's brilliant right hand (dextra corusca) is described in terms identical with Jupiter's hand, wielding the thunderbolt. But while the indiscriminate exercise of Jupiter's power is often criticized—his thunderbolt falls on just and unjust alike—God's fairness at the Last Judgement is exemplary (iustam...aequo). Ibid.*, p. 31.



not fear on account of having numerous *munera*,<sup>27</sup> or *dona*, i.e., martyrs (more specifically their relics) to present to him: *orbe de magno caput excitata / obviam Christo properanter ibit / civitas quaeque pretiosa portans / dona canistris*.<sup>28</sup>

In the following quatrains (17-48), within this eschatological context, Prudentius offers a first catalogue listing the name of cities when, in procession, each presents the gifts of their own martyrs to Christ.<sup>29</sup> H. Delehaye proposes the following synthesis of Prudentius' first catalogue of names of towns and their saints:

*In Cordoba there is Acisclus, Zoilus and the three martyrs that he determined with the meaning of tres coronae; in Tarragona there is Fructuosus, in Gerona, Felix; in Calahorra, our two martyrs; in Barcelona, Cucuphas; in Merida, Lusitanorum caput oppidorum, the virgin Eulalia; in Complutum, Justus and Pastor... He adds some foreign martyrs from outside Spain.*<sup>30</sup>

The list reaches its climax with the praise of Saragossa for her numerous martyrs. Prudentius, at this point, if taken out of context, may seem to give voice to a Spanish nationalism due to his special devotion to the martyrs of Saragossa.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the reader ought to recall the poet's effort to promote the cult of martyrs in his own country and to make their martyrs known. Moreover, the fact that Saragossa is the home of numerous martyrs ought not to be overlooked, instead it should be an honor to Spaniards:

<sup>27</sup> *Non timet mundi fragilis ruinam / tot sinu gestans simul offerenda / munera Christo*. Pe. IV, 6-8 (CSEL 61, p. 326). *Munera*, and *re cui tanta est*, are metaphors used to refer to the martyrs as gifts to Christ. Roberts explains the meaning of cities carrying their martyrs' relics in the following manner: *By a process of metonymic slippage the cities in Prudentius may be represented as carrying the martyrs themselves (31, 35, 45, 53), the bones, ashes blood, and limbs of the martyrs (17, 38, 41, 44), or crowns representing their martyrdoms (20, 21)*. M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 34.

<sup>28</sup> Pe. IV, 13-16 (CSEL 61, p. 326).

<sup>29</sup> The Latin poet consciously chooses the verbs in this section: *promet* (17), *offeret* (22), *exhibebit* (29), *gestabit* (31), *habebit* (35), *porriget* (40), *ferre...iuvabit* (43), *ingeret* (45), *revehes* (53). Prudentius translates his material into the language of late antique ceremony. *The parallels with later dome and nave mosaics from the churches of Ravenna are striking*. M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> H. Delehaye, *Les Origines du Culte des Martyrs*, p. 415.

<sup>31</sup> P.-Y. Fux defends the thesis that Prudentius in certain passages has transpired certain patriotism. P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, p. 71.

Tu decem sanctos revehes et octo,  
Caesaraugusta studiosa Christo,  
verticem flavis oleis revincta,  
pacis honore.

Sola in occursum numerosiores  
martyrum turbas domino parasti,  
sola praedives pietate multa  
luce frueris.

*Vix parens orbis populosa Poeni,  
ipsa vix Roma in solio locata  
te, decus nostrum superare in isto  
munere digna est.*<sup>32</sup>

In the martyr's narrative part, after the praise of Saragossa, Prudentius dedicates three quatrains to exploring an essential element of the cult of the martyrs: the martyrs' role as protectors of their native community. An instance of how the martyrs protect their communities against the evil powers of demons is the following: *omnibus portis sacer inmolatus / sanguis exclusit genus invidorum / daemonum et nigras pepulit tenebras / urbe piata*.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Pe. IV, 53-64 (CSEL 61, p. 326). Fux identifies this passage as an instance of Prudentius excessive nationalism: *comparaison excessevement avantageuse avec Rome et Carthage pour le nombre de martyrs*. P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, p. 71.

<sup>33</sup> Pe. IV, 65-68 (CSEL 61, p. 328). In this passage, it is not unreasonable to consider it as an allusion to the biblical text from Ex. 12, 13, which reveals the mysterious power of the blood of slaughtered lambs put on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses of the Israelites. The blood preserved the Hebrews from being struck by the plague of destruction during the night of Passover. Christian exegesis, from the beginning, has interpreted this passage as a *typos* of the sacrifice of Christ. Thus, Prudentius possibly had in mind the value of the shedding of blood by the martyrs as a reenactment of the saving sacrifice of Christ, which spares man from *genus invidorum daemonum* and from *nigras tenebras*. In the following quatrain, the poet using the words *horror*, *umbra*, and *pestis*, possibly alludes to the waves of persecutions or even paganism as instances of the evils that have been vanquished, and thus have given place to Christ in the town. *Nullus umbrarum latet intus horror / pulsa nam pestis populum refugit / Christus in totis habitat plateis / Christus ubique est*. Pe. IV, 69-72 (CSEL 61, p. 328). For Christian exegesis on Ex. 12, 13, see for instance 1 Cor. 5, 7.

At this point in the narrative part, Prudentius turns his attention to a specific martyr whose origin is traced back to Saragossa, i.e., Saint Vincent.

The Latin poet dedicates eight quatrains to Vincent, in order to emphasize the saint's origin from Saragossa, a factor that adds more glory to the town. He offers some specific data that enriches the knowledge about Vincent's life prior to his passion. Additionally, he seems to show an intention to report a common practice of the cult of martyrs, i.e., the veneration of the martyr's relic. Finally, these quatrains may be considered as examples of the poet's literary excellence: using rhetorical figures, while fostering the cult of martyrs, he delivers his message in a skillful way to an intellectual and well-read Christian public.

Firstly, as Prudentius continues to praise Saragossa for her several martyrs, the author adds a new glory to the town: to be the native land of Vincent. The poet seems to insist on the saint's origin: *Inde, Vincentii, tua palma nata est / clerus hic tantum peperit triumphum*,<sup>34</sup> and also *his terries tenui*,<sup>35</sup> and more emphatically *noster est*,<sup>36</sup> and lastly *noster et nostra puer in palestra*<sup>37</sup> are some examples of the Latin poet's claiming of the saint for Saragossa. Vincent's palm,<sup>38</sup> which grew in Saragossa, implies combat, but it also implies a previous time of preparation for the battle. And this time was lived in Saragossa.

According to the poet, when Vincent was younger, he belonged to the Christian community of Saragossa.<sup>39</sup> In that community, he was formed in virtue (*...noster et nostra puer in palestra / arte virtutis*), he was anointed

<sup>34</sup> Pe. IV, 77-78 (CSEL 61, p. 329).

<sup>35</sup> Pe. IV, 89-90 (CSEL 61, p. 329).

<sup>36</sup> Pe. IV, 97 (CSEL 61, p. 329).

<sup>37</sup> Pe. IV, 101 (CSEL 61, p. 330).

<sup>38</sup> *The martyr is a soldier of Christ against whom the persecutors deliver furious assaults, in order to lead him to deny his God. If he does not surrender despite threats and tortures, he is the one victorious in this combat; and after his death, he enters into heaven triumphantly with a crown on his head and a palm in his hand. See M. Lavarenne, Prudence, tome IV, p. 6. See also Pe. V, 1-8 (CSEL 61, p. 334).*

<sup>39</sup> *Noster et nostra puer in palestra / arte virtutis fideique olivo / unctus horrendum didicit domare / viribus hostem. / Noverat templo celebres in isto / octies partas deciesque palmas, / laureis doctus patriis eadem / laude cucurrit. Pe. IV, 101-108 (CSEL 61, p. 330).*

(*fideique unctus olivo*), he learned to overcome the horrible enemy (... *horrendum didicit domare / viribus hostem*), and he became aware of the martyrdom of some of its members (*noverat templo celebres in isto / octies partas deciesque palmas*). Raised amidst the glory of martyrdom's laurels, he himself ran towards that same glory (*laureis doctus patriis eadem / laude cucurrit*). The information provided by Prudentius seems to offer some data about Vincent's life that are not present in *Pe. V*, which is dedicated mainly to his passion.<sup>40</sup> In regard to the reason that drove Prudentius to offer such data regarding Vincent, this study may only propose, later, conjectures within the framework of the rising of the cult of martyrs.

Secondly, the Christian poet seems to transmit a common devotion of the cult of martyrs practiced by the citizens of Saragossa:

*hoc [sanguis] colunt cives, velut ipsa membra  
caespes includat suos et paterno  
servet amplectens tumulo beati  
martyris ossa.*<sup>41</sup>

In fact, the poet gives witness to their veneration of the only relic of Vincent available to them (the blood that, according to a tradition, came out from his nose in sign of his future passion).<sup>42</sup> For the citizens, to have Vincent's relic meant to have the same spiritual benefits of his protection and intercession as if the martyr were buried in their own town. Even

<sup>40</sup> Fux argues for the anteriority of *Pe. V* in relation to *Pe. IV*: *si perist. 5 narre le détail de la passion, il ne dit rien du lieu des événements, ni du passé du martyr: en perist. 4, on a au contraire une forte revendication du martyr pour Saragosse et l'indication du lieu de sa sepulture (Sagonte), mais aucun récit du martyr. Perist. 4, incompréhensible sans les données de perist. 5, lui apporte un complément... l'inverse n'étant pas vrai, perist. 5 est antérieur à perist. 4. P.-Y. Fux, Les Sept Passions de Prudence, p. 48.*

<sup>41</sup> *Pe. IV, 93-96 (CSEL 61, p. 329).*

<sup>42</sup> *Nonne, Vincenti, peregrini necandus / martyr his terris tenui futuri / sanguinis rore speciem futuri / morte propinqua? Pe. IV, 89-92 (CSEL 61, p. 329).* According to an old tradition, prior to his departure from Saragossa, Vincent's nose bled as a sign of his upcoming passion. Citta Nuova, footnote 26, pg. 177. *Hic jacet ille cruor, quem das pro corpore pignus, / nate fluente tuus hic jacet ille cruor.* Eugenius Toletanus, *Opusculorum, Praefatio VIII (PL 87, 361).*

though Vincent did not suffer his passion in Saragossa, the Christian poet, on account of the martyr's upbringing in this city, claims the martyr as *noster*.<sup>43</sup>

Lastly, in regard to Prudentius' literary skills in composing these quatrains dedicated to the Spanish martyr, the poet uses certain rhetorical figures which not only contribute to the embellishment of the text but they also may serve to create some passion in the reader:

*saevus antiquis quotiens procellis  
turbo vexatum tremefecit orbem,  
tristior templum rabies in istud  
intulit iras.*

*Nec furor quisquam sine laude nostrum  
cessit aut clari vacuus cruoris,  
martyrum semper numerus sub omni  
grandine crevit.*<sup>44</sup>

Prudentius uses metaphors alluding to the past waves of persecutions faced by Christians as the savage fury of a tempest in order to provide an account for the times of persecutions and the growing number of martyrs. As a storm "unleashes its natural forces," so the persecutions "have tormented and have made the earth tremble," especially the Christian community of Saragossa. However, in contrast to the fury of "old tempests," the town received praise for the shedding of the blood of its martyrs. In fact, the rhetorical figure of enjambement<sup>45</sup> and antithesis introduce a certain surprise:

<sup>43</sup> This is another instance where the poet while praising Saragossa seems to undervalue the actual place of Vincent's martyrdom using only the adverb *peregrī*, and the expression *in urbe ignota*, instead of Valencia or high Saguntum, which is a river, in Spain, that flows into the Mediterranean Sea near Saguntum, north of Valencia. There Vincent was buried. See footnote 28 in *Prudenzio. Gli Inni Quotidiani. Le Corone dei Martiri* (Collana di Testi Patristici 209), p. 177.

<sup>44</sup> *Pe. IV, 81-88 (CSEL 61, p. 329).*

<sup>45</sup> In short, this figure of speech, common in poetry, divides words that are connected into two different lines creating then a certain expectation in the reader.

each anti-Christian repression only contributed to the glory of the growing number of martyrs: *martyrum semper numerus sub omni / grandine crevit*.<sup>46</sup> As the “storms” increased their force against the community or the town (*istum templum*), so the glory of the list of “witnesses” also increased.<sup>47</sup>

In the final part of *Pe. IV*, the poet offers a second catalogue: the names of the eighteen martyrs of Saragossa.<sup>48</sup> The poem began by offering a list of names of towns bearing their martyrs in a future eschatological reality. Now it concludes with another list together with an invitation from the poet to Saragossa in order to praise and to celebrate her martyrs.<sup>49</sup>

The city is then united with the Christian community in a chorus to perform a song of praise and to venerate their saints. These martyrs are believed, now, to be under the eternal altar.<sup>50</sup> On the one hand, they are interceding for their co-citizens on account of their sins. On the other hand, the town of Saragossa watches over their relics. The poet invites the readers to join him in the cult of the martyrs, displaying their devotion at the grave of the saints,<sup>51</sup> experiencing a certain *amicitia* with the martyrs, which transcends space and time, only possible due to the saints’ privileged place in heaven and their presence at their tomb. Thus, they may be intercessors

<sup>46</sup> *Pe. IV*, 87-88 (CSEL 61, p. 329).

<sup>47</sup> After having dedicated some lines of the narrative part to the noble Spanish martyr, Prudentius also gives some attention to Encratis (109-144). The poet recounts using vivid images and some obscure expressions how she survived bravely all the tortures. Yet, she proved to merit fully the crown of a martyr. In fact, she was a living martyr who contributed to the glory of Saragossa. *Vidimus partem iecoris revulsam / unguis longe iacuisse pressis, / mors habet pallens aliquid tuorum / te quoque viva. Hunc novum nostrae titulum fruendum / Caesaraugustae dedit ipse Christus, / iuge viventis domus ut dicata / martyris esset. Pe. IV*, 137-144 (CSEL 61, p. 329). *Encratis* is included in the *Acts of Saragossa martyrs*, though it is not known whether she suffered with them during the persecution of Diocletian. See footnote 16 in *The Poems of Prudentius*, (The Fathers of the Church 43), p. 142.

<sup>48</sup> These are their names: Optatus, Lupercus, Successus, Martial, Urban, Julia, Quintilianus, Publius, Fronto, Felix, Cecilianus, Evotius, Primitivus, Apodemus, and four of Saturninus. He also adds the martyr Vincent and the confessors Encratis, Gaius and Crementius who survived their torments. See *Pe. IV*, 145-184 (CSEL 61, pp. 331-333).

<sup>49</sup> *Ergo ter senis sacra candidatis / dives Optato simul et Luperco / perge conscriptum tibimet senatum / pangere psalmis! Ede Successum, cane Martialem! / mors et Urbani tibi concinatur, Iuliam cantus resonet simulque / Quintilianum. Pe. IV*, 145-152 (CSEL 61, p. 331).

<sup>50</sup> *Haec sub altari sita sempiterno / lapsibus nostris veniam precatur / turba, quam servat procerum creatrix / purpureorum. Pe. IV*, 189-192 (CSEL 61, p. 333). See also *Apoc.* 6, 9.

<sup>51</sup> *Nos pio fletu, date, perluamus / marmorum sulcus, quibus est operata / spes, ut absolvam retinaculorum / vincla meorum. / Sterne te totam generosa sanctis / civitas mecum tumulis, deinde / mox resurgentes animas et artus / tota sequeris. Pe. IV*, 193-200 (CSEL 61, p. 333).

now and for those who hope to receive spiritual assistance from them.

In conclusion, the analysis of *Pe. IV* contributes somewhat to the goal of the present study. Even though Vincent was not the main theme of this poem, nevertheless, it was possible to identify some relevant characteristics of Prudentius' poem, which transmits unique data regarding Vincent within the context of the promotion of the cult of martyrs. A more specific source for the analysis of his martyrdom is *Pe. V*, a poem dedicated to the *Passio Vincentii*.

### *Peristephanon V*

Prudentius dedicates *Pe. V* entirely to the *Passio Vincentii* which took place in Valencia.<sup>52</sup> The title of the poem is *Passio sancti Vincenti martyris* and is found in most of the manuscripts.<sup>53</sup> The poem is written in 576 iambic dimeters, divided into 143 quatrains.<sup>54</sup> *Pe. V* may be divided into four main parts: introduction (1-16), passion of the martyr (17-504), epilogue (505-524), and conclusion (525-576). Each of these parts will be examined and will also be divided into subparts in order to facilitate the analysis. It seems then opportune to turn to the introduction of the poem.

In the introduction, the poem begins (as it also ends) alluding to the martyr's *dies natalis*, January 22nd, the day of his triumph,<sup>55</sup> when the faithful venerate this solemn date with their mouth and hearts.<sup>56</sup> Prudentius most probably wrote *Pe. V* on the occasion of the celebration of the feast day of Vincent,<sup>57</sup> the day on which the martyr overcame the magistrate

<sup>52</sup> Although Valencia is not named in the poem, it does not follow that the poet claimed the martyr's passion to Saragossa. See *Pe. IV*, 97-100 (CSEL 61, p. 329). The fact he considers the former a "foreign town" may be understood as another instance of Prudentius' patriotism. See Saxer, pg. 69.

<sup>53</sup> See V. Saxer, *La Passion de S. Vicent Diacre dans la Première Moitié du Ve Siècle*, p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> The following is the scheme of the meter: —|~ —| —|~. The meter and the strophe are taken from the Ambrosian hymns, however the length of *Pe. V* exceeds their 32 vv. The same meter is used for *Pe. II*. See P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, p. 236.

<sup>55</sup> *Diem triumphalem tuum. Pe. V*, 2 (CSEL 61, p. 334).

<sup>56</sup> *...Sollemnem diem /... ore et pectore. Pe. V*, 561-562 (CSEL 61, p. 354).

<sup>57</sup> The martyr is named here (4) as he will also be named after (29. 273). He was named in *Pe. IV*, 77. 89 too. The following passage remains ambiguous to a certain point: *...tibi / corona, Vincenti, datur! Pe. V*, 5-8 (CSEL 61, p. 334). It may also be understood thus: "to you who is victorious." Prudence here allows this play on words (*Vincentius* and *vincens*), which has been explored more abundantly by Augustine in his homilies. See P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, p. 237.

and torturer and was elevated from the darkness of the world to heaven, to Christ: *hic te ex tenebris saeculi / tortore victo et iudice / evexit ad caelum dies / Christoque ovantem reddidit*.<sup>58</sup> It is precisely the contrast between his glorious presence in heaven and his past trials on earth that introduces the narrative of Vincent's Passion.

Prudentius, in the introduction, presents the two main characters of the poem: Dacian and Vincent. The former is initially referred to as *satelles idoli* (13), and he is only named later (40. 130. 422). Frequently, he is described according to his role (*iudex*, 94; *praetor*, 175. 326), according to his actions (*persecutor*, 201; *maior carnifex*, 147. 216), and according to his conduct (*hostis*, 250; *tyrannus*, 168. 255. 429). On the other hand, Vincent is named from the beginning and sometimes throughout the poem (4. 29. 273), but he is referred to more often as *martyr* (1. 93. 185. 216. 250. 285. 354. 392) or by an equivalent word like *miles* or even *levita* (30. 145).<sup>59</sup> It is mainly between these two characters that the battle is fought.

In regard to the second part of the poem, the passion of the martyr, this study will offer a synthetic reading of the series of punishments undergone by Vincent and later in the conclusion will propose some reflections regarding Prudentius' contributions with reference to the *Passio Vincentii*. Roberts proposes a suitable division of this poem's part into two major stages of Vincent's engagement with Dacian, i.e., that of battle and victory. The battle may be subdivided into verbal (speech) and physical (torture) combats. The victory segment includes the martyr's death. Regarding this scheme of battle (verbal and physical) and victory (including death and subsequent victories), the victory part can take place only once in the

<sup>58</sup> *Pe. V, 3-4 (CSEL 61, p. 334).*

<sup>59</sup> No other actors intervene in the narrative except ministers and executants. On the side of the judge, they are the following: *lictores* (98), *alumni carceris* (137), *poenae ministros* (212), *obsessor atri liminis* (310), *manceps carceris et vinculorum ianitor* (345-346), *Eumorfio* (466), and *navitae* (493). On Vincent's side, there were the *angeli* (281), *turbam fidelem* (334), *sanctorum chori* (374), and *cura sanctorum* (509). V. Saxer, *La Passion de S. Vicent Diacre dans la Première Moitié du Ve Siècle*, pp. 69-70. Saxer notes that the apparition of the angels reveals that the battle is a spiritual combat between the faithful of God against the followers of the idols. See V. Saxer, *La Passion de S. Vicent Diacre dans la Première Moitié du Ve Siècle*, p. 70.



narrative, whereas the battle part, can be repeated. The British scholar summarizes it in the following manner: *when speeches are multiplied, each exchange tends to take on the pattern of the martyrdom as a whole: conflict, followed by victory for the martyr and defeat for the magistrate.*<sup>60</sup>

Prudentius thus reveals the intention of the magistrate towards Vincent: *praecinctus atris legibus / litare divis gentium / ferro et catenis cogeret.*<sup>61</sup> In the first lines of the passion's narrative, it is possible to identify the beginning of the battle and victory sequence. The first part of the battle is that of the verbal combat, which is subdivided into two combats.

The first verbal combat (17-40) regards Dacian's invitation for Vincent to sacrifice and the martyr's response professing his faith. Prudentius unveils the first technique adopted by the *iudex*: *ac verba primum mollia / suadendo blande effuderat.*<sup>62</sup> Thus the judge, as a *lupus* who tries to capture a *vitulus*,<sup>63</sup> invites Vincent with soft and flattering words to persuade him to offer sacrifice to pagan gods. Augustine had also exhorted in one of his *sermones*, as discussed in the previous chapter, about the danger of the "double-edged sword" with which the world threatens the Christians: *it flatters in order to deceive; it scares in order to break.*<sup>64</sup> The verbal combat against soft and flattering words is by no means an easy battle: *insofar as verbal blandishments employ deceitful cunning directly against the mind, they may represent a more dangerous threat to spiritual integrity than tortures that work on the body.*<sup>65</sup> The Latin poet portrays the martyr with a resolute and uncompromising mind which rejects any form of idolatry and, instead,

<sup>60</sup> M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 54. See also M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, pp. 43-77. Saxer presents a similar division of the passion's narrative into two major parts: *la lute entre Vincent et Datien se joue en plusieurs épisodes que le poète ramène cependant à deux grandes unites, avant et après la mort du martyr, don't celui-ci sort chaque fois vainqueur: in morte victor... post mortem victor (541-543)*. V. Saxer, *La Passion de S. Vicent Diacre dans la Première Moitié du Ve Siècle*, p. 70.

<sup>61</sup> *Pe. V*, 14-16 (CSEL 61, p. 334).

<sup>62</sup> *Pe. V*, 17-18 (CSEL 61, p. 334).

<sup>63</sup> *Captator ut vitulum lupus / rapturus adludit prius. Pe. V*, 19-20 (CSEL 61, p. 334). See also *Mt. 7*, 15.

<sup>64</sup> *Duplicem, dixi, aciem producit mundus contra milites Christi. Blanditur enim, ut decipiat; terret, ut frangat. Sermo 276, 2 (PL 38, 1256)*.

<sup>65</sup> 261 M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, pp. 52-53.

professes the right faith. Vincent responds boldly<sup>66</sup> against the judge's pagan attitude in regard to idolatry, addressing him thus: *tu mortuorum mortuus / fias deorum pontifex*.<sup>67</sup> He then professes the Christian faith.<sup>68</sup> That was the first victory of the martyr over the magistrate during the initial verbal combat, which continues uninterruptedly.

In the second verbal combat (41-92), the magistrate is already *commotior* (41) i.e., agitated, due to Vincent's first response. It will not be difficult for the reader to note that each verbal opposition between the magistrate and the martyr contributes to the growing fury of the judge.<sup>69</sup> The magistrate now tries a different technique against the martyr, threatening him: *aut ara ture et caespite / precanda iam nunc est tibi / aut mors luenda est sanguine*.<sup>70</sup> The poet had depicted the martyr's initial self-restraint against flattering words, and now he displays Vincent's patience against the threats that aim to scare him so as to impel him to perform a sacrifice to the gods. The martyr presents himself with the same initial resolution, and now even more courageously as seen in the following passage: *tormenta, carcer, unguulae / stridensque flammis lammina / atque ipsa poenarum ultima, / mors, christianis ludus est*.<sup>71</sup> After these firm words, Vincent offers another speech openly criticizing the pagan gods as the work of human hands (69),

<sup>66</sup> Prudentius puts in the mouth of the martyr *verbis asperis* (44) against the magistrate's *verba mollia* (17).

<sup>67</sup> *Pe. V*, 35-36 (CSEL 61, p. 335). In this quatrain, there is a triple anaphora of *tu* in reference to Datian (34-36) which will be contrasted by the martyr's *nos* (37). This may be understood as the Latin poets' clear distinction between the pagan magistrate and the faithful martyr. Moreover, the poet offers another contrast: the martyr defines pagan gods as *deorum mortuorum* (35-36) thus related to the world of darkness, which contrasts with the true God, the Father, creator of light (37-39). See P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, pp. 241-242.

<sup>68</sup> *Nos lucis auctorem patrem / eiusque Christum filium, / qui solus ac verus deus, / Datiane, confitebimur. Pe. V*, 37-40 (CSEL 61, p. 335). Prudentius already mentioned the two divine Persons (... *patre filioque*) in *Pe. IV*, 174 (CSEL 61, p. 332).

<sup>69</sup> *After Vincent's first response, he becomes more agitated (iam commotior, 5. 41) and his agitation continues to grow (5. 94-95), until after Vincent's final words he is "wounded, and grows pale, reddens and seethes, rolling his maddened eyes and gnashing his teeth and foaming at the mouth" (saucius / pallet rubescit aestuat / insana torquens lumina / spumasque frendens egerit, 5. 201-4). The description suggest diabolical possession... Datian's excited state continues after Vincent's death. M. Roberts, Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr, pp. 54-55.*

<sup>70</sup> *Pe. V*, 50-53 (CSEL 61, p. 336).

<sup>71</sup> *Pe. V*, 61-64 (CSEL 61, p. 336). May this quatrain be understood as Prudentius' ideal image of the martyr as a hero? Or an exaggeration? Or a resolute Christian faith so determined not to have any compromise against paganism?

filled with vile spirits (77-80) who are demons (92) that in the end recognize the power of Christ who drives them out (89-91).<sup>72</sup> Prudentius seems to underline the authority of such words (*his intonantem martyrem*).<sup>73</sup> On the other side, the judge is qualified as *profanus* (94. 394), he shouts to silence the martyr (*conclamat: os obtrudite*),<sup>74</sup> and will command to torture him.

The second part of the battle is that of physical combats. After the verbal disputes the battle turns into the first of several physical combats (93-128).<sup>75</sup> The *poenae* that the martyr had previously prophesized indirectly (61-64) begin to be applied against him.<sup>76</sup> The magistrate commands the following tortures:

*vincium retortis brachiiis  
sursum ac deorsum extendite,  
conpago donec ossuum  
divulsa membratim crepet.*

*Posthinc hiulcis ictibus  
nudate costarum abdita,  
ut per latebras vulnerum  
iecur resectum palpitet.*<sup>77</sup>

<sup>72</sup> See the following biblical passages that may have been alluded by Prudentius: *Mt.* 8, 29; *Mc.* 5, 6; *Lc.* 8, 28.

<sup>73</sup> *Pe.* V, 93 (CSEL 61, p. 337).

<sup>74</sup> *Pe.* V, 94-96 (CSEL 61, p. 337).

<sup>75</sup> In regard to physical combats, Roberts states the following: *in the epic passion the persecutor conventionally has a large number of methods available for inflicting pain. It is a principle of these texts that the glory of a martyr is proportionate to the cruelty of his suffering. Multiplying punishments increases their cruelty and hence enhances the martyrs' renown.* M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>76</sup> *In their temporal sequence of torments the poems of the Peristephanon do seem to presuppose a regular succession of tortures: binding, stretching, tearing with the double-forked unguiae, and exposure to fire, either on a bed (catasta, grabatum), or by heated metal plates (lamminae)... only Vincent suffers the canonical sequence.* *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>77</sup> *Pe.* V, 109-116 (CSEL 61, p. 338).

After having his arms bound, Vincent suffers the first of his *poenae*: on the rack<sup>78</sup> he is stretched up and down until his limbs would break and every bone would tear asunder. Moreover, Prudentius providing a vivid image describes how the martyr was commanded to be struck with the claws until *his throbbing liver may be seen*.<sup>79</sup> Despite such tortures, treated as one by Prudentius, the martyr (*miles dei*) reveals a certain serenity (*ridebat*) and rebukes the torturers (*manus cruentas increpans*) that what he was suffering was not enough.<sup>80</sup> Those who were torturing him experience a considerable exhaustion and weariness. In contrast, Vincent is much happier (*tanto laetior*) and his forehead is illuminated (*frontem serenam luminat*) because he sees Christ's presence (*te, Christe, praesentem videns*).<sup>81</sup> In front of the martyr's serenity and profound joy, which seem to reveal who is the one truly overcoming the combat, the magistrate is again infuriated.

The second segment of physical combat (129-200) reveals Datian's indignation in not being able to overcome Vincent who rejoices, laughs and provokes those who torture him: *gaudet, renidet, provocat / tortore tortus acrior*.<sup>82</sup> In fact, the one who is tortured is more energetic than the ones torturing him. A break is granted to the torturers (*alumni carceris*) that they may recover their strength and continue to torture the martyr.<sup>83</sup> However, at these words, the

<sup>78</sup> This instrument of torture is probably the *equuleus*, upon which the victim was placed in order to have his limbs stretched with cords until the breaking of his bones. See footnote 16 in *Prudenzio. Gli Inni Quotidiani. Le Corone dei Martiri* (Collana di Testi Patristici 209), p. 184.

<sup>79</sup> Even though the text does not describe this first physical combat, the reader may reasonably assume it actually took place on account of Datian's orders. Regarding the word *iecur*, the liver like the heart may allude to interiority. It may even mean the heart, which is located under the ribs. The liver is also the object of torture on *Pe. IV, 137*: where it is mentioned the breast of a martyr. See P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, p. 253.

<sup>80</sup> *Pe. V, 117-120* (CSEL 61, p. 338).

<sup>81</sup> *Pe. V, 125-128* (CSEL 61, p. 339). Regarding the expression *frons serena*, although it is a common manifestation of happiness, *Prudentius has reanimated the metaphor serena by insisting on its original meteorological sense, and in so doing he has represented the martyr as an antitype to Zeus or Jupiter as weather-god, whose brow is among the clouds. Vincent receives heavenly attributes because he is in some sense already in heaven*. M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 63. Prudentius address to Christ is the only one in the collection of poems of *Peristephanon: ailleurs, il recourt à l'intercession des martyrs, confessant son indignité devant Dieu et le besoin d'un médiateur. Outre les invocations au martyr qui encadrent le poème (1-16. 537-576), on a aussie une adresse au juge (429-432), avec sa réponse (433-448)*. P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, p. 255.

<sup>82</sup> *Pe. V, 130-132* (CSEL 61, p. 339).

<sup>83</sup> *Praesica rursus ulcera, / dum se cicatrix colligit / refrigerati sanguinis, / manus resulcans dirvet. Pe. V, 141-144* (CSEL 61, p. 339).

martyr is by no means intimidated. Instead, Vincent is bold and challenges the judge (called *maior carnifex*) to come himself to torture him, since the strength of his torturers languished (*languere virtutem canum*).<sup>84</sup> Prudentius seems to explain the martyr's boldness as the acknowledgment of the inviolability of his inner-self, despite the violence suffered in his body: *erras, cruenta, si meam / te rere poenarum sumere, / cum membra morti obnoxia / dilancinata interficis* and *est alter, est intrinsecus, / violare quem nullus potest, / liber, quietus, integer, / exsors dolorum tristium*.<sup>85</sup> Vincent is assured of the inviolability of his inner-self, which is not subdued by any tempest but subject to God alone.

At these words the torture resumes, and for a second time the grinding hooks tear his flesh. Taking advantage of the martyr's suffering, the judge whispers serpent-like words so that Vincent might at least reveal the place where (sacred) writings (possibly the books of the Scriptures) are kept for him to burn them.<sup>86</sup> However, once again, the martyr does not compromise with the pagan persecutor. Vincent not only did not hand over the books to the magistrate but also threatened him with the flames of fire: *quem tu, maligne, mysticis / minitaris ignem litteris, / flagrabis ipse hoc iustius* and also *exemplar hoc, serpens, tuum est, / fuligo quem mox sulphuris / bitumen et mixtum pice imo implicabunt tartaro*.<sup>87</sup> Contemplating the invincibility of the martyr, the magistrate becomes even more agitated: *his persecutor saucius / pallet, rubescit, aestuat / insane torquens lumina / spumasque frendens egerit*.<sup>88</sup>

In the third physical combat (201-236), the magistrate orders the ultimate torture: *igni, grabato et lamminis*.<sup>89</sup> When all is set, i.e., *a bed of fire and red-hot*

<sup>84</sup> See *Pe. V*, 147-148 (CSEL 61, p. 339).

<sup>85</sup> *Pe. V*, 153-160 (CSEL 61, p. 340). See 2 *Cor.* 4, 16.

<sup>86</sup> *The edicts of persecution included sometimes orders to deliver books of sacred scriptures and orders to offer a sacrifice; the magistrate seems to imply that he is ready to lessen his expectations. From this point on, the judge is compared to a serpent (veneni, 191), (serpens, 197), (torquens, 203), saevire inermem crederes / fractis draconem dentibus, 381-382), assistant of the devil, and possessed. After his verba... mollia (17), the judge begins to unveil his true diabolic nature. P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, 261.*

<sup>87</sup> *Pe. V*, 186-188. 197-200 (CSEL 61, p. 341). See also *Gen.* 19, 24-25.

<sup>88</sup> *Pe. V*, 201-204 (CSEL 61, p. 341).

<sup>89</sup> *La séance de torture destinée à obtenir un aveu (ici, celui du lieu où se trouvent les Écritures) ou une repentance (ici, le geste sacrificial), par opposition au supplice punitive proprement dit. P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, p. 266.*

*metal plates, the former equipped with sharp metal spikes*,<sup>90</sup> Prudentius depicts the martyr hurrying towards this *munera*,<sup>91</sup> with swift steps and joy. And the combat continues, a combat between hope and cruelty: on the one side is the martyr; on the other, the tormentor.<sup>92</sup> The martyr contemplating the proximity of his crown of glory, climbs onto the instrument of torture by himself without any trace of fear. Even though the fire under his bed is strewn with salt, and the martyr is smeared with molten fat, Vincent remains steady (*inmotus manet*)<sup>93</sup> as if unconscious of any pain (*tamquam dolorum nescius*)<sup>94</sup> while lifting up his eyes towards heaven. Dacian wonders if it is the free enjoyment of light that keeps the martyr's spirit up and thus decides to throw Vincent into a dungeon.

The fourth physical combat (237-324) begins with Vincent strengthened (*fortior*) in his determination, after the previous combat. The poet subtly conveys the martyr's determination noting the following: as before the saint climbed the instrument of torture by himself, now he needs to be taken down from it in order to be thrown into an "infernal" prison. Prudentius describes the prison as a sinister dungeon (*lugubre in antrum truditur*),<sup>95</sup> where there is a darker and gloomy place (*locus tenebris nigrior*), where an eternal night hides itself (*aeterna nox illic latet*), there the horrible prison holds its hell (*hic carcer horrendus suos / habere fertur inferos*).<sup>96</sup> The poet's skill is evident in his

<sup>90</sup> M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 62.

<sup>91</sup> It would not be inaccurate to consider the message of martyrdom as both a duty and a grace. See P.-Y. Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence*, p. 266. Regarding Prudentius' depiction of Vincent hurrying towards martyrdom, G. Caruso defends the thesis that martyrs and saints are not considered as ordinary men for Prudentius and for many people of our present day. See G. Caruso, *Il Martirio di Fruttuoso in Agostino e Prudenziolo*, in *Pau, Fructuós i el Cristianisme Primitiu a Tarragona (segles I-VIII)*. Actes del Congrès de Tarragona, Tarragona, 2008, p. 300.

<sup>92</sup> See *Pe. V*, 213-216 (CSEL 61, p. 342).

<sup>93</sup> See *Pe. V*, 233 (CSEL 61, p. 343).

<sup>94</sup> See *Pe. V*, 234 (CSEL 61, p. 343).

<sup>95</sup> See *Pe. V*, 238 (CSEL 61, p. 343). Clearly, the description of Vincent's spirit as *altus* is no panegyric cliché. The elevation of his soul is insisted on throughout the poem. Subjection to physical abuse, even being thrown into the deepest prison (*fimo ergastulo*, 241), only increases his resolution and his proximity to heaven. M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p.63.

<sup>96</sup> *Pe. V*, 241-248 (CSEL 61, p. 343). In his description of the martyr's prison, Roberts defends the thesis that Prudentius, whether or not following details present from a prose passion, has been inspired by Sallust and by a biblical passage: *Prudentius' description of Vincent's cell has much in common with perhaps the most famous prison ecphrasis in Latin literature, Sallust's description of the Tullianum, the underground death cell in the Carcer Mamertinus where the Catilinarian conspirator Lentulus and his comrades were executed by strangulation... At the same time, the account in Acts of the imprisonment of Paul and Silas probably played a role (Act. 16, 22-34). There the apostles are confined to an inner prison (interiorem carcerem, Act. 16, 24), where, like Vincent's, their feet are bound "with wood" (pedes eorum strinxit lingo)... Vincent does not escape*

description of the prison with visual elements that suggest an association between Vincent's prison and hell:<sup>97</sup> *substantial features of Vincent's cell merge into an affective, impressionistic picture of the infernal and demoniac.*<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, the martyr undergoes not only incarceration, but his legs are kept apart by wooden stocks, and a new torture is added:<sup>99</sup> jagged potsherds are spread on the floor to prevent the martyr from resting and sleeping. At this point, when Vincent's is in a subterranean hell-like prison, deprived of physical light, suffering from a newly crafted method of torture, Prudentius announces the ultimate victory of the spiritual combat: *Belzebulis callida / commenta Christus destruit.*<sup>100</sup> In fact, the Latin poet describes a spectacular phenomenon: the darkness of the prison is flooded by a splendid light (*carceralis caecitas splendore lucis fulgurate*), and the double teeth of wooden stocks break apart, as their chambers burst open,<sup>101</sup> and he sees a vision of angels who announce to him the upcoming end of his passion. In that moment, Vincent realizes that the prize which had been hoped for has arrived, Christ the giver of light. The custodian of the prison becomes terrified because he hears voices singing psalms; he investigates and, looking inside the cell, sees that the jagged fragments of pottery have bloomed with flowers and the martyr walks freely and sings.<sup>102</sup> Prudentius' realistic description of this passage may suggest a spiritual interpretation to the Christian community. After a synthetic reflection on the battle (regarding the battle-victory binomy), the present work turns to the victory part, which includes the death of the martyr and his subsequent victories over the judge.

In regard to the death and victory of the martyr (325-376), the Latin poet

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*from prison, he does not even, like Paul and Silas, have the prison gates come miraculously open for him. The expected liberation is transferred synecdochically to a smaller scale: "the double teeth of the stocks break apart, as their chambers burst open."* M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>97</sup> *The martyr, by being plunged into dark subterranean depths from which his spiritual integrity allows him to emerge victorious, repeats Christ's own descent.* M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 83.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>99</sup> *Quin addit et poenam novam / crucis peritus artifex, / nulli tyranno cognitam / nec fando conpertam retro.* Pe. V, 253-256 (CSEL 61, p. 343).

<sup>100</sup> See Pe. V, 267-268 (CSEL 61, p. 344).

<sup>101</sup> Roberts, 87. See Pe. V, 271-272 (CSEL 61, p. 344).

<sup>102</sup> See Pe. V, 281-324 (CSEL 61, p. 344-345). This episode echoes the pericope of the three young men in the furnace. See *Dan* 3.

provides relevant information. While the magistrate orders that Vincent be removed from the underground prison and granted some rest, before undergoing more tortures, the Christian faithful gather near the martyr and, preparing for him a soft bed, they care for his wounds. In the following quatrains, Prudentius explores in a more thorough way themes common to the cult of martyrs.<sup>103</sup> In fact, it may be possible that the poet intended to anticipate or legitimize a custom related to the cult of saints during his own time in regard to relics.

When the poet describes Christians dipping cloths into the martyr's blood in order for them to keep the blood as a protection for their posterity, he was probably referring to a common devotion of the cult of the martyrs during the end of the 4th century. It was already a widespread practice of lowering a piece of cloth, i.e., *brandea*, into the saint's tomb to have a contact relic of the saint.<sup>104</sup>

After mentioning the jailer's conversion,<sup>105</sup> Prudentius skillfully explores the theme of the death of the martyr as his final liberation and victory. In this light, the soul of the martyr is finally liberated from the body and ascends victoriously to heaven.<sup>106</sup>

As an introduction to the first victory of the martyr, after his own death, over the cruel magistrate (377-432), Prudentius notes that the magistrate acknowledges the martyr's victory (*evasit exultans, ait, / rebellis et palmam tulit*),<sup>107</sup> and, moved by cruel instincts in his envious heart (*fellis venena et*

<sup>103</sup> *Coire toto ex oppido / turbam fidelem cerneris, / mollire praefultum torum, / siccare cruda vulnera. Ille unguularum duplices / sulcos pererrat oculis, / hic purpurantem corporis / gaudet cruorem lambere. Plerique vestem linteam / stillante tingunt sanguine, / tutamen ut sacrum suis / domi reservent posteris. Pe. V, 333-344 (CSEL 61, p. 346). The fullest treatment of the origins of a martyr's cult in Prudentius is in Pe. 5, devoted to the Spanish saint, Vincent ... But in the narrative space thus created Prudentius gives an account of the attentions the martyr receives from the Christian community (turba fidelis, 334) as he lies at the threshold between life and death, heaven and earth. M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 13.*

<sup>104</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>105</sup> *Tunc ipse manceps carceris / et vinculorum ianitor, / ut fert vetustas conscia, / repente Christum credidit. Pe. V, 345-348 (CSEL 61, p. 346). The story of the jailer's conversion is a subtext that Prudentius has interwoven with the main narrative concerning Vincent in a manner unparalleled in the recensions of the prose passion. M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 88.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ergo ut recline mollibus / reiecit aulaeis caput, / victor relictis artubus / caelum capessit spiritus. Pe. V, 365-368 (CSEL 61, p. 347).*

<sup>107</sup> *Pe. V, 383-384 (CSEL 61, p. 348).*



*lividum / cor efferata exusserant*),<sup>108</sup> he decides to torture the dead body of the martyr whom he was not able to overcome when he was alive. He contemplates delivering the corpse to the wild beasts or giving it to the dogs to rend into pieces, thinking that thus there would be no relics of the saint to be venerated. In this way, he commands that the martyr's sacred body be exposed naked in the midst of plants.<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, no animal dared to stain the trophy of glory (*tropeum gloriae*),<sup>110</sup> i.e., the martyr's body. Moreover a raven<sup>111</sup> fearlessly protected his body against the threat of a ferocious wolf.<sup>112</sup> In front of this incredible miracle, Prudentius poses a series of rhetorical questions to underline the magnitude of such event: the enemy's violence against Vincent's body followed by an additional victory of the saint: *quis audienti talia, / Datiane, tunc sensus tibi, / quantis gementem spiculis / figebat occultus dolor. Cum te perempti corporis / virtute victum cerneres / ipsis et inpar ossibus / vacuisque iam membris minor?*<sup>113</sup> Even though the magistrate acknowledges his defeat by means of the miracle that the ferocious beast grew tame and voracious ravens became meek and merciful, he does not surrender, instead he contemplates the idea of further violence against Vincent's body.

The second victory of the martyr after his death (433-504) regards the preservation of his body against the malice of the magistrate. After Dacian was overcome again by the already dead martyr, the magistrate decides to plunge Vincent's body into the waters, enclosed in a sack and tied with a cord to a stone. However, another miracle of the mighty power of God is performed: the divine power<sup>114</sup> commands the sea to bring back Vincent's

<sup>108</sup> *Pe. V, 378-380 (CSEL 61, p. 348).*

<sup>109</sup> *Pe. V, 385-396 (CSEL 61, p. 348).*

<sup>110</sup> *Pe. V, 399 (CSEL 61, p. 348).*

<sup>111</sup> *3 Reg. 17, 6.*

<sup>112</sup> *Pe. V, 397-420 (CSEL 61, pp. 348-349).*

<sup>113</sup> *Pe. V, 421-428 (CSEL 61, p. 349).*

<sup>114</sup> God's power had already commanded the Red Sea to open wide in order that the people may cross it safely. It had calmed a storm in the sea to protect the disciples, and it had provided that Christ would walk on the sea without being submerged. Now this same divine power orders the sea to obey with docility the holy body of Vincent granting to it a safe journey back to the shore. See *Ex. 14, 21; Mt. 14, 22-33; Mc. 6, 45-52; and Io. 6, 16-21*. See also *Pe. V, 485-488 (CSEL 61, p. 351)*.

body safely to the shore, whose sand is offered as a sepulcher for the martyr's body.

In the epilogue (505-524), Prudentius describes how that happy sea-shore recess cared for Vincent's body offering its sand as his first sepulcher: *felix amoeni litoris / secessus ille, qui sacra / fovens harenis viscera / vicem sepulcri praebuit*.<sup>115</sup> The poet refers to the care showed by the Christians to the saint. As they were probably still under persecution, their sign of devotion was limited to adorn his sepulcher only. However, once the persecution was over *...mox subactis hostibus / iam pace iustis reddita*,<sup>116</sup> an altar, a metonymy which stands for a church, is built to grant rest for his remains, which are buried in the sanctuary at the foot of the altar, from where they smell the scent of the heavenly sacrifice which fills all over: *subiecta nam sacrario / imamque ad aram condita / caelestis auram muneris / perfuse subter hauriunt*.<sup>117</sup> The Latin poet gives an account also for the martyr's soul, which has been received into the dwelling of God together with other saints, i.e., the Macabees brothers and Isaiah who suffered martyrdom too.<sup>118</sup>

In the conclusion of the poem (525-576), Prudentius compares Vincent to the aforementioned martyrs, but he defends the preeminence of the former on account of his double victory: *in morte victor aspera, / tum deinde post mortem pari / victor triumpho proteris / solo latronem corpore*.<sup>119</sup> After praising the martyr for his double victory, the Latin poet addresses a prayer to the martyr.

In the last eight quatrains of *Pe. V*, the poet, who is also a faithful Christian, turns to Vincent with confidence that the saint may assist all

<sup>115</sup> *Pe. V*, 505-508 (CSEL 61, p. 352).

<sup>116</sup> *Pe. V*, 513-514 (CSEL 61, p. 352).

<sup>117</sup> *Pe. V*, 517-520 (CSEL 61, p. 352).1

<sup>118</sup> Prudentius describes some of Vincent's companions in heaven: the Macabees brothers and Isaiah. For the account of the martyrdom of the Macabee's brothers, see 2 *Mac.* 7. The martyrdom of Isaiah, as having been sawed in two, is traced back to an old Jewish tradition, according to footnote 50 in *Prudenzio. Gli Inni Quotidiani. Le Corone dei Martiri* (Collana di Testi Patristici 209), p. 194.

<sup>119</sup> *Pe. V*, 541-544 (CSEL 61, p. 353).

those who invoke him, since the saint is believed to be an efficacious advocate in front of the Father (*nostrī reatus efficac / orator ad thronum patris*).<sup>120</sup> Prudentius, relying on the martyr's great suffering and thus great glory after his victory, offers his prayers invoking what rendered the saint victorious: his name, prison, chains, fire, claws, stocks, jagged potsherds, and even the devotion showed to his bed.<sup>121</sup> Prudentius, through the martyr's intercession for his own people, intends to find mercy from Christ on account of his sins.

### **1.3: CONCLUSION ON THE TRANSMISSION OF THE *PASSIO VINCENTII* BY PRUDENTIUS**

It was the aim of the present chapter to offer some specific analysis, without any pretense of being exhaustive, of Prudentius' two poems in which the poet mentions the martyr Vincent. Around 400 AD,<sup>122</sup> Prudentius has composed these two poems praising and celebrating Vincent. *Pe. IV* was dedicated to the praise of Saragossa's eighteen martyrs, but some quatrains were written about Vincent since he was originally from Saragossa although he suffered martyrdom in a different land. *Pe. V* was totally dedicated to the *Passio Vincentii*. While Prudentius had been inspired by different previous works, such as the literary production composed by Damasus or by Ambrose, or texts in prose like acts, passions, and sermons on martyrs,<sup>123</sup> the Latin poet nevertheless revealed some freedom and originality in writing the *Passio Vincentii* in verse.<sup>124</sup> These poems, as others from Prudentius' *Peristephanon*, may have been written during a particular time when there was a need for the promotion of the cult of martyrs in the church of Spain, following the example of Rome. Different factors may have contributed to

<sup>120</sup> *Pe. V*, 54547-548 (CSEL 61, p. 353).

<sup>121</sup> *Pe. V*, 549-556 (CSEL 61, p. 354).

<sup>122</sup> *Vers l'an 400, Prudence a tressé deux "couronnes" en l'honneur de S. Vincent. V. Saxer, La Passion de S. Vicent Diacre dans la Première Moitié du Ve Siècle*, p. 68.

<sup>123</sup> J. Fontaine, *Naissance de la Poésie dans l'Occident Chrétien*, p. 190.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 192-193.

the composition of the poems: his own sojourn in Italy where he visited martyrs' tombs and celebrated some of the martyrs' feast days, the interest of Bishop Valerian in spreading the cult in his country, and Prudentius' own interest in the figure of martyrs as models of Christian life.<sup>125</sup> Thus it seems reasonable to associate, at least to some extent, the data about Vincent in the poems with the context of the promotion of the martyrs' cult during the beginning of the fifth century.

Prudentius gives witness to the liturgical celebration of the feast of the martyr Vincent (*dies sollemnis*),<sup>126</sup> a special occasion when the faithful gather near the martyr's tomb with devotion<sup>127</sup> to praise the martyr and to entrust their prayers to him. The poet presents the figure of the martyrs, in general, as protectors of the town against evils (*genus invidorum daemonum* and *nigras tenebras*),<sup>128</sup> but Vincent, in particular, is also portrayed as an intercessor on behalf of the believer and as an advocate or spokesman (*efficax orator*) of the faithful before the throne of the Father seeking mercy.<sup>129</sup> Prudentius' theology of the martyrs is not compromised by the role of protector and intercessor performed by Vincent, instead the poet seems to attribute all graces to Christ.<sup>130</sup> In writing about the celebration, Prudentius gives the impression of being inclined towards a lexicon which does not rule out polysemy, instead rhetorical figures contribute to allow

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190-191.

<sup>126</sup> There are two passages where Prudentius seems to allude to the martyr's feast day: *diem triumphalem tuum... and sollemnem diem /... ore et pectore*. *Pe. V*, 2. 561-562 (CSEL 61, p. 334. 354).

<sup>127</sup> The poet invites the faithful to join him in venerating the martyrs' tomb with devotion: *nos pio fletu, date, perluamus / marmorum sulcos, quibus est operta / spes, ut absolvam retinaculorum / vincla meorum*. *Pe. IV*, 193-196 (CSEL 61, p. 333). Prudentius also uses the verb *sternere* in order to describe the position of prayer that he and the faithful observe.

<sup>128</sup> The martyrs of Saragossa are presented as protectors of the town against evils such as *genus invidorum daemonum* and against *nigras tenebras*. Due to their protection, the town is now considered *urbs piata* and has made possible for Christ to be everywhere. *Pe. IV*, 65-72 (CSEL 61, p. 328).

<sup>129</sup> *Lapsibus nostris veniam precatur... Pe. IV*, 190 (CSEL 61, p. 333). *Adesto nunc et percipe / voces precantum supplices / nostri reatus efficax / orator ad thronum patris*. *Pe. V*, 545-548 (CSEL 61, p. 353). Roberts observes how beyond the connotation of the word *patronus* Prudentius' language also reflected how he conceived the role of the martyr having in mind the scheme of patron-client relationship. See M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>130</sup> ... *Christi favorem deferens*. *Pe. V*, 566 (CSEL 61, p. 354). Christ is the source of blessings. The martyr may secure a gift which comes from Christ to the believer or to the community. Thus, the martyr's role may be understood as bringing the petition before Christ. See M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 20.

more than one meaning to a word, often blurring boundaries of time and space, past and future, physical and spiritual dimensions,<sup>131</sup> which is not an evidence of inadequate poetic facility, but *rather a constitutive element of the poetics of the passage*.<sup>132</sup>

The faithful from heaven and earth seem to experience communion in that special place<sup>133</sup> where Vincent's passion is relived as a reenactment of Christ's giving hope to all in their daily battle against evil. In *Pe. V*, Prudentius geniusly transmits the stages of Vincents' physical torments: stretching on the rack, the first and second use of claws, a bed of fire and hot metal plates, and finally incarceration. In front of these punishments, Vincent is portrayed as serene, bold, and determined to reject any compromise with the pagan magistrate. Moreover, Vincent is certain of Christ's presence and of the inviolability of his inner-self. While some may criticize the poet for describing so vividly the tortures that the martyr underwent, nevertheless, Prudentius seems to transmit the preservation of the martyr's inner-integrity amid so many punishments. At each stage of torture, the martyr ended surprisingly victorious. Even when thrown into a dark underground prison described with diabolical characteristics interpreted as a kind of death or hell, the martyr was providentially enlightened by a light which dispels physical and spiritual darkness. Even his death seems to be a final liberation and victory over a worldly reality. In fact, the martyr is described as anxious to achieve his ultimate and promised reward.

<sup>131</sup> The following passage about Vincent's bones buried under an altar is an instance of Prudentius' genius regarding his poetic of the martyrs: *subiecta nam sacrario / imamque ad aram condita / caelestis auram muneris / perfusa subter hauriunt. Pe. V, 517-520 (CSEL 61, p. 352)*. In reflecting on this passage, Roberts wonders about the origin of the "breath." Whether the "breath of heavenly bounty" comes from heaven to earth or whether it comes from earth to heaven: *in struggling with the passage readers are brought to appreciate in their own experiences the indistinguishability in the cult of the martyrs of heaven and earth and close reciprocal relationship between martyr and worshipper* M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 196. Lavarenne reads *effluves du sacrifice céleste* as a periphrasis for the Eucharist. Nevertheless, he acknowledges a certain obscurity in the passage. See M. Lavarenne, *Prudence*, tome IV, p. 90. Thus, the passage may admit more than one interpretation.

<sup>132</sup> M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 196.

<sup>133</sup> Recall the introduction and conclusion of *Pe. IV*, where the poet alludes first to an eschatological celebration of different towns forming a community bearing their martyrs to Christ. After he concludes the poem with a present celebration of the faithful also experiencing communion on account of the cult of martyrs.

Finally, it is possible to interpret Vincent's imprisonment and death as a pattern for souls who are daily exposed to carnal temptations. In this light, Vincent's final victory may be understood as a victory over temptation, sin, and death and it may serve as a model for Christians. Being thrown into a dark and diabolical dungeon and experiencing physical death, the martyr seems to reenact Christ's own death, descent into Hell, and resurrection. It is the passion and resurrection of Christ which brings victory and liberation from temptations and sin to Vincent and to all Christians.<sup>134</sup> In fostering the cult of martyrs and particularly Spanish martyrs, Prudentius did not conceal his own devotion. He envisaged Christianity in the West united in the veneration of martyrs and thus composed "sacred" poetry *that involves the reader in the experience of worship at the martyrs' shrine or of the celebration of their feast days, and that makes martyrs and their celestial home present in the here and now.*<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Moreover, the martyr's liberation from the prison and his liberation from his body (death) are a special instances of the *spiritual freedom all Christians can achieve in their everyday life by resisting tribulation and temptation*. See M. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyr*, p. 91

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

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