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Text, Tomb and City: Prudentius and the Making of Martyr Cults in Late Antique Spain

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Marina Murillo Sánchez

September 2025

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Michele Renee Salzman, Chairperson
Dr. Piotr Górecki
Dr. Nicola Denzey Lewis

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The Dissertation of Marina Murillo Sánchez is approved:

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Committee Chairperson

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Malum est in necessitate vivere; sed in necessitate vivere necessitas nulla est. —

Seneca

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Text, Tomb and City: Prudentius and the Making of Martyr Cults in Late Antique Spain

by

Marina Murillo Sánchez

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History
University of California, Riverside, September 2025
Dr. Michele R. Salzman, Chairperson

This dissertation examines the cult of the saints in Late Antique Hispania through a close study of Aurelius Prudentius Clemens' *Peristephanon*, a collection of hymns to the martyrs composed in the early fifth century. My research addresses the problem of how Prudentius engaged with existing traditions of martyr veneration and how his poetry shaped the devotional landscape of Spain. Rather than interpreting the hymns as either purely literary inventions or literal reflections of cultic practice, this study situates them at the intersection of text, archaeology and local memory.

The methodology is grounded in the literary analysis of Hymns 1, 3, 6 and 8 of the *Peristephanon*, dedicated to the martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius, Eulalia, and Fructuosus with his deacons Augurius and Eulogius, with comparative readings of earlier martyr passions. This is complemented by material evidence from the Hispano-Roman cities if *Calagurris* (Calahorra), *Emerita Augusta* (Mérida), and *Tarraco* (Tarragona), including basilicas, necropoleis and epigraphy. This interdisciplinary approach highlights

the ways in which Prudentius drew upon oral tradition, civic memory, and the physical presence of martyr shrines to construct his poetic vision.

The findings reveal that Prudentius both inherited and reshaped existing cults and, in some cases, build and promoted new ones. In *Tarraco* and *Emerita Augusta*, he reworked the well-rooted cultic traditions of Fructuosus and Eulalia, preserving local memories while elevating them into models of Christian devotion. In contrast, in his hymns to Emeterius and Chelidonius, he creatively established a cult for his hometown *Calagurris,* adapting elements from other Spanish centers of martyr veneration. Prudentius' *Peristephanon* thus emerges as a hybrid mode Christian of memory, monumentalizing local traditions while integrating them into a broader narrative of sanctity.

By combining textual and archaeological evidence, this study demonstrates that Prudentius' work not only reflects but also actively shapes the development of the cult of the saints in Hispania. His hymns illuminate how literary artistry, civic identity, and material spatiality converged in Late Antiquity to preserve and reimagine the memory of the martyrs.

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List of Abbreviations

AEspA..*Archivo Español de Arqueología*

CCSL...*Corpus Christianorum*: *Series Latina*

CIL II²/14....................................*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum II: Inscriptiones Hispaniae Latinae, editio altera, pars XIV, fasciculus I. Pars meridionalis conventus Tarraconensis*, G. Alföldy – M. Clauss – M. Mayer, eds., Berlín - Nueva York, 1995.

CSIC..Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

C. Th....*Codex Theodosianus*

HEpOL...*Hispania Epigraphica Online Database*

ICERV..*Inscripciones Cristianas de La España Romana y Visigoda* (ed.) José Vives. Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1942.

LCL..Loeb Classical Library

PG..*Patrologia Graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne

PL..*Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne

PLRE 1...*Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire , vol. I: AD 260– 395* (ed.) A. H. M. Jones, J. Morris, and J. Martindale. Cambridge University Press, 1971.

RIT.... ....G. Alföldy, *Die römischen Inschriften von Tarraco*, Berlin, 1975.

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Prudentius and the *Peristephanon*

Introduction

When Prudentius retired to compose the *Peristephanon* in the early fifth century, he was not writing from the vantage point of Rome alone, nor was he simply imitating the great figures of Christian Latin literature like Ambrose, Jerome, or Augustine. He was a Spaniard, a man of *Calagurris*, whose imagination was nourished by the landscapes, memories, and cities of Hispania. In his hymns we hear echoes of *Tarraco*'s amphitheater, Mérida's basilica, and the hills of the Ebro Valley. We see not only the grandeur of martyrs elevated into poetic archetypes but also the very real presence of communities who venerated them, built shrines for them, and shaped their civic identity around their memory.

And yet, for generations, scholars have largely looked past this Spanish horizon. The hymns to the Roman martyrs have often taken center stage, interpreted through the lens of Prudentius' visit to Rome and his experience of the eternal city's monumental topography. Rome has loomed large as the presumed center of inspiration, casting Hispania into the shadows of Prudentius' literary world. My dissertation seeks to redress that imbalance by asking what happens when we take seriously the Spanish setting of his hymns. What if, instead of imagining Prudentius primarily as a pilgrim in Rome, we read him as a poet whose life, education, and religious identity were anchored in Hispania—and whose poetry was, above all, shaped for an audience there?

Approaching the *Peristephanon* from this perspective allows us to see the collection anew: as a dialogue between text and landscape, memory and monument, invention and tradition. Prudentius was not only a transmitter of existing cults but also, at times, their shaper and even their inventor. His poetry bears the imprint of classical tradition, biblical exegesis, and aristocratic taste, yet it also carries the urgency of a man who wanted to anchor Christian identity in the cities and regions he knew best. Hispania is not a backdrop for the *Peristephanon*—it is its stage.

This dissertation follows Prudentius across three key sites of Spanish devotion. In *Tarraco*, we encounter the figure of Bishop Fructuosus, remembered in the Passio of his martyrdom and reimagined by Prudentius in Hymn 6. Here the poet's role is one of transmission and transformation: he inherits a preexisting cult, preserves its memory, but also expands its reach. In Mérida, with the virgin martyr Eulalia, Prudentius offers both an archetype and a civic emblem. His hymn overlays her devotion with literary embellishment, while archaeology reveals the monumental basilica complex that anchored her cult in the city's fabric. Finally, in *Calagurris*, Prudentius' hometown, we find him in what I call his "creative mode": inventing a cult for Emeterius and Chelidonius, soldier-martyrs who serve not only as models of faith but as the foundation of a Christian civic identity for his own community.

Taken together, these case studies reveal Prudentius as both a poet of memory and a poet of invention. His *Peristephanon* bridges the gap between lived devotional practices and literary representation, between the archaeological remains of cult and the rhetorical

artistry of Latin verse. More broadly, his hymns show us how the cult of the martyrs became a cornerstone of Christian identity in late antique Hispania from Prudentius' time on.

In pursuing this argument, my dissertation is not only about Prudentius himself but also about the world he inhabited: a world of shifting orthodoxies, contested religious loyalties, and local communities seeking to define themselves through their saints. To trace this interplay of poetry, archaeology, and civic identity is to understand how Hispania became, in Prudentius' imagination, a Christian land—its landscapes reshaped by memory, its cities marked by martyrdom, its identity forged in devotion.

1. Primary source material

1.1 Introducing Prudentius

We know little about the life of Prudentius, since we have no contemporary sources mentioning the poet until the late fifth century.[1] The only references we have about Prudentius' life are the ones he himself chooses to emphasize in the brief preface to all his work that he wrote when he was fifty-six years old, towards the end of his life.

[1] Some fifth century authors such as Sidonius Apollinaris, "*nam similis scientia viri, hinc Augustinus hinc Varro, hinc Horatius hinc Prudentius lectitabantur*" (*Ep.* 2. 9.4) and Gennadius of Marseille in his *De viris illustribus* mention Prudentius, although sparsely.

Born during the consulship of Salia (348 CE),[2] this would give us the date of 405 CE for the writing of the *Praefatio*.[3] It can be assumed that Prudentius did not live much longer after writing this text that serves as a review of his life in old age, since in none of his works do we find mention of major events that would occur shortly thereafter, such as the Sack of Rome of 410 CE or, more remarkably, the barbarian invasions in Hispania of 409 CE.[4] Although it is clear that the work of Prudentius has a clear Christian theme and an eminently poetic function that generally avoids making reference to the political vicissitudes of his time, it is difficult to suppose, as Paula Hershkowitz points out, that if he had known or lived these events, he would not have mentioned them as did other authors of the period.[5]

---

[2] "… suddenly the hoar of age has stolen upon me, convicting me of having forgotten Salia's consulship of long ago. Under him my time began … - … *inrepsit subito canities seni, oblitum veteris me Saliae consulis arguens, sub quo prima dies mihi …* " (*Praefatio*, 24-25, in Prudentius, *Preface. Daily Round. Divinity of Christ. Origin of Sin. Fight for Mansoul. Against Symmachus 1*, trans. Henry John Thomson, I, Loeb Classical Library 397 [Harvard University Press, 1949], 4-5). I will be using this edition for the Latin and translations from now on.
Flavius Salia was consul at 348CE (A.H M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, and J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume I A.D. 260-395* [Cambridge University Press, 1971], 796).

[3] Around 404-405 CE, according to his date of birth. See Aaron Pelttari, *The Psychomachia of Prudentius. Text, Commentary, and Glossary* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2019), 3.

[4] This theme is of great importance in other Spanish authors of the period, such as Orosius (*History Against the Pagans,* 7.40.4-10) and Hydatius, who records the arrival of Vandals, Alans, and Sueves in Spain in 409 CE (*Chronicle*, 34 [42]). Throughout his *Chronicle*, Hydatius reports numerous acts of pillaging by barbarians throughout Spain, up until the end date of the chronicle in 468 CE. Throughout his *Chronicle*, Hydatius reports numerous instances of pillaging carried out by barbarian groups across the peninsula, continuing up to the chronicle's end in 468 CE. The events were also known to Augustine, who is informed of them in a letter sent to him by a certain Consentius from Menorca (Balearic Islands). The letter reports that the baggage of a priest named Severus from *Tarraco*, identified as a follower of Priscillianism and containing several of his books, was seized by "barbarians," but Consentius never specifies which ones (*Letter* 11* 1-2, 6 and 20).

[5] On this idea Paula Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity: Poetry, Visual Culture, and the Cult of Martyrs* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 8.

The first aspect of his biography that has generated controversy is his place of birth, since Prudentius makes no explicit reference to it in the *Praefatio*. The first hypotheses pointed to ancient *Caesaraugusta* as his birthplace because of the poet's varied references to the city as "*noster populus*" in Hymn 4 of the *Peristephanon*.[6] However, this same reasoning could be applied to *Tarraco*, which he also refers to as *nostrae ... urbis*, dedicating hymn 6 to three martyrs of the city,[7] or even to Rome, which he refers to as "*nostrae ... Romae*" in *Contra Orationem Symmachi* 1.[8] It is clear that Prudentius uses the possessive "our" in a rather generic way, either to refer to cities familiar to him or known to him, such as those mentioned, which is not a strong enough indication to locate his origin in any of them. It is added here that, in the cases of *Caesaraugusta* and *Tarraco*, both belong to the province *Tarraconensis*, which may explain the use of the possessive to indicate familiarity and relative proximity. In the case of Rome, this familiarity is also expressed by the use of "our," since the city was known to Prudentius and still remained symbolically important for the mentality of late antiquity.

---

[6] This hypothesis is the oldest. One of the arguments put forward to support it is the "enthusiasm" shown by Prudentius in Hymn 4 of the *Peristephanon*. See Aurelio Prudencio Clemente, *Obras Completas de Aurelio Prudencio*, trans. Isidoro Rodríguez Herrera and Alfonso Ortega (Madrid: La Editorial Catòlica, 1981), 5-6.

[7] "*o triplex honor, o triforme culmen, quo nostrae caput excitatur urbis*…" (*Peristephanon* 1.143-144, Prudentius, *Against Symmachus 2. Crowns of Martyrdom. Scenes From History. Epilogue*, trans. Henry J. Thomson, II, Loeb Classical Library 398 [Harvard University Press, 1953], 212-213). The three martyrs are bishop Fructuosus and his deacons, Augurius and Eulogius.

[8] "*Felix nostrae res publica Romae iustitia regnante viget*." (*Contra Orationem Symmachi* 1.36, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 352-353).

This leaves the town of *Calagurris* in northeastern Spain as the most consistent hypothesis. This town is also located in the *Tarraconensis* and again Prudentius refers to it as "*nostro ... oppido*."[9] The hymn that opens the *Peristephanon* is dedicated to its two martyrs, and *Calagurris* is the place to which Prudentius refers most familiarly and closely. In addition to this poem, Prudentius dedicates another hymn to the city (*Peristephanon* 8), a special piece within the collection and certainly distinct, in which the poet describes to the readers a baptistery of the city erected at the place of death of its martyrs, Emeterius and Chelidonius. The strongest evidence in favor of this hypothesis is found in the second hymn of the *Peristephanon*, dedicated to the martyr Lawrence, in which Prudentius laments that he cannot visit his tomb when he would like to, since they are separated by the "Basque Ebro."[10] The Ebro River, the second longest in the Iberian Peninsula, makes part of its course passing very close to *Calagurris*, and both this stretch of the river and the city were considered part of the Basque territory.[11]

In another hymn, dedicated to the Roman martyr Hippolytus and which Prudentius writes for Valerian, bishop of *Calagurris*, the poet urges him to include the feast of Hippolytus in the calendar of feasts of the year, which supports the theory that

[9] "*hoc bonum Salvator ipse, quo fruamur, praestitit, martyrum cum membra nostro consecravit oppido, sospitant quae nunc colonos quos Hiberus alluit*." (*Peristephanon* 1.115-117, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107).

[10] "*nos Vasco Hiberus dividit binis remotos Alpibus, trans Cottianorum iuga, trans et Pyrenas ninguidos*." (*Peristephanon* 2.537-540, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 140).

[11] Koldobika Sáenz del Castillo Velasco, "Registro material, rituales funerarios y cristianización del territorio en la Vasconia de la Antigüedad Tardía," *Sancho el Sabio* 41, (2018): 7-28.

this is symbolically the most important city for him and with which he has closer ties, probably because it is his place of origin and perhaps also his place of retirement.[12]

Continuing with Prudentius' life, the information that he chooses to reveal in the *Praefatio* shows a fairly conventional biography for the period. In his youth he received lessons in rhetoric and surely practiced as a lawyer, something Prudentius considers *lasciva protervitas*, lamenting that he had been corrupted by having learned to use speech to spread falsehoods.[13] This mention in the preface may lead to think that he came from a wealthy local or provincial family based on the type of education he received. However, a career in rhetoric could be the first step to climb the social ladder but it does not necessarily indicate that Prudentius came from a wealthy family.

The poet goes on to gloss his merits in the administrative career, of which he mentions that "twice he held the reins of noble cities" (*bis legum moderamine frenos nobilium reximus urbium, ius civile bonis reddidimus, terruimus reos*),[14] most likely serving as governor in the Hispanic provincial sphere.

Prudentius chooses not to mention here the specific position he held nor the name of the cities, either for the sake of concreteness or only to emphasize the fact that he had a successful career in the civil sphere before devoting himself fully to his poetry and his

[12] Jacques Fontaine, *Valeurs antiques et valeurs chrétiennes dans la spiritualité des grands propriétaires terriens à la fin du IVe siècle occidental* (Beauchesne, 1980), 241-265.

[13] "*mox docuit toga infectum vitiis falsa loqui, non sine crimine*." (*Praefatio* 8-9, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 2-3).

[14] "Twice, with the direction of laws, we led the reins of noble cities, granting civil justice to good men, frightening criminals" (*Praefatio* 16-18, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 2-3).

dedication to God. This aspect has, however, been the subject of debate for several authors, although we can only conjecture. Both Paula Hershkowitz and Anne Marie Palmer point out that it is strange that he held the office of governor twice, despite the emphasis on the word *bis*, given that this was an unusual practice in this period which, most likely, would have received punishment or disapproval.[15] Hershkowitz proposes at this point that Prudentius may have been one of the *duoviri*, something that would also explain the use of the plural *reximus*,[16] which seems a very plausible hypothesis.

Prudentius' career at the provincial level brought him the recognition of being elevated to imperial service, in the poet's words, in a rank that was relatively close to the emperor.[17] This aspect has also been analyzed at length, since Prudentius once again, does not mention what office he held nor under which emperor. The words of the author when referring to his appointment, assuring that the "*pietas principiis*" elevated him to the position, allows us to think that Prudentius refers to one of the Christian emperors, Theodosius (379 - 395 CE) or Honorius (395 - 423 CE), both contemporary to the poet's

---

[15] Palmer refers as an example the anecdote narrated by Ammianus Marcellinus (29.3.6) about the provincial governor Africanus, who asked Emperor Valentinian to serve as governor a second time in a different province and was executed for his ambition. Anne-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, (Clarendon Press, 1989), 25-26. Paula Hershkowitz adds to this that the practice was finally sanctioned and condemned by law by Honorius (*C.Th.* 9.26.4, Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 14). Also in A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social Economic and Administrative Survey* (University of Oklahoma Press Norman, 1964), 385.

[16] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 14-15. Palmer suggests that the plural *reximus* is expressing pride from Prudentius' side, perhaps for having achieved a long-desired goal. Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 24.

[17] "*tandem militiae gradu evectum pietas principis extulit adsumptum propius stare iubens ordine proximo*." (*Praefatio* 19-21, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 2-3).

adult years. There is no consensus as to whether Prudentius was referring to the Hispanic emperor or his son since mention of the names of the emperors is totally absent, not only from the preface, but from the rest of his work.[18]

In favor of Theodosius as the reigning emperor when Prudentius begins his career in the imperial court we have the fact that the poet himself seems to profess a deep admiration for him that is reflected in several moments of his work, especially the *Contra Orationem Symmachi*.[19] On the other hand, the age that Prudentius would have been when Theodosius ascended to power, around thirty-one years, also makes it perfectly possible that by this time serving at the imperial court was the logical next step in his career.[20] On the other hand, as Luis Rivero García points out, if Prudentius rose in his career under the reign of Theodosius it had to be before 393 CE, the year in which his sons Honorius and Arcadius received the titles of *princeps* and *Augustus*, which according to the author would allow enough time for the poet to write all his works

[18] Prudentius makes a reference in the *Apotheosis* to an emperor whom we can infer to be Julian, but again he never gives his name: "*principibus tamen e cunctis non defuit unus me puero, ut memini, ductor fortissimus armis, conditor et legum, celeberrimus ore manuque, consultor patriae, sed non consultor habendae relligionis, amans ter centum milia divum*. - Yet of all the emperors one there was in my boyhood, I remember, a brave leader in arms, a lawgiver, famous for speech and action, one who cared for his country's weal, but not for maintaining true religion, for he loved myriad gods." (*Apotheosis* 449-453, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 154-155).

[19] There are several references praising Theodosius' work in the prohibition of paganism under his rule, conceiving it as a medicine applied to Rome against the dangerous diseases spread by paganism: "*credebam vitiis aegram gentilibus urbem iam satis antiqui pepulisse pericula morbi/nec quidquam restare mali, postquam medicina principis inmodicos sedarat in arce dolores*. - I used to think that Rome, which was sick with her pagan errors, had by now quite rid herself of the dangers of her old disease and that no ill remained behind, now that the emperor's healing measures had assuaged in the seat of power her grievous pains." (*Contra Orationem Symmachi,* 1-4, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 350-351).

[20] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 26.

during the productive years of his retirement, after completing his civil service.[21] It should be noted, however, that in the arguments for linking Prudentius with Theodosius as a potential member of the emperor's circle, the Spanish origin of the emperor has sometimes been used as the only support for this argument.[22]

However, Theodosius' court was located primarily in Constantinople, and from what can be derived from his work, Prudentius had no direct personal or political ties to the East, nor did he visit Constantinople on any occasion. His previous career in Hispania and his training as a rhetor and lawyer may have gained him the right friendships to attain a junior position in the imperial administration. The generally accepted suggestion is that Prudentius began his civilian career in Hispania under Theodosius and his appointment to the imperial court occurred under Honorius, with General Stilicho as regent.[23] The poet may have held the office of *comes primi ordinis* although, considering his training, it has

[21] Luis Rivero García, *La Poesía de Prudencio* (Universidad de Huelva, 1996), 16, n. 18.

[22] "Although Theodosius never once set foot in Spain after becoming emperor, his Hispanic origins have figured prominently in studies of his reign" (Neil McLynn, "'Genere Hispanu*s*': Theodosius, Spain, and Nicene Orthodoxy," in *Hispania in Late Antiquity. Current Perspectives*, ed. Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowski [Brill, 2005], 77). It has been suggested the existence of a "Hispanic clan," a circle of aristocrats from Spain close to the emperor with some political relevance in both the Eastern and Western courts (see, for example, John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and the Imperial Court AD 364– 425* [Clarendon Press, 1975], 146-147). Gonzalo Bravo, more recently, has suggested in a more realistic way that it is true that a considerably greater number of Hispanics is registered compared to the preceding period, which, nevertheless, does not still allow to speak of a "dominant group" constituted on the basis of their Hispanic identity that had a determining relevance in the structures of the State. As the author refers, if the existence of some kind of Spanish political-ideological group close to the emperor can be considered, other factors beyond the common origin must probably be taken into account, such as, for example, a similar religious affiliation (Gonzalo Bravo, "Sobre élites tardorromanas en Hispania: un balance historiográfico," *Mainake* XXXI [2009]: 45–56).

[23] Altay Coskun argues that Prudentius' promotion to the imperial court occurred only under Honorius, since his previous positions as a trial lawyer and local governor would require about 20 years of service. Therefore, the author places Prudentius at the imperial court between 395-400 AD, after which he would retire to devote himself to the writing of his poetry (Altay Coskun, „Zur Biographie Des Prudentius", *Philologus* 152, no. 2 (2008): 297-304).

also been suggested that he may have been attached to one of the *scrinia* at court, perhaps the *scrinium libellorum*.[24] As noted above, Prudentius had no ties to the East, so it is possible to assume that this office was associated with the Western court in Milan. However, the poet makes no reference to this city in any of his works (including the *Praefatio*), as he does with his visit to Rome, which leaves open the possibility that, in fact, he never left Hispania in the years in which he devoted himself to his civil career.[25]

At this point it is necessary to make a parallel analysis of the *Preafatio* and the brief piece that Prudentius conceived as the concluding act of the collection, the *Epilogus*.[26] In both, Prudentius sets out the reasons for the existence of his work as his humble way of serving God and draws a clear line concerning other ways of serving the Christian faith that are not within his reach. Toward the end of the preface and as a metaphor for the very end of his life, Prudentius acknowledges the sins of his soul in a style very similar to Augustine's *Confessions* (perhaps based on him): "*atqui fine sub ultimo peccatrix anima stultitiam exuat*."[27] These verses are clearly linked with the

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[24] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 27-28.

[25] Anne Marie Palmer takes for granted the presence of Prudentius in Milan, even linking him with the aforementioned "Hispanic circle" and the renowned bishop of the city, Ambrose. These influences, Palmer points out, "must have been formative for the conception and composition of at least part of the *Peristephanon*" (Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, l3). However, the author does not provide a satisfactory solution here as to why Prudentius makes no mention of the city of Milan, nor of its famous bishop, but does dedicate several hymns of the *Peristephanon* to martyrs of Rome.

[26] There is no evidence for dating the *Epilogus* but given the "circular" nature of what appears to be a planned collection by Prudentius, it is plausible to assume that the epilogue was written at the same date as the preface simply to give beginning and closure to the set of poems that Prudentius considered representative of his Christian vision.

[27] "Yet as my last end draws near let my sinning soul put off her folly." (*Praefatio* 35, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 4-5).

information we find previously in the *Praefatio*, "soon, having been corrupted, the toga taught me to tell falsehoods, not without fault."[28] in which the author exposes the behaviors of his youth, repenting first of all for his training in rhetoric and the use he made of it. In the following verses he delves into self-criticism by stating that "By means of the filth and dirtiness of wickedness, licentious wantonness and lascivious excess polluted the young man,"[29] emphasizing through the redundancy of these adjectives the deep disgust that his past actions caused him.

From these verses we can infer that not only his education in rhetoric, but also certain excesses probably related to the fact that he had been sexually active in his youth are those he regretted in his old age when he wrote the *Praefatio* and *Epilogus*. The conception of rhetoric as an instrument for spreading falsehood and his rejection of it, as well as the regret for a licentious youth, have again their similarity in Augustine's *Confessions*.[30]

Prudentius closes this circle of self-criticism and individual introspection in the epilogue by declaring himself as "*sanctitatis indigi*"[31] for his purpose of serving God in some way that involves giving something of himself through the most common manifestations of Christian piety: charity or asceticism. The word *sanctitas* is broad in

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[28] *Praefatio* 9, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 2-3.

[29] "*tum lasciva protervitas et luxus petulans … foedavit iuvenem nequitiae sordibus ac luto*." (*Praefatio* 10-12, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 2-3).

[30] On this idea see Dave Tell, "Augustine and the 'Chair of Lies': Rhetoric in The Confessions," *Rhetorica* 28, no. 4 (2010): 384–407.

[31] *Epilogus* 9, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 372-373.

meaning, and here Prudentius may refer strictly to "holiness" to create the argument that he did not measure up in that sense to the martyrs to whom he composes his hymns, or to a more general sense implying "chastity" or "lack of moral purity," having previously referred to his libertine past.

Prudentius' vision of his Christian duty, his self-perception and criticism are thus concretized in the epilogue through the following verses:

> *Inmolat Deo Patri pius, fidelis, innocens, pudicus dona conscientiae, quibus beata mens abundat intus. Alter et pecuniam recidit, unde uictitent egeni. Nos citos iambicos sacramus et rotatiles trochaeos sanctitatis indigi nec ad leuamen pauperum potentes. Adprobat tamen deus pedestre carmen et benignus audit.*[32]

The lack of moral purity by which Prudentius perceives himself denies him from exercising his service to God and attaining his salvation through the "traditional ways." Unlike Augustine, he does not acquire any ecclesiastical office as part of his path of redemption, and the past of excesses that Prudentius describes for himself prevent him from pursuing the path of asceticism and complete renunciation of the world. Charity and almsgiving for the poor is not an option for him either, since he claims he lacks sufficient wealth for this work. What is left for him then? Only to offer his poetry as a witness of his personal conversion and hope for his own salvation.

Here it is necessary to return to the preface again to shore up some of the data provided by Prudentius so far. Although the poet constructs very succinctly in the

[32] "To God the Father he who is devout, faithful, guiltless, and pure offers the gifts of his conscience, which the blessed soul within him has in plenty; another again cuts his wealth short to give a living to the needy. For my part I dedicate my swift iambics and quick-running trochees, for I lack holiness and am not rich enough to relieve the poor. Yet God accepts the uninspired song and in kindness listens to it." (*Epilogus*, 1-12, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 372-373).

Praefatio and *Epilogus* a path of personal redemption very similar to Augustine's, there is no reference in them to conversion to Christianity in the strict sense of the word. It is only possible to make conjectures since Prudentius is intentionally obscure about his origins and does not provide any information about who his parents or ancestors might have been. From the very selective biography that the poet sets out in the *Praefatio*, it has been assumed that he belonged by birth to the Christian upper-class of Hispania, but this biographical data also fits the prototype of the "*homo novus*" of late antiquity, benefited by the expansion of bureaucracy and administration in this period.[33] This hypothesis would fit with the fact that his brief autobiography does not mention anything about his origin and focuses largely on his personal achievements as a young and adult man, probably because these achievements were not attained by birthright.

Likewise, this absence of references to his origins makes it impossible to discern whether he already came from a Christian family or was converted during his lifetime. What seems more likely, based also on the content of his poetry, is that Prudentius had probably been a Christian from birth. The most compelling argument is made by Palmer, who analyzes the structure of the *Praefatio* and *Epilogus* as a metaphor for conversion from a worldly existence to one fully committed to God.[34]

In this context, the end of his redemptive journey is represented by his poetry as the means that articulates a very concrete vision of his now Christian devoted life, but

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[33] See Christopher Kelly, "Emperors, Government, and Bureaucracy," in *The Cambridge Ancient History. The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425*, ed. Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 138-183.

[34] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 11.

also serves for the salvation of his own soul. In leaving behind his earthly concerns and personal ambitions to retire to write his poetry, Prudentius appeals to the very salvation of his soul through the creation of an immortal, permanent work, as he refers to in the *Praefatio*: "*haec dum scribo vel eloquor*, *vinclis o utinam corporis emicem liber, quo tulerit lingua sono mobilis ultimo!*"[35] Although Prudentius' poetry is very self-referential, it is possible to glimpse here some proselytizing intention of his work. Writing and the word are the means to disseminate the Christian vision, so his service is paid not only by the salvation of his soul, but also that of others, his audience.

Regarding Prudentius' second statement about his inability to serve God by giving money to the poor, it fits with the career described by himself in the preface. The bulk of his career was in the local government, and it is unknown what kind of position he held when he was promoted to the imperial bureaucracy. Regarding his stay in Milan, authors such as Aaron Pelttari not only take for granted that this was the case and that he may have made his pilgrimage to Rome from there, but even that as a member of the administration Prudentius was a member of the Senate.[36] The claim of not being wealthy enough, in this case, may point to the classic literary *topos* of modesty to disguise a certain sense of pride in his accomplishments.[37] However, there is no evidence that

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[35] "And while I write or speak of these themes, O may I fly forth in freedom from the bonds of the body, to the place whither my busy tongue's last word shall tend." (*Praefatio* 43-45, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 4-5).

[36] Aaron Pelttari observes that Prudentius' mention of the battle of Pollentia (402 CE) in *Contra Symmachum* (269-768) contains allusions to passages from Claudian's *De bello Getico*, hypothesizing that Prudentius' stay in Milan may have led him to meet him in person as well (Pelttari, *The Psychomachia of Prudentius*, 5).

[37] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 18.

Prudentius was a great landowning aristocrat and the most plausible hypothesis considering his self-described career is that his retirement to write Christian poetry occurred in some much more modest rural settlement, perhaps in *Calagurris*.

It is inevitable here the comparison with the life of Paulinus of Nola, of whom we do know that he had a career as an officer of senatorial rank and significant wealth and properties. Like Prudentius, Paulinus retired first in Barcelona with his wife Therasia and later in Nola to live a life dedicated to Christ, also through poems celebrating the martyrs.[38] There are certain similarities, especially in the path of retirement and renunciation of an earthly life, but it is unknown if Prudentius shared the aristocratic origins of Paulinus, and surely he did not have a career comparable to that of the bishop of Nola. On the other hand, Paulinus is not the only case of an aristocrat who withdraws to the countryside to pursue an ascetic existence, in many cases founding religious communities that expanded a specific monastic ideal. In Hispania, the most paradigmatic example is that of Priscillian, who gathered an entire community of believers around his ascetic ideal, with the rural *villae* as the setting for its development.[39]

Following these examples, the question of whether or not Prudentius belonged to a religious community similar to the one that Paulinus founded in Nola has also been

[38] On the matter, see Michael Roberts, "Narrating the Saints: Paulinus of Nola and the Beginning of Verse Hagiography," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 15, no. 1 (2022): 111–29.

[39] One of the best works on the archaeology of Priscillianism and its connection with the rural *villae* settlement is that of Diego Piay Augusto, "Arqueología y Priscilianismo," *Hispania Antiqua*, no. 35 (2011): 271–300.

discussed by various authors.[40] The hypothesis is based on some verses from Hymn 2 of the *Cathamerinon*, aimed to be sung in the morning.[41] In this fragment Prudentius describes the morning as the time that favors all kinds of businesses, "the soldier, sailor, citizen, the ploughman, salesman, artisan."[42] After criticizing how these individuals are only concerned with their wealth and prestige, the poet adds in contrast that "*at nos lucelli ac faenoris fandique prorsus nescii*, *nec arte fortes bellica*, *te, Christe, solum novimus*."[43] The plural *novimus* has been taken literally here to imply that Prudentius was referring to his religious community, which would promulgate ascetic ideals that would keep them away from the traditional activities described above.[44]

However, it does not seem that Prudentius' aim was to conduct his life under the rigorous ascetic ideal of fasting and detachment from all kinds of unnecessary possessions within a community such as that proposed by Priscillian.[45] The poet himself

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[40] Among others Jacques Fontaine, *Naissance de La Poésie Dans l'occident Chrétien: Esquisse d'une Histoire de La Poésie Latine Du IIIe Au VIe Siècle* (Études Augustiniennes, 1981), 156 and 181-182; and Antonio Yelo Templado, "El ascetismo en la Calahorra de Prudencio," in *Calahorra. Bimilenario de su fundación. Actas Del I Symposium de Historia de Calahorra* (Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección General de Bellas Artes y Archivos, 1984), 274.

[41] The *Cathamerinon* contains 12 hymns to be sung, read or recited at specific times of the day as well as on special holidays or for certain activities.

[42] *Cathamerinon* 2.37-40, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 14-15.

[43] "But we, whom cash and interest, and eloquence have left untouched, and prowess in the art of war, have knowledge, Christ, of Thee alone." (*Cathamerinon* 2.45-48, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 36).

[44] On this idea Jean-Louis Charlet, *La création poétique dans le Cathemerinon de Prudence* (Les Belles Lettres, 1982), 52-53. Other scholars have later rejected this thesis, see for example Rivero García, *La poesía de Prudencio*, 17; or Kim Bowes, "'Une Coterie Espagnole Pieuse': Christian Archaeology and Christian Communities in Fourth- and Fifth-Century Hispania"," in *Hispania in Late Antiquity. Current Perspectives*, ed. Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowski (Brill, 2005), 253-254.

[45] The central problem posed by Priscillianism is well summarized by Martin Horst in the following lines: "The main thrust of the decrees is to prevent religious practices that are independent of the established Church, with a secondary aim to curtail certain ascetic practices associated with the Priscillianists, such as

describes in the *Cathamerinon* that he enjoys the fruits and abundance of the earth that Christ provides,[46] and in his hymns dedicated to "Those who fast"[47] he appeals to the goodness of fasting at specific times of the day or certain appointed dates such as Lent, but he also promulgates that fasting is a choice and each one can take what they can bear.[48]

From his work, however, we can affirm that Prudentius lived modestly in his retreat and that he defended the need to avoid any excess, including food, but this is not sufficient evidence to say that he belonged to an ascetic religious community. Inferring from his writings it makes more sense that, if he was part of any community, it was the one formed around the city of *Calagurris*, led by its bishop, Valerianus.[49] Despite being

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fasting on Sundays, thus receiving the Eucharist but not consuming it as part of the rite" (Martin Horst, "Bishops between Reform and Heresy: Priscillian, Martin of Tours and Magnus Maximus," in *Bishops under Threat. Contexts and Episcopal Strategies in the Late Antique and Early Medieval West*, ed. Sabine Panzram and Poveda Arias [De Gruyter, 2023], 271.

[46] "*fundit opes ager ingenuas, dives aristiferae segetis, hic ubi vitea pampineo bracchia palmite luxuriant, pacis alumna ubi baca viret. haec opulentia Christicolis servit et omnia subpeditat*. - The land pours forth its native wealth in all the riches of its corn-crop, while here too the vine's branches luxuriate with leafy shoots and the berry that is the nursling of peace flourishes." (*Cathamerinon* 3.51-57, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 22-23).

[47] In this hymn Prudentius describes the whole imaginary of rigorous asceticism: the retreat to the desert, the detachment from all possessions and the total abstinence from worldly pleasures such as food or sex. Fasting is the main theme of Hymns 7 and 8 of the *Cathamerinon.*

[48] "*… laxus ac liber modus abstinendi ponitur cunctis, neque nos severus terror inpellit; sua quemque cogit velle potestas. sufficit, quidquid facias, vocato numinis nutu prius inchoare, sive tu mensam renuas cibumve sumere temptes*. - … an easy and free measure of abstinence is laid on all ; no stern fear drives us; it is each one's own power that constrains him to be willing. Sufficient is it, whatever a man does, to set about it after first appealing for God's approval, whether he refuse the table or put forth his hand to take food." (*Cathamerinon*, 3.65-72, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 74-75).

[49] Hymn 11 of the *Peristephanon* is directly addressed "*Ad Valerianum Episcopum*." There is also a certain Valerius attending the council of *Caesaraugusta* in 380 CE in which Priscillianism was condemned, although we cannot be certain that it is the same one (José Vives, *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos. Edición preparada por José Vives con la colaboración de Tomás Marín Martínez y Gonzalo Martínez Díez* [Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1963], 16-18).

portrayed as a "*villa* poet"[50] with his hypothetical primary audience being landowners who practiced Christianity privately in their lands,[51] Prudentius presents us with a vision of the cult of the saints that takes place mostly in the urban space, with the city being in his perspective the reference for the creation of community and public worship.

1.2 The *Liber Peristephanon*: Secondary scholarship

1.2.1 Anglophone Scholarship

Regarding the life and work of Prudentius, it can be said that they have received some acceptable attention in recent historiography, although, perhaps, not as excessive as other authors of the period, varying also depending on the specific works of the author.

With respect to the works of Prudentius, two main groups can be distinguished in the historiographic tradition, the Anglophone and Spanish speaking scholarship. With respect to the former, we must consider as one of the first major works the translation and commentary by Henry J. Thompson (1949) of the entire collection of Prudentius' poetry, laying the foundations of some of the key points studied about the author, mainly related to his biography.

Since this translation, various aspects of Prudentius' work, especially the literary aspects of it, have been treated in a scattered manner. However, the work that we can consider as a real turning point on the work of Prudentius and, especially, the

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[50] "*poetam rusticum*" *Peristephanon* 2.574. This thesis is suggested by Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 4.

[51] As proposed by Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 179-180.

Peristephanon, is that of Anne Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (1989). The author herself highlights the limited attention that Prudentius has received, as scholarship has so far focused primarily on the *Psychomachia* and the *Cathamerinon*.[52] Palmer makes an in-depth study of Prudentius' hymns from a very broad point of view, analyzing the author's literary influences, both from classical literature and from contemporary martyrial literature,[53] claiming the author's status within a general cultural context that is also influenced by the author's social background.

Although with a focus on the literary aspects of the *Peristephanon,* Palmer inevitably touches on some of the religious elements that may be derived from Prudentius' work on the martyrs. For this dissertation, her claim that Prudentius' hymns to the martyrs show a "strong feeling of patriotism"[54] is really interesting, especially in her study of the potential audience of these poems and of one of the martyrdom narratives, that of Fructuosus of Tarragona. Her treatment of these aspects is rather superficial, so far as this is just one element of her broad analysis of Prudentius' work and does not focus on the identity aspects that may derive from these hagiographies, but rather on how these hymns fit into the broader tradition of martyrdom literature.

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[52] See for example Paula James, "Prudentius *Psychomachia*. The Christian Arena and the Politics of Display," in *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, ed. Richard Miles (Routledge, 1999), 70-94; Philip Hardie, "Augustan and Late Antique Intertextuality: Virgil's *Aeneid* and Prudentius' *Psychomachia*," in *Intratextuality and Latin Literature*, ed. S. J. Harrison et al. (De Gruyter, 2018), 159-172; Kenneth R. Haworth, *Deified Virtues, Demonic Vices and Descriptive Allegory in Prudentius' Psychomachia* (A.M. Hakkert, 1980); and Joseph Pucci, "Prudentius, Readings of Horace in the 'Cathemerinon,'" *Latomus: Revue d'Études Latines* 50 (1991): 677–90.

[53] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 227 – 277.

[54] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 4.

The density of scholarship on Prudentius in the 1980s delves even more deeply than Palmer into different literary aspects of Prudentius' work, especially the classical elements of his poetry.[55] Other elements such as the political weight of Prudentius' poetry and its relationship to the social context are proposed by Harries, who analyzes the representation of imperial power and Prudentius' potential relationship with the Hispanic emperor Theodosius I in her 1984 article, *Prudentius and Theodosius*.[56]

In the following decade, most of the works follow the aforementioned approaches,[57] starting with Martha Malamud's work, published the same year as Palmer's, *A Poetics of Transformation: Prudentius and Classical Mythology*.[58] The author focuses especially on the hymns to "Roman martyrs" of the *Peristephanon* (hymns 9, 11, 12 and 14) with a particularly classicist approach by analyzing the literary *topoi* of classical literature that are constantly present in Prudentius' work. Malamud's perspective starts from the premise earlier proposed by Peter Brown that "there is no sharp distinction between the religion of the elite and popular religion"[59] and that, within

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[55] S. Georgia Nugent, *Allegory and Poetics: The Structure and Imagery of Prudentius' "Psychomachia,"* Studien Zur Klassischen Philologie 14 (Peter Lang, 1985).

[56] Jill Harries, "Prudentius and Theodosius," *Latomus* 43, no. 1 (1984): 69–84.

[57] A.A.R Bastiaensen, "Prudentius in Recent Literary Criticism," in *Early Christian Poetry. A Collection of Essays*, ed. J. den Boeft and A. Hilhorst, *Vigiliae Christianae*, Supplements 22 (Brill, 1993); and John Petruccione, "The Martyr Death as Sacrifice: Prudentius, Peristephanon 4. 9-72," *Vigiliae Christianae* 49, no. 3 (1995): 245–57. We find different lines of analysis of Prudentius' work, such as the proposal of William J. Henderson, "Violence in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*," *Akroterion* 28 (1983): 84–92; and Jill Ross, "Dynamic Writing and Martyrs' Bodies in Prudentius," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, no. 3 (1995): 325–55.

[58] Martha Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation: Prudentius and Classical Mythology* (Cornell University Press, 1989).

[59] Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation,* 3.

this elite, all functioned within the homogeneous cultural code of classical tradition, whose symbolisms were shared and taken for granted within the group, regardless of their religious identity.[60] This assertion, of course, also includes Prudentius as part of this elite and, therefore, the analysis of the poet is made in Malamud's work from the point of view that the main code of reference for him in constructing his message is that of this literary and cultural classical heritage.

This has been one of the main points of criticism of Malamud's work that will be seen in other scholars such as Michael Roberts' study of the *Peristephanon*. While Malamud's study relies solely on the analysis of classical textual references in Prudentius' work and claims that allusions to classical texts are used to structure a certain critique of the Christian identity of his era, Michael Roberts analyzes Prudentius' poems as a literary effort out of pure devotion to the martyrs.[61] He expands some of the lines pointed out by Anne Marie Palmer, and explores new avenues of interpretation of Prudentius' hymns, and explores new avenues of interpretation of Prudentius' hymns.

The influence of Peter Brown's groundbreaking works on the symbolism of the saints within the overall context of the spirituality of Late Antiquity is clearly visible in his work. Framing the author as a product of his time and class and following the path established by Peter Brown, Roberts analyzes the *Peristephanon* as a manifestation of the era of "Christian triumphalism," concluding that Prudentius' hymns evidence a social

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[60] Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation*, 4.

[61] Michael J. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius* (University of Michigan Press, 1993), 4.

reality of growing devotion to the martyrs in the fourth century that is a consequence of this triumphal stage.[62] The author, therefore, focuses on the specific defining aspects of martyr worship inferred from Prudentius' work, using the author's biographical context to defend the combination of "Roman and Christian" elements in his work, coexisting in a "stable synthesis."[63] From this point of view, the analysis of devotion to the saints in its discursive and literary dimension is the main focus of his work, although Roberts devotes his first chapter to some material component of the cult, especially the relationship between the martyr's tomb and relics as a primary place of devotion[64] and the role of the martyr as a mediator between heaven and earth.[65]

In more recent decades studies on the hymns of the martyrs by Prudentius are rather scarce. Two recent translations and commentaries of the *Peristephanon* appear,[66] and some scattered works that take up again the theological aspects of the Spanish poet's writings, as well as more general studies on Late Antique literature that analyze

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[62] Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 8.

[63] Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 5.

[64] Michael Roberts' assertions are entirely based on Peter Brown's previous analysis, stating that Prudentius follows Ambrose's line on the possession of relics, in what Brown calls the "privatization of the holy" by the Roman wealthy upper classes (Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 32-36; *cf.* Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 15-16.

[65] Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 40-78.

[66] Pierre-Yves Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence (Peristephanon 2.5.9.11-14). Introduction Générale et Commentaire* (Editions Universitaries Fribourg, 2003); Pierre-Yves Fux, *Prudence et Les Martyrs: Hymnes et Tragédie. Peristephanon 1. 3-4. 6-8. 10. Commentaire* (Academic Press Fribourg, 2013); and Aurelio C. Prudenzio, *Peristephanon VII, Introduzione, Traduzione e Commento*, trans. G. Galeani (ed.) Prudenzio: Peristephanon VII, Introduzione, Traduzione e Commento (Edizioni dell'Orso, 2014).

Prudentius as part of this tradition.[67] Of these more recent publications, we should highlight Marc Mastrangelo's work, which returns once again to the literary analysis of Prudentius, this time to put in an equal dialogue the classical allusions of his poems with biblical references and Christian theology.

Mastrangelo emphasizes Prudentius as a creative author in the construction of his message, who attempted to imbue the textual tradition of Roman identity with a new Christian culture constructed by mixing these references.[68] While this approach still relies solely on the literary analysis of Prudentius, it also puts the poet in a broader context of Late Antique cultural history by stressing the widely varied references of his works, beyond the classical heritage, wondering how this new language was intended to redefine Roman and Christian identity at the communal and individual levels. However, this work mentions the *Peristephanon* and other works of Prudentius in a very tangential way and focuses primarily on the *Psychomachia*, leaving aside more important aspects of Prudentius' own biography and what is the role of the cult of the saints in this redefinition of identity that Mastrangelo proposes.

In the most recent years of literature Prudentius, two authors stand out. The first is Cillian O'Hogan (2016), who conducts a study of the Prudentian poems focusing on the description of geographical landscapes through his works, and Paula Hershkowitz (2017) which adds a new perspective to the study of the *Peristephanon* through the concept of

[67] For example, Scott McGill and Edward J. Watts, eds., *A Companion to Late Antique Literature* (Wiley Blackwell, 2018).

[68] Marc Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity: Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 3.

visual culture.[69] O'Hogan analyzes the intersection between space and literature taking the whole range of Prudentius' poems, not just the hymns of the *Peristephanon*.

Interpreting Prudentius' poems as a literary journey, the author proposes that he constructs his spatial descriptions totally removed from his own lived experience, creating, on the contrary, an image of the world that cannot be connected with reality. For this enterprise Cillian O'Hogan once again relies on intertextual references to classical authors and biblical tradition, analyzing the locations of Prudentius' hymns as idealized descriptions of different spaces evoking famous journeys, creating a sort of "pilgrimage by proxy" for his readers.[70] It is true that Prudentius' poems also have an aesthetic intention and these textual references fulfill the mission of evoking certain images in his readers. However, in his analysis of the *Peristephanon*, O'Hogan only adheres to these descriptions as a space of imagination for the audience, without considering the possibility that this evocation served the purpose of traveling figuratively to spaces with a real background, especially for the martyrs of Spain.

On the opposite line, Paula Hershkowitz analyzes how the discursive elements of Prudentius' hagiographies translate into the creation of a concrete visual culture resulting from the descriptions and evocations of the tombs of the saints in Rome. The author focuses primarily on the hymns of Hippolytus and Cassian putting the focus on the visual iconographic manifestations of Prudentius' narrative to highlight the proselytizing work

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[69] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 1.

[70] Cillian O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 19.

of these hymns in creating an *exemplum* for the Christians of Hispania and Gaul, stimulating imitation and devotion to these martyrs in his readers.

Coinciding in part with the line suggested by Cillian O'Hogan, Paula Hershkowitz hypothesizes that the visual culture created from these two hymns serves the goal of provoking in the reader the same emotions that the Hispanic poet felt when visiting the tombs of Hippolytus and Cassian in Rome, trying to create through a narrative full of details a kind of visual journey for the reader that allows them to experience the proximity to the saints, even in the distance.[71] From this perspective, the author takes up the question of the audience in Prudentius' work, presupposing in the visual culture created by the poet a "pedagogical" element for the promotion of Christianity, especially among the Hispanic upper classes.[72] While it is true that this explanation seems satisfactory for these two hymns, the author does not quite resolve the question of how the visual culture of hymns 9 and 11 is somehow reflected in the hymns of the *Peristephanon* dedicated to Spanish martyrs. Paula Hershkowitz's work still relies too much on Rome and its martyrs as the inspiration for Prudentius' hymns, often overlooking the possible influence of Spanish cults predating Prudentius in her analysis.

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[71] The same hypothesis is proposed by Roberta Franchi in her most recent study of hymns 9 and 11 of the *Peristephanon* dedicated to Hippolytus and Cassian. The author adheres to Hershkowitz's hypothesis by pointing out that Prudentius' audience was not only the Christians of Hispania, but also those of Gaul (Roberta Franchi, "Prudenzio, Peristephanon 9 e 11: Il Potere Dell' «ekphrasis» e Il Processo Di Cristianizzazione," *Adamantius : Annuario Di Letteratura Cristiana Antica e Di Studi Giudeoellenistici* 26 [2020]: 229–43. The figure of Saint Hippolytus as a reflection of the intersection in Prudentius between the classical tradition and its Christian reinterpretation has recently been analyzed by Rio Sanz, based on a comparative study between the Hippolytus of the *Peristephanon* and the Hippolytus of Seneca as represented in his tragedy *Phaedra* (Emilio del Río Santos, "Séneca, (San) Hipólito y Prudencio: Una Recapitulación," *Cuadernos de Filología Clásica. Estudios Latinos* 38, no. 2 [2018]: 193–213).

[72] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 35-37.

The questions left unanswered by Hershkowitz are nevertheless one of the main points of departure for this dissertation and her multidisciplinary work attempting to incorporate non-literary evidence into the analysis of Prudentius is a major inspiration for this project.

1.2.2 Spanish Scholarship

To this historiographical review on Prudentius, it should be added the secondary scholarship done in Spanish, which is difficult to access outside the academic sphere for non-speakers of the language. A first element that should be emphasized here is that the *Peristephanon* has received much more attention than in Anglophone historiography. There is no work in the style of Anne Marie Palmer or Michael Roberts that studies the *Peristephanon* in depth in a more global context, so the works in Spanish focus on specific aspects or hagiographies. Most of the works on Prudentius' hymns are concentrated between the early 1990s and the late 2000s, with three main themes standing out: the development of the cult of the saints in Hispania, the reception of Prudentius' works in the Visigothic period, and his influence on the creation of works such as the seventh century *Passionarium Hispanicum* and the martyrdom of Saint Eulalia as the flagship hagiographic text of the *Peristephanon.*

On these lines, Isabel Velázquez makes an analysis primarily in terms of the reception of the literary *topoi* of Prudentius' hagiographies, establishing him as one of the pioneers of the characteristic elements that would establish hagiography as a particular literary genre in Visigothic literature. Velázquez is one of the scholars who focuses on

the martyrdom of St. Eulalia as the stereotype and model of virtue and purity for later periods, identifying a series of rhetorical devices and structures in the narrative of Prudentius that would be repeated almost exactly in the *passio* written about the saint in the Visigothic era.[73] However, among the various works that analyze the hagiographic account of Eulalia, we must highlight the work of Antonio Mateos Martín de Rodrigo (2009), which makes a survey of the different *passio* dedicated to the martyr of Mérida.[74]

This work serves as a useful compilation of the different accounts of Eulalia, of which the account of Prudentius has generally been considered the first written testimony. What is interesting about Mateos' work is that it shows how most of the Spanish-speaking historiography agrees that Prudentius' account was based on a lost primitive *passio* that could also be the basis of the seventh-century account, adding stylistic elements from Prudentius' work.[75] About this lost *passio*, the most striking hypothesis (and with a considerable degree of acceptance) is the one proposed by Antonio Mateos Martín de Rodrigo in his already mentioned work, and other authors

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[73] Isabel Velázquez Soriano, *Hagiografía y culto a los santos en la Hispania visigoda*, vol. 32, Cuadernos Emeritenses (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 2005); and Isabel Velázquez Soriano, *La Literatura Hagiográfica. Presupuestos Básicos y Aproximación a Sus Manifestaciones En La Hispania Visigoda* (Fundación Instituto Castellano y Leonés de la Lengua, 2007).

[74] Antonio Mateos Martín Rodrigo, *Las Pasiones de Santa Eulalia de Mérida o África e Hispania*, Cuadernos Emeritenses 33 (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 2009).

[75] See, among others, Manuel Domínguez Merino, "Himnodia Eulaliense," in *Mérida y Santa Eulalia. Actas de las Jornadas de Estudios Eulalienses* (Ayuntamiento de Mérida, 2005); Juan Carmona Muela, *Iconografía de los santos* (Istmo, 2003); and María Victoria Escribano Paño, "El cristianismo marginado. Heterodoxos, carismáticos y herejes del siglo IV," in *Historia del cristianismo. El mundo antiguo*, ed. Manuel Sotomayor and José Fernández Ubiña (Trotta, 2003).

such as Juan Gil[76] about a possible Donatist origin of the *passio* of Eulalia.[77] This account was lost, according to these scholars, in the years following the condemnation of Donatism and that was reintroduced in Hispania following the Byzantine conquest of Carthage.

Works such as that of Antonio Mateos Martín de Rodrigo have marked the general lines of studies on the *Peristephanon* in Hispania, either focusing on the study of specific hymns, such as that of Eulalia, or using the *Peristephanon* to analyze the incidence of the cult of the saints in the cities mentioned by Prudentius. As mentioned in the previous section, the cult of the saints and the hymns have been related in Spanish historiography to the process of Christianization of Hispania (especially in some regions such as *Gallaecia*), which explains the popularity in the scholarship of some specific saints such as Eulalia, Vincent and Fructuosus, through whom Christianity would have spread to these regions.[78]

Aside from these three martyrs, the city of Calahorra and its saints, probably because it was the city of origin of Prudentius, as well as *Caesaraugusta*, have also

[76] Juan Gil, "La Pasión de Santa Eulalia," *Habis* 31 (2000): 403–416.

[77] Antonio Mateos Martín Rodrigo, *Las Pasiones de Santa Eulalia de Mérida*, 148-200.

[78] Eulalia is undoubtedly the martyr who has received the most attention in Spanish historiography. See, for example, Xosé L. Armada Pita, "El culto a Santa Eulalia y la cristianización de 'Gallaecia.' Algunos testimonios arqueológicos," *Habis* 34 (2003): 365–88; Isaac Sastre de Diego, "El *exemplum* de Eulalia en la cristianización de la aristocracia romana hispana. Arqueología, hagiografía y epigrafía," in *A Baete ad fluvium Anam: Cultura epigráfica en la Bética Occidental y territorios fronterizos*, ed. Joan Carbonell i Manils and Helena Gimeno Pascual (Editorial Universidad de Alcalá, 2016); or Rosa Mentxaca, "Elucubraciones acerca del escrito de Prudencio sobre el martirio de Santa Eulalia de Mérida," in *Mujeres de la Hispania romana: Una mirada al patrimonio*, ed. Alicia Valmaña Ochaíta et al. (Dykinson, 2021), 319-326.

received much attention in modern scholarship. These works follow the line we pointed out in the previous section, considering that the words of Prudentius are sufficient evidence to support the existence of the cult to the saints in these cities in spite of his many rhetorical licenses.

Several of these works are supported by Prudentius' use of already existing oral traditions about martyrs such as Emeterius and Chelidonius of Calahorra to create his hymns. The references in the *Peristephanon* to news and stories that seem to circulate about these martyrs in the city since ancient times would attest that they were known from a time before Prudentius, although the inconsistencies he assumes in the oral tradition led him to resort to the stereotypes of the incipient martyr literature to fill in the gaps in the narrative.[79] In some cases, such as *Caesaraugusta*, which was already a relevant city in Hispania long before the time of Prudentius, the poet's account has served for recent scholarship to try to map the location and reuse of spaces in the city related to the cult of the saints.[80]

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[79] Antonio Encuentra Ortega, "Prudencio y los inicios del culto martirial en *Caesaraugusta*. Análisis Del *Peristephanon* 4," *Saldvie* 22 (2022): 51–74.

[80] On the possible location of the Christian *basilicae* of Zaragoza, see María Victoria Escribano Paño, "La Sacralización Cristiana de Los Espacios. El Caso de Zaragoza," in *El Cristianismo Primitivo En Aragón*, ed. A. Mostalac and María Victoria Escribano Paño (Caja de Ahorros de la Inmaculada, 2009), 151-159. María e. Ortiz and Juan A. Paz have recently argued that the arcaded *frigidarium* of the central baths of the city was used as a Christian church from 370 onwards and that the adjoining rooms housed a baptistery. See María Esperanza Ortiz Palomar and Juan Ángel Paz Peralta, "Luces y Sombras En El Espacio Porticado de Las Termas Públicas Centrales de Caesaraugusta: El Vidrio," in *IV Congreso Arqueología Patrimonio Aragonés (9 y 10 de Diciembre de 2021)*, ed. María del Pilar Utrilla Miranda et al. [Colegio Oficial de Doctores y Licenciados en Filosofía y Letras en Ciencias de Aragón, 2022], 253-266; and Juan Ángel Paz Peralta, "La Arquitectura Del Frigidarium de Las Termas Públicas Centrales de Caesaraugusta (Zaragoza)," in *IV Congreso Arqueología Patrimonio Aragonés (9 y 10 de Diciembre de 2021)*, ed. María del Pilar Utrilla Miranda et al. (Colegio Oficial de Doctores y Licenciados en Filosofía y Letras en Ciencias de Aragón, 2022)., 239-252.

1.3 The *Peristephanon* as a hagiographic work: literary features and composition

There is a certain consensus that the *Praefatio* and its closing act, the *Epilogus*, were written by Prudentius with a view to their future distribution as an edited collection or perhaps as an already existing *corpus* of his works.[81] The poet identifies towards the end of his preface the contents of this collection and what are the specific themes in which he manifests his devotion to God:

> *saltem voce Deum concelebret, si meritis nequit. Hymnis continuet dies*, *nec nox ulla vacet quin Dominum canat*; *pugnet contra hereses, catholicam discutiat fidem, conculcet sacra gentium*, *labem, Roma*, *tuis inferat idolis*, *carmen martyribus devoveat*, *laudet apostolos*.[82]

These verses refer, in this order, to the *Cathamerinon*, the *Apotheosis*,[83] *Hamartigenia*,[84] *Peristephanon* 10 (dedicated to the martyr Romanus), the two books of the *Contra Orationem Symmachi,*[85] and, finally, the remaining hymns of the *Peristephanon*, with special emphasis on Hymn 12 dedicated to the passion of the

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[81] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 9; Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius*, 2; and Michael von Albrecht, "Prudentius," in *A History of Roman Literature: From Livius Andronicus to Boethius: With Special Regard to Its Influence on World Literature* (Brill, 1997), 1357.

[82] "With hymns let her link the days together, and no night pass without singing of her Lord. Let her fight against heresies, expound the Catholic faith, trample on the rites of the heathen, strike down thy idols, O Rome, devote song to the martyrs, and praise the apostles." (*Praefatio* 36-42, Thomson, *Prudentius,* I, 4-5).

[83] The *Apotheosis* is an apology in defense of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity against various heresies as Patripassianism, Sabellianism or Manicheism.

[84] Discussion on the origin of sin, mostly attacking the Gnostic dualistic concept of it. See Martha Malamud, *The Origin of Sin: An English Translation of the* "*Hamartigenia*" (Cornell University Press, 2012).

[85] Response to Symmachus on the widely known discussion about the Altar of Victoria, with an underlying anti-pagan discourse.

apostles Peter and Paul. Neither the *Psychomachia*[86] nor the *Tituli Historiarum*[87] appear in this list, so it can be interpreted that they were either written after the *Praefatio* or that he did not intend to include them initially as part of the collection. The omission of these poems in the preface may also indicate, however, that the future collection that Prudentius had in mind was still unfinished by the time he wrote the *Praefatio* and the *Epilogus* (around 404-405 CE) and the poet may not have had enough time to make the *Psychomachia* and the *Tituli Historiarum* part of it considering that he most likely died before 409-410 CE.

Although this structure suggests an intentionality behind the composition of the preface and epilogue toward constituting a collection, the position of the hymns of the *Peristephanon* in it is not so easy to determine. The manuscript tradition of Prudentius' poems seems to indicate that the actual compilation and arrangement of the fourteen hymns of the *Peristephanon* did not occur until a late period in the history of his works. The earliest preserved manuscript dates from the early sixth century, *Codex Parisinus Latinus* 8084 known as *Puteanus*, which contained the *Cathamerinon, Apotheosis, Hamartigenia, Psychomachia* and *Peristephanon* 1, dedicated to the martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius of *Calagurris*.[88]

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[86] Allegorical text that represents the battle between seven personified virtues and vices: Faith versus Paganism and Idolatry, Chastity versus Lust, Patience versus Anger, Humility and Hope versus Arrogance, Temperance versus Wantonness, Reason and Charity versus Avarice and Fraud and Harmony versus Discord (Heresy). See Pelttari, *The Psychomachia of Prudentius*, 12.

[87] Lines describing certain scenes from the Old and New Testament which were intended to be inscribed as epigraphs. See von Albrecht, "Prudentius," 1358.

[88] Maurice P. Cunningham, "Some Facts about the *Puteanus* of Prudentius," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 89 (1958): 32.

At the end of the 6th or beginning of the 7th century another codex appears, the so-called *Ambrosianus* (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana D 36 Sup.) which contains for the first time some parts of *Peristephanon* 10, in addition to the texts mentioned above.[89] The arrangement of these first two manuscripts, which also do not include the *Praefatio* nor the *Epilogus*, seems to suggest that while Prudentius may have had some sort of collection of his works in mind, his works were circulated in the first instance as separate manuscripts and it is reasonable to assume the same for the hymns of the *Peristephanon*. A sample of this is the aforementioned Hymn 10, dedicated to Romanus of Antioch, which seems never to have been intended as part of a complete collection of hymns to the martyrs. Its subject matter is clearly focused on making an anti-pagan argument and in most manuscripts subsequent to those mentioned above it generally appears under its own title, *Romanus Contra Gentiles*.[90]

On the other hand, the exact date of composition of most of Prudentius' poems, beyond the *Praefatio* itself and his famous apology *Contra Symmachum*, remains unknown.[91] As noted in the introduction on Prudentius, the more traditional view is that the poet wrote the bulk of his works during his retirement years after serving at the imperial court, which would be sometime in the 390s CE, probably towards the end of

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[89] Len Krisak and Joseph Pucci, *Prudentius' Crown of Martyrs: Liber Peristephanon* (Taylor & Francis, 2019), 18.

[90] As Michael Roberts points out, *Peristephanon* 10 is always placed before or after the rest of the hymns of the *Peristephanon* in the manuscripts, never among them (Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius*, 9, n. 1).

[91] Prudentius speaks about the battle of Pollentia against the Goths (402 CE) but does not mention the battle of Verona of 403 CE. He most likely completed the second volume of the *Contra Orationem Symmachi* by 402 CE, although it was probably not ready for distribution until perhaps a year or two later.

the decade.[92] According to Palmer, it is unlikely that the poems of Prudentius circulated at a time before 392 CE, since Jerome makes no reference to the Hispanic poet in his *De viris illustribus*, in which we do find mention of Prudentius' contemporaries such as Ambrose or even Priscillian.[93]

For the hymns of the *Peristephanon*, Anne Marie Palmer suggests that it is plausible that the first six were written before Prudentius' appointment to serve at the imperial court.[94] The passage in Hymn 2 in which Prudentius speaks of the martyr Lawrence, whose tomb is in Rome, and laments that he cannot go to venerate his remains because "the Basque Ebro separates them,"[95] seems to plausibly suggest that Prudentius was physically in Hispania when he wrote it. The fact that he is not mentioned in Jerome's work reinforces the theory that, by then, Prudentius may not yet have left Spain so some of his writings were perhaps unknown beyond the borders of the Iberian Peninsula. Palmer's hypothesis is not at all far-fetched if we take into account that these first six hymns are the ones that mostly focus on martyrs of Hispania, while the remaining eight are dedicated to non-Spanish martyrs. Of the latter group, Hymns 11 and 12 stand out, the three on martyrs of Rome, in which the level of detail provided by

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[92] Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius*, 2.

[93] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 24. As Paula Hershkowitz rightly points out, this need not imply that Prudentius was not by then a well-known poet in certain circles, simply that he had no contact with these personalities known practically throughout the Roman world (Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 16-17).

[94] Jill Harries, "Prudentius and Theodosius," 71.

[95] See n. 10.

Prudentius when describing the places of worship linked to them allows us to hypothesize that they could have been written at a later time.[96]

This quick overview of the circumstances of its writing reveals the main problem of working with a poetic and hagiographical text such as the *Peristephanon*. In both cases the question revolves largely around the authenticity of the facts related in the martyrdoms and different *vitae* of saints and on the historicity of the protagonists of these stories. The questions surrounding the *Peristephanon* have also largely gone around this same issue, to what extent it is possible to extract authentic historical material from his hymns or, on the contrary, they should be considered "fictional hagiography" and, therefore, only deemed in their literary dimension.

One aspect that stands out from the historiographical review made in the previous section is that the almost non-existent certainties that we have about Prudentius' life have also generated suspicions about his work in terms of the possibility of extracting some kind of historical verisimilitude from his hymns. Concerns about the authenticity of either the earlier martyrs acts and whether those acts of persecution actually occurred, or the legitimacy of the subsequent martyr cult based on those texts have traditionally been a central point in historiography. The scope of what Éric Rebillard calls "the specter of authenticity" has led to a complete shift in perspective toward a focus on the narrative, the construction and ultimately, the invention or fictionalization of the story to the point

[96] Palmer analyzes Prudentius' vivid descriptions of these places as evocating the "normal emotional state of the pilgrim" (Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 29). These poems have supported the traditional interpretation that the vision of these places was what inspired Prudentius to evoke these same images in his hymns to Spanish martyrs.

of claiming that all martyr narratives have been frauds and forgeries at some point.[97] On the other hand, hagiography is a difficult territory to analyze in that it is not possible to encapsulate it as a literary genre as such with homogeneous and defined criteria, but rather as an umbrella term covering a large number of texts and different subgenres in which there is no general formal unity.[98]

This same heterogeneity is what we observe in the *Peristephanon*, from the style chosen by the author, the poetry, to the martyrs themselves that he memorializes in his hymns. This is partly explained by the time at which Prudentius writes and the type of audience to which these poems were addressed, which we must assume was primarily an educated audience, although there is no need to assume that it was all Christian. However, as Palmer notes, we cannot separate at this time the formation of a new Christian culture as something completely distinct from the traditional classical culture of the educated elite.[99] We find a great debt in Prudentius to this classical literary tradition of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Lucan or Seneca.[100] However, the references in Prudentius' poetry, as pointed out, do not reside solely in classical authors. According to Marc Mastrangelo, "Prudentius' broad notion of poetry engages with and redefines *Romanitas*

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[97] Éric Rebillard, *The Early Martyr Narratives: Neither Authentic Accounts nor Forgeries* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 3-4.

[98] Koen De Temmerman, Julie Van Pelt, and Klazina Staat, eds., *Constructing Saints in Greek and Latin Hagiography: Heroes and Heroines in Late Antique and Medieval Narrative* (Brepols Publishers, 2023), 16.

[99] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 37.

[100] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 98-204.

and *Christianitas* both individually and collectively."[101] In order to persuade other minds similar to his own of this accomplishment, Prudentius mixes in his poetry references to classical authors, but also to the Bible and Christian theology, which has been interpreted by Mastrangelo as an effort to produce a "grand-narrative" or "meta-narrative" for Roman Christian identity and its proper cultural, ideological and intellectual expression.[102]

The question remains whether this "meta-narrative" constructed by Prudentius in his poems is really intended to define a collective identity or is more an individual expression of devotion to the martyrs. I think we can see both dimensions in Prudentius' hymns, hagiography being "an intersection between communal and self-definition"[103] and poetry being a medium that, on the one hand, allows for a certain sense of cultural authority to be displayed and, on the other, allows for a greater degree of experimentation and innovation in the elaboration of his hymns. Prudentius can be found at this point of intersection between the gradual shaping of a Christian culture that adapts classical models to the new realities of the post-Constantinian world, and the author's own vision, which from the beginning imprints his perspective by placing himself in the preface at the center of his own poetry.

Despite being carefully crafted for a specific audience, the local Spanish aristocracy, we find in Prudentius' hymns also a high degree of introspection and

[101] Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity*, 2

[102] Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity*, 3.

[103] McGill and Watts, *A Companion to Late Antique Literature*. 378.

personal mediation with the martyrs about whom he writes. The *Peristephanon* speaks equally to the community, prefiguring a cult to the saints that acquires entity through the collective performance of the cults, and to the individual, inciting introspective reflection and the continuation of the performance of devotion to the martyrs through the reading of the hymns.

A final aspect that stands out in Prudentius' work as hagiographic writing is the choice of the "holy humans" that make up his hymns. At a time when we see a shift from the earliest heroes of the Christian imaginary, the martyrs, to new forms of holiness focused on the lives of ascetic saints, Prudentius chooses to remain with the martyrs, setting himself apart from other writers of his period who began similar enterprises such as Paulinus of Nola. This can be explained partly by the very nature of the figure of the martyr, in which their sacrifice and physical suffering for the defense of their faith constitute a sufficiently powerful message to take their sanctity for granted and potentially generate an attachment to them.

On the other hand, we have the context of Spain itself, in which we find even some competition between different religious identities, also Christian, which can also explain the figure of the martyr as a more powerful argument in the eyes of Prudentius. It can be interpreted that in this context Prudentius was thinking of his martyrs as examples of the endurance of the Christian faith in the face of the "unorthodoxy" he still observed in Hispania. The martyrs serve especially as role models for this purpose, exuding a greater sense of epic in proportion to the desert-ascetic holy humans. However, if Prudentius was only aiming to fabricate fabulous stories about saints for the pedagogical purpose of

providing role models for the Christian community, the model of the ascetic saint is much more effective in this period than that of the martyr. We are not at that time in Hispania in a context of open persecution of Christianity and for those actual and potential Christians who are not going to be exposed to torment or execution, the sacrifice of withdrawal from worldly life and deprivation offered a more effective and achievable role model.[104]

On the other hand, Prudentius' focus on the martyrs rather than the ascetic saint reinforces the hypothesis that, as I will develop later, some kind of cult already existed around some martyrs in Hispania such as Fructuosus. Michael Stuart Williams, in his study of Paulinus' *Natalicia,* argues that while the bishop of Nola tries to present Felix as both *confessor* and *martyr* in his text, when approaching the stories of miracles related to Felix's tomb and relics Paulinus, as an outsider of the local community, prefers to stick to the appellative of *martyr*, probably adapting his language to local Christians who were already more invested and attached to the Felix who rested in the tomb.[105] In the case of Prudentius, if we take into account the existence of already existing cults for some of the martyrs of the *Peristephanon*, the comparison with this analysis of Paulinus of Nola is very suggestive.

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[104] "Just as the sufferings of martyrs provided exemplars for other Christians who might at any moment experience the rigors of persecution, so too ascetics provided models that could inspire other Christians to similar acts of holy privation." (Mark Humphries, "Saints and Hagiography," in *The Early Christian World*, ed. Philip F. Esler [Routledge, 2017], at 504).

[105] Michael Stuart Williams, "Always Already a Martyr? Felix of Nola as *Martyr* and *Confessor*," in *Culte Des Saints et Litterature Hagiographique: Accords et Desaccords*, ed. Vincent Déroche, Bryan Ward-Perkins, and Robert Wiśniewski (Peeters Publishers, 2020), 158-162.

2. Cult of the Saints: Secondary scholarship

2.1 Peter Brown and his legacy

The methodology and elements that constitute the study of the cult of the saints in Late Antiquity have their foundational moment with the work of Peter Brown in the early 1970s. From this starting point, a first stage of scholarship on the cult of the saints extends from the 1970s to the end of the 1990s, defined by the most relevant works of Brown in which he expands many of the ideas pointed out in his first article on the "universe" of the holy man from different points of view, trying to analyze how this new concept of sanctity configures in a totally different way the social, political and religious relations of the period.

In this first moment of what would become an actual field in itself, Brown establishes the defining elements of what he calls the religious turn of Late Antiquity: as opposed to previous conceptions of the cult of the saints as a "vulgarization" of the popular superstition of Greco-Roman religious culture, heirs of the framework represented mostly by Edward Gibbon,[106] Brown vindicates certain continuities of the cult of the saints with this religious culture, such as the imperial cult,[107] as well as the role of the Late Roman elites in its propagation.

[106] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), 12 – 18; and Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1982), 274 – 275.

[107] Claudia Rapp, "Saints and Holy Men," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Vol. 2, Constantine to c. 600. Vol. 2*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 548.

Peter Brown's early works claim not only the religious but also the spatial shift that the cult of the saints introduces, insofar as, even in relation to the cult of heroes, the boundaries between the territory of the living and the dead remained totally delimited.[108] The real revolution proposed by Brown in the cult of the saints is centered precisely on the figure of the holy man, as mediator between the two worlds, as the figure who, thanks to his death, is closer to God than anyone else, while the material elements of the cult, the body of the deceased, his tomb or his festivities, continue to connect him to the earthly world and to the memory of Christians.[109] In the world of the "very special dead," the threshold between heaven and earth becomes blurred.

On these material elements and the connection between the holy man, the veneration of deceased bodies and the Christian monasticism that flourished from the third century onwards, Brown weaves in his early works the story of the Christian triumph through the saints' conquest of the territory. Christians completely reversed the traditional boundaries of city and countryside, of public and private, through a new map of holy places where the martyrs' relics of the Christian faith could be venerated, public tombs where the believer could connect with God through the holy bodies.[110]

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[108] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* 5.

[109] "The carefully maintained tension between distance and proximity ensured one thing: *praesentia*, the physical presence of the holy, whether in the midst of a particular community or in the possession of particular individuals, was the greatest blessing that a late-antique Christian could enjoy." (Brown, *The Cult of the Saints,* 88).

[110] On the idea of sacralization and mapping of holy places in this period see S. MacCormack, "*Loca Sancta*: The Organization of Sacred Topography in Late Antiquity," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. R. Ousterhout (University of Illinois Press, 1990), 7-40; and Robert A. Markus, "How on Earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 3 (1994): 257–71. The role of the cult of the saints in this aspect has been approached from different

It is important here to highlight the differentiation established by Peter Brown between holy man and cult of the saints, inasmuch as only a small part of the "holy human beings" had a cult as saints posthumously. The holy man is defined as the human being who, in life, stands out for his ascetic or hermit activity, for an unblemished Christian conduct that leads them to be considered as having a special connection with the divine. Although Brown places the rise of this concept of holiness in the deserts of Syria and Egypt,[111] the reputation of the "holy man" is not limited only to ascetic activity, as other authors have also pointed out. Other prominent figures of the religious sphere, such as martyrs and bishops,[112] or the civil sphere, such as certain emperors, could achieve this status of holiness during their lifetime.[113]

The realignment of the concept of sanctity proposed by Peter Brown also ties with a new configuration of individual identity and social integration, and this is one of his major concerns regarding the holy man insofar as the author represents him not only as

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perspectives, especially from the idea of Christianization of the territory through the tombs and shrines dedicated to the martyrs and the pilgrimage to these holy places to be in contact with the holy body of the saint. For regional studies on this topic see, for example, S. J. B. Barnish, "Religio in Stagno: Divinity, and the Christianization of the Countryside in Late Antique Italy," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 3 (2001): 387–402; D. Bar, "The Christianization of Rural Palestine during Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 54, no. 3 (2003): 401–21; or more recently, R. Sweetman, "The Christianization of the Peloponnese: The Topography and Function of Late Antique Churches," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 3, no. 2 (2010): 203–61.

[111] Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, 109 – 115.

[112] See for example Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (University of California Press, 2005); and Rita Lizzi, "Martino Vescovo Santo: Un Modello Di Santità Nell'Occidente Tardoantico," *Cristianesimo Nella Storia* 29 (2008): 231–66.

[113] On the concept of "pious emperor" see Jill Harries, "Pius Princeps. Theodosius II and Fifth Century Constantinople," in *New Constantines. The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th-13th Centuries*, ed. P. Magdalino (Ashgate, 1994) , 35-44; or more recently, Christopher Kelly, *Theodosius II. Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity. Cambridge Classical Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

the main intercessor with the divine, but also as a mediator of conflicts and relief of social tensions, especially in rural communities.[114]

This last point was expanded shortly thereafter in his article "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," where Brown delves into the theme of the *paidea* and the role of the saint as exemplar for the models of behavior and social interaction adopted by the elite.[115] The cult of the saints is now framed within a broader phenomenon of universalism, in which the Christian *paidea* absorbs in a certain way the old elites, moving towards a progressive "Christianization" of society.[116]

The methodology proposed by Brown, although with changes, expansions and evolutions, constituted the main paradigm during this first stage, especially the points associated with the Christianization of the empire and the Christian *paideia*, with special emphasis on the role of the saints as patrons and *exampla* counting with the promotion of aristocrats and churchmen behind them.

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[114] "Humanizing the sacred landscape of the countryside" (Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity,* 124 – 129). On the same lines, see J. H. Corbett, "The saint as patron in the work of Gregory of Tours," *Journal of Medieval History* 7, Issue 1 (March 1981): 1 – 13.

[115] Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations,* (Spring 1983): 1 – 25. On Christian *paideia* see also Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); B. Neil, "Towards defining a Christian culture: The Christian transformation of classical literature," in Casiday, A. and Norris, F. W. (eds.) *Cambridge History of Christianity* (2008), 317-342; or more recently L. I. Larsen and S. Rubenson, *Monastic Education in Late Antiquity: The Transformation of Classical Paideia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[116] Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity. Towards a Christian Empire* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), especially chapter 4, 118 – 158 and Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), with especial emphasis in the "narratives of Christianization and triumphalism in which the holy man acted as the perfect element of cohesion between the pagan and Christian elites (chapter 3, 55-78).

2.2 Developments, revisions and alternatives to Peter Brown's model

Peter Brown himself at the end of this period acknowledges one of the main problems of his work raised until then, the gap between hagiographic narratives and the social realities behind them, admitting that his original view of the holy man was heavily biased by primary sources that speak of individual men, but do not fully serve to answer how this concept fits into the larger religious picture of Late Antiquity.[117] One point that has been contested since then is the strong top-down view that Brown proposes as paradigmatic in overemphasizing episcopal propaganda as the main promoter of the cult of saints. As authors such as Kate Cooper point out, in his attempt to move the phenomenon of saint worship away from being a manifestation of popular superstition, the cult of the saints has been overly interpreted as a fabrication of the episcopal elite.[118]

Other scholars such as Raymond Van Dam extend the analysis by also stressing that in his foundational work *The Cult of the* Saints, Brown gives an excellent interpretation of the "function" of the saints in Late Antiquity, but not of the "rise" in a very specific way. The author points out that one of the main problems with Brown's

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[117] "I was following almost too closely the grain of our principal sources (on which I worked most intensely at that time) - the vivid *Lives* of individual holy men, usually written, by their disciples, after their death." (Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World*, 59). The author expresses similar thoughts in other works published during the 1990s: "Altogether, our study of holiness and its function in late antiquity must learn to trawl with a wider net than I had once thought was necessary" (Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity (1971 – 1997)," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 3 [1998]: 376).

[118] "The cult of the saints, in turn, has been seen as a by-product of the bishops' struggle to retain control of a church now inundated by a rich, articulate, and even imperious, laity." (Kate Cooper, "The Martyr, the Matrona and the Bishop: The Matron Lucina and the Politics of Martyr Cult in Fifth- and Sixth Century Rome," *Early Medieval Europe* 8 [1999]: 298).

perspective is to take for granted a certain homogeneity in the assimilation of the cult of the saints and the conception of sanctity in all regions of the empire.[119]

Thus, by the early 2000s there is less consensus on the "rise" aspect of saint worship or the universal idea that saints represented, echoing the main criticism of Van Dam and others; geographical and chronological diversities should be considered in measuring the reception and acceptance of saint worship in different parts of the empire.[120] Under this idea of "different saints, different cults," regional studies break in a certain way the previous idea of universality around the holy man and the cult of the saints, although in great part all these studies follow Brown's methodology applying it, nevertheless, to a concrete geographic space. Thus, we find in the historiography the emergence of the "local saint," trying to discern his image and function in his regional context and the concrete role of the place in the memorialization and expansion of the cult.[121]

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[119] Raymond Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 5. See also P. A. Hayward, "Demystifying the Role of Sanctity in Western Christendom," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward (Oxford University Press, 1999), 115-142.

[120] W. Treadgold, "Taking the Sources on Their Own Terms and on Ours: Peter Brown's Late Antiquity," *Antiquité Tardive* 2 (1994): 153–59. Advocating for a regional approach on the cult of the saints see for example, T. Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orleans, 800-1200* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[121] For example, D. Frankfurter, "Hagiography and the Reconstruction of Local Religion in Late Antique Egypt: Memories, Inventions, and Landscapes," *Church History and Religious Culture*, Special Issue: The Encroaching Desert: Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West, vol. 86, no. 1/4 (2006): 3-37; Pedro Castillo Maldonado, "*Angelorum Participes*: The Cult of the Saints in Late Antique Spain," in *Hispania in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives*, ed. Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowski (Brill, 2005), 151 – 188; A. Thacker, "Loca Sanctorum: The Significance of Place in the Study of the Saints," in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-43; Béatrice Caseau, "Sacred Landscapes," in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21-59; Marianne Sághy, "*Renovatio*

Although Peter Brown's paradigm suggests a certain idea of continuity between the period of emergence of the cult of the saints and the subsequent centuries, the periodization that these regional studies propose is clear, generally making a clear difference between the cults that emerged during the "Roman period" and those that emerged in the light of the new barbarian monarchies. This means that for regions such as Gaul the emergence of local saint cults is not generally dated before the 5th century, with a special revival from the end of this century onwards, with the figure of the "episcopal patron" or the "saint bishop" acquiring a special prominence with the emergence of figures such as Gregory of Tours.[122] For Britain, the dating for the emergence of local saints is even later, around the 6th and 7th centuries, and as John Blair points out, their nature is more distant from the figure of the urban bishop that we find in Gaul and nearer to the monastic and ascetic ideal the closer we get to the Anglo-Saxon period.[123]

Memoriae: Pope Damasus and the Martyrs of Rome," in *Rom in Der Spätantike: Historische Erinnerung Im Städtischen Raum*, ed. R. Behrwald and Ch. Witschel (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012); J. Ashkenazi, "St. Konon of Pamphylia: Scales of Veneration and Local Identity in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 30, no. 3 (2022): 433–62.

[122] J. K. Kitchen, "Gregory of Tours, Hagiography, and the Cult of the Saints in the Sixth Century," in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. A. C. Murray (Brill, 2016); T. Roatman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth Century Gaul. Rethinking Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022); on the same lines; S. Coates, "Venantius Fortunatus and the Image of Episcopal Authority in Late Antique and Early Merovingian Gaul," *The English Historical Review* 115, no. 464 (2003): 1109–37; M. A. Handley, *Death, Society and Culture: Inscriptions and Epitaphs in Gaul and Spain AD 300-750* (Achaeopress, 2003).

[123] John Blair, "A Saint for Every Minster? Local Cults in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Local Saints And Local Churches: In The Early Medieval West*, ed. Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford University Press, 2002), 455-494, at 460. See also Martin Biddle, "Archaeology, Architecture, and the Cult of Saints in Anglo-Saxon England," in *The Anglo-Saxon Church: Papers on History, Architecture and Archaeology*, eds. Richard K. Morris and Lawrence A. S. Butler (Council for British Archaeology, 1986), 1-31; and Karen George, *Gildas's De Excidio Britonum and the Early British Church* (Boydell Press, 2009).

Towards the 2000s we also see a shift towards exploring more deeply what is the specific connection between the notion of "holy" and asceticism, something that seems to be taken for granted but is not entirely clear, as authors like Averil Cameron point out.[124] Is asceticism a *sine qua non* condition for the individual in question to attain the status of "holy"? The connection between the phenomenon of asceticism and the holy man is a central question if we consider, again, the diversity that exists in terms of how asceticism is characterized, and the different spaces in which it develops according to the geographical context.

Without dwelling too much on the phenomenon of asceticism in Late Antiquity, we may note that Peter Brown seems to suggest that asceticism and holiness are interchangeable concepts, insofar as he places the emphasis of ascetic activity on sexuality - or its renunciation - and the body as a means to achieve the holy status.[125] However, as proposed by authors such as Susanna Elm in the late 1990s, asceticism etymologically speaking is essentially a discipline that seeks to achieve self-control in the face of passions beyond those strictly related to the body, including a wide range of emotions such as greed, anger or jealousy. The ultimate goal of ascetic activity, as Elm points out, is to achieve direct communication with the divine, without the need to

[124] Averil Cameron, "On Defining the Holy Man," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward (Oxford University Press, 1999), 34.

[125] "By the year 300, Christian asceticism, invariably associated with some form or other of perpetual sexual renunciation, was a well-established feature of most regions of the Christian world." Peter Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 1988), 202.

conceptualize the body as evil, as opposed to the soul as good.[126] Thus, the traditional interpretation proposed by Brown leaves out other models of asceticism within the Christian religion, for example, forms of asceticism in communities labeled as heretical in the literary sources.[127] The factor of the audience is an important element to consider here insofar as the status of holy depends above all on the validation of *the other* and the phenomenon of asceticism can present itself in various forms and involve different levels of detachment from the community.[128]

From the 2000s to the present, we can see Brown's revisions of his own work partly motivated by the enormous attention that his article on the holy man received after the first twenty years of its publication. As mentioned earlier, one of the main reflections revolves around the attribution of an excessive role of episcopal patronage in the rise of the cult of the saints, conceptualizing them either as a mere instrument at the service of this same social elite, or as an "aristocratizing" agent of the representatives of the Church. Brown delves even deeper at this stage into the function of the cult of the saints outside

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[126] Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God. The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Clarendon Press, 1996), 13 – 14.

[127] Jason David BeDuhn, "8. Manichaean Asceticism," in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. Richard Valantasis (Princeton University Press, 2000), 122 – 132. See also, Geoffrey G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (University of Chicago Press, 1992); Vincent L. Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Studies in Antiquity & Christianity (Bloomsbury, 1990); Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis, *Asceticism* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

[128] Ramsay MacMullen, "The Place of the Holy Man in the Later Roman Empire," *Harvard Theological Review* 112, no. 1 (2019): 6.

the realm of aristocratic beneficence, emphasizing its relationship with other actors participating in the cult, for example, through healing.[129]

Another aspect that caught Peter Brown's attention in these later decades is the breadth and geographical varieties of the cult, as he himself acknowledges in the 2015 enlarged edition of his famous *Cult of the Saints*: "The cult of the saints can now be seen against a far wider geographical background than I had done when I studied, primarily, its manifestations only in Augustine's Africa, parts of Italy and Gaul."[130] In his recently published memoirs, Peter Brown also acknowledges that the works conducted in the last two decades on Spain supposed a great enrichment for him, vindicating the role of this previously "silent" and peripheral area within the framework of studies on the late Latin West.[131] This implies the recognition of a broader spectrum of social background for the participants of the cult than the one previously supposed, which opens the door to reconsider the absolute social validation of the saints in Late Antiquity by integrating

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[129] Peter Brown, "Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity," *Early Medieval Europe* 9, no. 1 (2000): 16.

[130] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Enlarged Edition (University of Chicago Press, 2015), xviii. Along these lines, Brown introduces the concept of "micro-Christendom's" in an attempt to bridge the gap between universalism and regional diversity trying to thin about Christianity not from a center-periphery dynamic: "The religious leaders of every region claimed to possess at home a set of customs and doctrines which were ultimately derived from 'true' centers of Christian learning and practice in a wider world." Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* (Wiley, 2012), 359.

[131] "Until then, Spain had been somewhat peripheral to the study of the late Roman West. Now a new generation of ancient historians and archaeologists began to give a voice to the Iberian Peninsula—an immense and hitherto silent land." Peter Brown, *Journeys of the Mind. A Life in History* (Princeton University Press, 2023), 693.

perspectives of skepticism or even denial of the cult such as that of the 5th century author Vigilantius of *Calagurris*.[132]

From this point of view, more recent studies have focused on the response of the audience to hagiographic texts, trying to avoid the assumption that they necessarily share the same worldview as their authors.[133] As noted above, the model of triumphalism in which the role of the cult of the saints has been traditionally framed underestimates the various competitive identities within Christianity whose access to and interaction with the cult differs from the image presented by its patrons and promoters.[134]

On the other hand, more recent scholarship has also delved into new approaches to the construction of sacred spaces, highlighting works such as that of Kim Bowes, which emphasizes the role of private ritual activities and private worship spaces such as the household, which contrast with the model of what the author calls "episcopally supervised cult."[135] Under this perspective, other authors such as Éric Rebillard have

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[132] Marc Van Uytfanghe, "Le culte des saints et l'hagiographie face à l'écriture: Les avatars d'une relation ambigüe," in *Santi e demoni nell'alto Medioevo occidentale (secoli V-XI). Atti, 7-13 Aprile 1988. Tomo I* (Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1989), 155–202; Santiago Castellanos and Txomin del Pozo, "Vigilancio y el culto a los santos y sus reliquias en el occidente tardoantiguo," *Studia Historica. Historia Antigua* 13–14 (1995-1996): 405–20; David G. Hunter, "Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen: Ascetics, Relics, and Clerics in Late Roman Gaul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 3 (1999): 401–30; Rebecca J. Keller, "Jerome, Vigilantius, and the Cults of the Saints," *Theological Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2021): 283–92.

[133] Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints' Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great*, Oxford Studies in Byzantium (Oxford University Press, 2012) , 149 – 236.

[134] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. *Enlarged edition*, xix.

[135] Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity*, 2. From a different approach, Virginia Burrus also provides interesting reflections on the private and public dimension of worship. See Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (University of California Press, 1995).

come to contest the notion of Christian owned burials for the average Christian by emphasizing not only the private and familial character of the burials, but also the fluid coexistence in terms of space between Christian, pagan and Jewish burial places.[136]

In recent years, works such as that of Nicola Denzey Lewis echo these reflections to propose a new paradigm in the study of the cult of the saints, claiming that the Late Antique revolution identified by Brown is nothing more than an Early modern and 19th century reimagination that basically fabricated a whole record of Late Antique relics to emphasize the materiality of the cult from its very origin.[137] In doing so, the author critiques the basic notion of the traditional paradigm of saint worship, the conception of the dead body as a vessel of sanctity and purity asserting that in Late Antique Rome "the corpse never transcended the torpid world of decay and dissolution."[138] While Denzey Lewis's approach may seem radical, it is highly suggestive to address less normative ways of thinking about the cult that do not focus on the prominence of the corpse.

Peter Brown's recent reflections point to a more "dialogic" view of the cult of the saints that advocates to replace the idea of imitation of the saints with that of participation in the cult. Brown thus seeks to bring the "popular" element of religion back from exile by reconfiguring it from the idea of superstition to a shared sense of euphoria, the search

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[136] Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 22.

[137] Nicola Denzey Lewis, *The Early Modern Invention of Late Antique Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 12.

[138] Nicola Denzey Lewis, *The Early Modern Invention of Late Antique Rome*, 155.

for a common symbiotic link with the divine that cuts across all social classes equally.[139] In the next section, I will turn to a review of the cult of the saints' scholarship in Spain, a field, as will be seen, very dependent on Prudentius' works.

2.3 Cult of the saints in Late Antique Spain: review of scholarship

It is difficult to review the historiography of the cult of the saints without linking it to Prudentius and the *Peristephanon*. Since there are other aspects in Prudentius that must be considered, I will leave the studies more particularly focused on the poet for a separate section and here I will give a general review on the historiography of the cult of the saints in Hispania, including some references to the Visigothic period.

Modern historiography on the cult of saints in Spain has been strongly influenced, at least until the end of the 1990s, by the early work in the field carried out under Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975). In general, I have not taken political issues into account when reviewing the historiography relevant to my dissertation, but in the case of the scholarship written in Spanish on the topic of Christianity in Spain, the Francoist ideology of nationalist-Catholicism has had a great weight. This is an important aspect insofar as the Franco dictatorship constructs an idea of national identity that traces its existence back to the last centuries of Rome and especially to the Visigothic past, considering the antiquity of the Spanish nation in the mid-twentieth century as an identity that, in its central aspects, has remained unchanged ever since.[140]

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[139] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. *Enlarged edition*, xxxiii.

[140] On this topic see Jesús Torrecilla, "Spanish Identity: Nation, Myth, and History," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature* 33 (2009): 204-225.

The Spanish-Portuguese academy is strongly influenced by this framework and the interest in studying primitive Christianity in Hispania grows exponentially in this period with the desire to demonstrate or "create" a long-standing Christian past in the Iberian Peninsula, emphasizing the Christian nature of its settlers since ancient times.[141] The saints and their cult become, therefore, a living proof of this Christian past.

New critical editions of hagiographic texts that reflect this spirit appear, such as the compilation, translation and commentary of the so-called *Passionarum Hispanicum* by Ángel Fábrega Grau (1953-55)[142] which would have a new critical edition, much less biased by the context of Franco's regime, by Pilar Riesco Chueca in 1995.[143] However, undoubtedly the work that laid the historiographical foundations for the study of the cult of saints in this period was that of Carmen García Rodríguez, *El culto de los santos en la España romana y visigoda* (1966),[144] who analyzes the sources from a more critical

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[141] The Jacobean tradition occupies a central place in mid-twentieth-century scholarship, with works focused on demonstrating the historicity of the pilgrimage of St. James (Santiago) and his evangelizing activity, establishing him as the saint *par excellence* of Spanish national identity. See, for example, Salustiano Portela Pazos, *Orígenes Del Culto al Apóstol Santiago En España* (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1953); Jesús Carro García, *A Pelengrinaxe Ao Xacobe de Galicia* (Galaxia, 1965); and José Guerra Campos, "La Carta Del Papa León Sobre La Traslación de Santiago En El Manuscrito 1104 de La Biblioteca Casanatense," *Compostellanum: Revista de La Archidiócesis de Santiago de Compostela* 1, no. 2 (1956): 481–92.

[142] The *Passionarium Hispanicum* is a compilation, study and critical edition of hagiographic accounts dated between the 3rd and 11th centuries, including among its protagonists the martyrs of Prudentius. Ángel Fábrega Grau's first edition analyzes above all the late passions by means of which he tries to reconstruct the primitive *passiones* of the martyrs, generally with the aim of tracing their chronology back as far as possible. See Ángel Fábrega Grau, *Pasionario Hispánico (Siglos VII-Xl)*, vol. 1, Monumenta Hispaniae Sacra 6 (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1953).

[143] Pilar Riesco Chueca, *Pasionario Hispánico. Introducción, edición crítica y traducción* (Universidad de Sevilla, 1995).

[144] Carmen García Rodríguez, *El culto de los santos en la España romana y visigoda* (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1966).

perspective, especially trying to combat the idea of isolationism of the Iberian Peninsula with respect to the rest of the late-antique Mediterranean, also strongly linked to the rise of regional or peripheral nationalisms that boomed in the twentieth century in Spain, such as Catalan or Galician. However, the work also reflects part of the historiographical trends present during the Franco regime by approaching hagiographical sources only from a philological perspective, generating an excessive dependence on texts such as the *Peristephanon* of Prudentius that will be reproduced in scholarship in later decades.[145]

In this way, other authors try to approach the question of the cult of the saints from other fields of study such as archaeology, which had barely been contemplated in works such as that of Carmen García Rodríguez. At the end of the 1960s we must highlight the work of Pere de Palol, a pioneer in the field of the so-called "Christian archaeology," in which the search for archaeological remains of the cult of the saints becomes a central issue, although certainly following in part the trail of "proving" an early cult of the saints in the Spanish territory.[146]

The impact of Peter Brown's work made itself noticed from the 1970s onwards, incorporating an anthropological and sociological perspective to the already existing philological analysis. From this point of view, works such as that of Manuel Sotomayor

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[145] See, for example, Santiago Castellanos and Txomin del Pozo in the 1990s: "Specifically in Hispania, the veneration of martyrs is a fact at least since the 4th century, although we should not rule out, of course, the presence of earlier cultic manifestations - Concretamente en Hispania, la veneración de mártires es un hecho al menos desde el citado siglo IV, si bien no hay que descartar, lógicamente, la presencia de manifestaciones cultuales anteriores." (Castellanos and Pozo, "Vigilancio y el culto a los santos y sus reliquias en el occidente tardoantiguo," 406).

[146] Pere de Palol, *Arqueología Cristiana de La España Romana, Siglos IV-VI*, España Christiana (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1967).

began to consider the *function* of the saints and their hagiographic texts within the framework of Late Antiquity, which is established as a period with its own entity and dynamics. Following in Brown's wake, the phenomenon of the cult of the saints and the expansion of Christianity in Hispania is analyzed from a more universal perspective with the aim of placing this region within the general trend of changes and transformations of the Late Antique Mediterranean.[147]

Already in the 1990s, the work of Pedro Castillo Maldonado can be considered the most complete and systematic work of recent historiography published in Spanish on the cult of the saints.[148] The author performs here for the first time the titanic work of gathering all the written sources and archaeological evidences of the cult available up to the moment, trying to carry out a systematic study that updates the 1966 work of García Rodríguez. Some of the elements that characterize the post-Brown historiography emerge from his analysis, such as the rejection of the idea of the cult of the saints as an expression of "popular religiosity" or the key role of the ecclesiastical elites in its propagation, constituting the saint as a representative of the Christian triumph and

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[147] "The Church in Spain should not be considered as a "Church" imported from abroad, as something already defined and established, but rather as a communion of churches or communities that are emerging and developing from multiple messages and examples of various Christian elements that are reaching the most diverse parts of the Peninsula - La Iglesia en España no hay que considerarla como una Iglesia importada desde fuera, como algo ya definido y hecho, sino como una comunión de iglesias o comunidades que van surgiendo y desarrollándose a partir de una múltiple predicación y ejemplo de diversos elementos cristianos que van llegando a los puntos más diversos de la Península. Manuel Sotomayor, "La Iglesia En La España Romana," in *Historia de La Iglesia En España*, ed. Ricardo García-Villoslada, vol. 1 (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1979), 13.

[148] Pedro Castillo Maldonado, *Los mártires hispanorromanos y su culto en la Hispania de la Antigüedad Tardía* (Universidad de Granada, 1999). Castillo Maldonado examines aspects of the cult of saints traditionally associated with the Visigothic period—though he also addresses Prudentius and the earlier Decian and Valerian persecutions—such as the *inventio* and *translatio* of relics, the rise of the "saint confessor," and the increasingly widespread absorption of foreign saints.

emphasizing its pedagogical and indoctrinating function.[149] However, the main emphasis of Castillo Maldonado's work lies in discussing what he calls "the double life" of the martyrs, their dimension as objects of cult, but also, their human dimension as objects of persecution. The historicity of the martyrdoms is the main point of concerns for Castillo Maldonado insofar as the author analyzes the martyr cult as something inexorably linked to an existing and previous Christian-pagan conflict: "One must point to the triumph of Christianity in the pagan-Christian confrontation as the determining factor in the emergence of the martyrial phenomenon."[150]

To these works are added exhaustive studies in other fields that in one way or another are associated with the cult of the saints, many of them continuing the line pointed out above of linking the historical work on these issues to the prior assumption of the presence of a visible and recognizable Christianity in Hispania since the third century.[151] A very important branch of these works is developed on the previously mentioned idea of conflict and antagonism of identities such as the Christian-pagan and the representation of the barbarian in hagiographic sources generally identified with

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[149] Castillo Maldonado, *Los mártires hispanorromanos*, 14 and 440.

[150] "Se ha de señalar al triunfo del cristianismo en la confrontación pagano-cristiana como el factor determinante de la eclosión del fenómeno martirial. Castillo Maldonado, *Los mártires hispanorromanos*, 442.

[151] See, for example, Ramón Teja, "Ramón Teja, "La carta 67 de S. Cipriano a las comunidades cristianas de León-Astorga y Mérida: Algunos problemas y soluciones," *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* 7 (1990): 115–24; Francisco J. Fernández Ubiña, "Los orígenes del cristianismo hispano. Algunas claves sociológicas," *Hispania Sacra* 59, no. 120 (2002): 427–58, esp. 430-433; and Josep Vilella Masana, "Las iglesias y las cristiandades hispanas: panorama prosopográfico," in *La Hispania del siglo IV. Administración, economía, sociedad y cristianización*, ed. Ramón Teja (Ediplugia, 2002), 117-159.

pagan or heretical behaviors, being this stereotyping present in the Spanish sources also applied to certain regions such as *Vasconia* or *Gallaecia*.[152]

These studies have raised questions about the relationship between the dispersion of the cult of the saints and the incidence of invasions in Hispania. In this regard, we must highlight the work of Purificación Ubric Rabaneda (2004), which does not focus specifically on the martyr cult, but on the relationship between the Church and the barbarian states in fifth century Hispania. However, within her analysis, the author proposes a very interesting hypothesis regarding the evolution of the cult of the saints in the 5th century, pointing out that the martyr cult could have had a greater proliferation in Hispania in this century as a consequence of the incidence of the barbarians in the territory. In this way, Ubric Rabaneda establishes a connection between the sense of insecurity that may have arisen in Hispania after the invasion of barbarian tribes and the emphasis on the cult of saints as a response to that insecurity.[153]

A last aspect to highlight in the historiography of the cult of the saints is its connection with asceticism and the origin of monasticism in Hispania. It is generally considered that the first ascetic influences in the Iberian Peninsula begin to become

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[152] For example, Prudentius in *Peristephanon* 1: "*Iamne credis bruta quondam Vasconum gentilitas quam sacrum crudelis error inmolavit sanguinem?*" (1.94-95, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107).

[153] Purificación Ubric Rabaneda, *La Iglesia en la Hispania del siglo V* (Universidad de Granada, 2004)., 406-450.

generalized from the fourth century onwards,[154] taking as protagonists some of the figures who will also be related to the cult of the saints, such as Paulinus of Nola.[155]

Relevant for this dissertation topic is the link established between Priscillian and asceticism in Hispania, considering the so-called "heretic" as the introducer of ascetic ideas in the Iberian Peninsula, especially in the province of *Gallaecia*.[156] In spite of the controversy, the group of Priscillian and some of his supposed posthumous followers is taken as the model of rigid and proselytizing asceticism as opposed to the asceticism of individual retreat represented by Paulinus of Nola.[157] The background scenario for the development of these positions would be the rural fabric of *villae*, in which Christian and pagan aristocracy shared certain circles and spaces, a potential audience that has also been associated with the cult of the saints.[158] More recent historiography has delved into these questions especially trying to define the lines of interaction between pagan and

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[154] Mar Marcos, "Los orígenes del ascetismo y el monacato en Hispania," in *El cristianismo. Aspectos históricos de su origen y difusión en Hispania. Actas del symposium de Vitoria-Gasteiz (1996)*, ed. Juan Santos Yaguas and Ramón Teja (Universidad del País Vasco = Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2001), 201-233.

[155] Gregoria Cavero Domínguez, *Inclusa intra parietes. La reclusión voluntaria en la España Medieval* (Presses universitaires du Midi, 2010), 60.

[156] See, for example, José María Blázquez Martínez, "Prisciliano, introductor del ascetismo en *Gallaecia*," in *I Reunión Gallega de Estudios Clásicos (Santiago-Pontevedra, 2-4 julio 1979)* (Santiago de Compostela: 1981): 210-236; and Pablo C. Diaz Martínez, "Recepción Del Monacato En Hispania," *Codex Aquilarensis: Cuadernos de Investigación Del Monasterio de Santa María La Real* 5 (1991): 131–40.

[157] José M. Blázquez Martínez, "El Monacato de Los Siglos IV, V y VI Como contracultura civil y religiosa," in *Homenaje a Marcelo Vigil Pascual: la historia en el contexto de las ciencias humanas y sociales*, ed. María José Hidalgo de la Vega and Marcelo Vigil Pascual (Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1989), 97-122.

[158] See Alejandra Chavarría Arnau, "Aristocracias tardoantiguas y cristianización del territorio (siglos IV-V): Otro mito historiográfico?," *Rivista Di Archeologia Cristiana* 82 (2006): 201–30; and Alejandra Chavarría Arnau, *El final de las villae en Hispania (siglos IV-VII d.C.)* (Brepols, 2007).

Christian aristocracies, making use especially of archaeology to analyze the cult of the saints within the general framework of the expansion of Christianity in Hispania.

3. Historical context: Hispania as a unit of analysis

One of the key aspects to put Prudentius' view of the cult of the saints in context is to connect it with the general background of Hispania in the fourth century since we find in Spain his primary audience. It has already been noted above that Prudentius has been described as a "*villa*-poet" whose audience would be the elite retired on their large plots of land. For this audience, Prudentius would adapt the classical literature common to aristocratic education to the Christian tradition, creating a message that could be enjoyable and familiar to these groups. However, the context of Hispania has a wider diversity than the scope of the *villa*, despite the great growth that this type of settlement had in the Iberian Peninsula in Late Antiquity.

Prudentius' hymns have as protagonists the cities and, therefore, it is in the environment of the urban community in which the Hispanic poet visualizes the cult. To this it must be added that, as I will argue in the following chapters, the cities of Tarragona and Mérida most likely already had a certain community of cult around their patron saints. We should not focus the audience of Prudentius only in the scope of the *villae* but also in the urban population, since what the archaeological record shows is, precisely, a great interdependence between those urban centers that continued to be important even until the Visigothic period and their immediate surroundings of *villae*.[159]

[159] Chavarría Arnau, *El final de las villae en Hispania*, 113.

With these aspects in mind, in this section I will briefly explore the Iberian Peninsula in the fourth and early fifth centuries, the world that inspires Prudentius and in which he constructs the topography of the martyrs to whom he professes devotion.

The *Peristephanon* begins with an exaltation of the martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius of *Calagurris*, present day Calahorra, belonging to the province *Tarraconensis*. In the same province are *Caesaraugusta* (Zaragoza) and *Tarraco* (Tarragona), the latter still being the capital of the province at the time of the poet's life (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. Late Fourth Century Spain

Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, x.

The *Tarraconensis* covers the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula, flanked on its northern side by the Pyrenees mountain range, always conceived by the inhabitants of Hispania as their natural border to the north with the Gallic provinces.[160] On the east side, the Mediterranean coast, which left the way open by sea to connect with Rome and other important Mediterranean ports. The port of *Tarraco* continued to be an area of great commercial and urban activity until the sixth and seventh centuries, as evidenced by the various repairs made to the public baths located in the port area that were carried out throughout the fourth century. As Pilar Diarte Blasco points out, the maintenance of these public baths identified as *Thermae Montanae*, show us the vitality of the port and the city, which would continue to have a strong local *curia* and sufficient resources to restore and preserve this space.[161]

Through the *Tarraconensis* runs one of the longest and most abundant rivers of the Iberian Peninsula, the Ebro River, which also served as one of the main routes of communication throughout the province. The flow of the Ebro connects from its source the Basque territory and the Cantabrian Mountains, in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, with its mouth in the Mediterranean Sea, near Tarragona. The river crosses another city mentioned by Prudentius, *Caesaraugusta*, again an urban center of great importance thanks to its strategic position right in the center of several communication routes that

[160] "In former times everywhere beyond the Rhodanos and the isthmus bounded by the Galatic Gulfs was called Iberia, but today the boundary is placed at Pyrene, and they speak synonymously of Iberia and Ispania." (Strabo, *Geography* 3.4. 19, Duane W. Roller, trans., *The Geography of Strabo: An English Translation, with Introduction and Notes* [Cambridge University Press, 2014], 177).

[161] Pilar Diarte-Blasco, *Late Antique and Early Medieval Hispania: Landscapes without Strategy?* (Oxbow Books, 2018), 39.

connected the peninsula from south to north. Zaragoza was linked to the famous "Silver Route," which connected *Emerita* and *Asturica Augusta* and, from there, created an axis from west to east by a route that passed through *Caesaraugusta* and ended in *Tarraco*.[162] The city also sits right in the middle stretch of the Ebro, being a key point to access an exit from Hispania through the Pyrenees, also connected to the southwest of France and through Route I to Rome.[163] Although *Caesaraugusta* lived its best times under the rule of its founder, Augustus, the archaeological record does not show a decline in the late period. As Michael Kulikowski notes, "the commercial life of the forum lived on into the sixth century and its Tiberian fabric was maintained until the middle of the fifth. In the fourth century, moreover, there is positive proof of the forum's having retained the symbolic aspects of its institutional life."[164] The amphitheater of the city presents repeated repairs until the end of the sixth century which, as in the case of Tarragona, shows a still strong urban community that continued to maintain public spaces despite the difficulties of the period.[165]

The Ebro River and the land communication routes that linked the cities of *Tarraco* and *Caesaraugusta* on the west-east axis also included the third city of the

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[162] María Pilar González-Conde Puente, "La visita de Adriano a Hispania y la reparación de la Vía de La Plata," *Habis* 51 (2020): 137–60, at 140.

[163] Enrique Gonzalbes Cravioto, "La *Tabula Peutingeriana* y las vías romanas de Hispania," in *VIII Congreso Internacional de Caminería Hispánica* (Servicio de Publicaciones Ministerio de Transportes y Movilidad Sostenible, España, 2008), 10-11.

[164] Michael Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities* (The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 125.

[165] Michael Kulikowski, "Cities and Government in Late Antique Hispania: Recent Advances and Future Research," in *Hispania in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives*, ed. Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowski (Brill, 2005), 58.

Tarraconensis mentioned by Prudentius, *Calagurris*. The present day Calahorra did undergo some changes during the third century, losing part of the importance it had attested in the first centuries of the imperial period.[166] Archaeology shows a certain decline in municipal building activity in the late period, or at least in certain structures, as shown by the accumulation of ceramic remains at the bottom of the city sewers dating from the third century.[167] This could be indicative of a lack of capacity of the municipal *curia* to clean them on a regular basis.

We find another similar case in structures such as the circus, taking some materials from it for the construction of the wall in the second half of the third century.[168] This walling defines in a definitive way what would be the urban enclosure of *Calagurris* in the late period, reducing a little its perimeter with respect to the imperial period. However, it must be taken into account that *Calagurris* was mid-level important city in the region of La Rioja, between the Cantabrian Mountains and *Caesaraugusta,* but of medium size compared to the large urban centers mentioned above. Therefore, it is logical to suppose that the building impulse of the Augustan period was reduced in a later period, which did not mean that the city lost its urban activity. Archaeological remains of mosaics and other objects that could be classified as luxurious, dated to the fourth

[166] Urbano Espinosa proposes that *Calagurris* had some sort of importance in the judicial administration of the *Tarraconensis* in the second and third centuries. Urbano Espinosa, "*Iuridici* de la Hispania Citerior y *patroni* en *Calagurris*," *Gerión* 1 (1984), 314.

[167] Urbano Espinosa et al., "*Civitates* y *territoria* en el Ebro Medio: Continuidad y Cambio Durante La Antigüedad Tardía," in *Comunidades Locales y Dinámicas de Poder En El Norte de La Península Ibérica Durante La Antigüedad Tardía* (Universidad de la Rioja Servicio de Publicaciones, 2021), 56.

[168] Diarte-Blasco, *Late Antique and Early Medieval Hispania: Landscapes without Strategy?*, 41.

century, are also evidence of a continuity in the activity of the city, at least as far as the elites were concerned.[169]

Returning again to the Silver Route, the road takes us to the province of *Lusitania*, whose territory occupied most of present-day Portugal from the center of the Iberian Peninsula to the southwest. The province is bathed by two great rivers, the Tajo (*Tagus*) and the Guadiana (*Anas*), flowing out into the Atlantic Ocean, which made Lusitania a territory dominated by a fertile valley very suitable for agricultural activity. At the confluence of the Guadiana and one of its tributary rivers lies the capital of the province, *Augusta Emerita*, one of the most important cities of the Iberian Peninsula, also capital of the *diocesis Hispaniarum* after Diocletian's provincial reorganization.[170]

Of all the cities mentioned by Prudentius, Mérida is probably the most renowned and its importance as an urban center is fully documented even beyond the Visigothic period. Its strategic situation was unbeatable, being the central point of connection of most of the main roads that connected the different provinces of Hispania in the north-south axis and towards the northeast in a direct way.[171] The bridge built over the river in

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[169] Espinosa et al., "*Civitates* y *territoria* en el Ebro Medio," 54.

[170] On the arguments for identifying Mérida as the capital of the *Dioecesis Hispaniarum* see Laurent Brassous, "L'identification des capitales administratives du diocèse des Espagnes," in *Roma generadora de identidades. La experiencia hispana*, ed. Antonio Caballos Rufino and Sabine Lefebvre (Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 2011), 341.

[171] Through the Via XXV to *Caesaraugusta* and the Silver Route—which formed a continuous axis connecting the south and north of the Iberian Peninsula, from *Hispalis* (*Baetica*) to *Asturica Augusta* (*Gallaecia*)—Mérida was also linked to the *Via Augusta*, which connected Hispania south to north in the eastern side. Javier Arce suggests that this strategic location was the principal reason for choosing it as the capital of the *diocesis Hispaniarum* and the seat of the *vicarius Hispaniarum*. See Javier Arce Martínez, "¿*Hispalis* o *Emerita*?: a propósito de la capital de la *diocesis Hispaniarum*," *Cuadernos Emeritenses* 22 (2003), 43.

the Augustan period, still standing today, served as the main distributor of communications between the capital and the rest of Iberian Peninsula, being still a point of debate whether the Guadiana could have been a navigable river in Roman times, at least in certain sections.[172]

In the chapter dedicated to the martyr Eulalia I will enter to discuss aspects of why Prudentius, whose imaginary of saints is concentrated mainly in the Spanish northeast, considered dedicating an entire hymn to this city, but it can be said that *Emerita Augusta* was the example par excellence of a city known practically in all the corners of the Peninsula. After Diocletian's reforms, Mérida became the political and administrative center of Hispania and it can be said that also religious, since, as Purificación Ubric Rabaneda points out, it is also the best documented episcopal see of Spain for the fourth century.[173] Its new status as a capital city encouraged building activity during the fourth century, as well as the maintenance of public buildings.[174]

It can be concluded that the city of Mérida lived a stable development during the fourth century and it will not be until the fifth when we find more drastic changes in its urban activity, with the abandonment of spaces such as the theater probably in the first

[172] José María Álvarez Martínez, "El Tajamar Del Puente Romano de Mérida y La Navegabilidad Del Ana," *Revista de Estudios Extremeños* 71, no. 1 (2015): 37–66, at 56.

[173] Purificación Ubric Rabaneda, "La organización de la Iglesia hispana en los siglos IV y V," *Mélanges de La Casa de Velázquez. Nouvelle Série* 49, no. 2 (2019): 51.

[174] Their maintenance is attested through epigraphy and archaeological data (Pedro Mateos Cruz, "De capital de la *diocesis Hispaniarum* a sede temporal de la monarquía sueva. La transformación del urbanismo en *Augusta Emerita* durante los siglos IV y V," in *Territorio, topografía y arquitectura de poder durante la Antigüedad Tardía*, ed. Isabel Sánchez Ramos and Pedro Mateos Cruz [Instituto de Arqueología de Mérida, 2018], 131).

half of the fifth century.[175] The city was certainly affected by the Sueve (429 CE)[176] and the Visigothic (457 CE)[177] invasions, but this did not mean its disappearance or decay since, at the end of the fifth century, we find examples of restoration of structures such as the bridge over the Guadiana river.[178]

Neither *Baetica* nor *Gallaecia*, the two remaining provinces of the Iberian Peninsula, had martyrs to whom Prudentius had dedicated a hymn in the *Peristephanon*, although in the case of *Baetica* we find a brief reference in Hymn 4 to the martyrs of *Corduba*, Zoellus and Acisclus, as well as "three more martyr's crowns," without specifying their names.[179] *Galleacia* has no mention in the *Peristephanon* and it is not strange knowing the nature of Prudentius' work. In this province we find the greatest presence of the so-called Priscillianist heresy whose leader, Priscillian of Avila, had been executed in 385 CE, a date close to the possible composition of the hymns of the Peristephanon. After his death and perhaps burial in *Gallaecia,* the followers of

[175] Pedro Mateos Cruz and Luis Caballero Zoreda, "El paisaje urbano de *Augusta Emerita* en época tardoantigua (siglos IV-VII)," in *Actas Congreso Internacional 1910-2010: El Yacimiento Emeritense*, ed. José María Álvarez Martínez and Pedro Mateos Cruz (Ayuntamiento de Mérida, 2011), 6.

[176] Hydatius, *Chronicle,* 80 [90], in R. W. Burgess, trans., *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana: Two Contemporary Accounts of the Final Years of the Roman Empire* [Oxford University Press, 1993], 91. The city was proclaimed as capital by the Sueve king Rechila in 439, according to the bishop of Chaves (*Chronicle*, 111 [119], R. W. Burgess, trans., *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana*, 95).

[177] Hydatius, *Chronicle*, 175 [182], R. W. Burgess, trans., *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana*, 109.

[178] Reparations made by the Visigothic governor, Salla, and the bishop of the city, Zenon (Francisco José Gómez Fernández, "*Augusta Emerita* en el transcurso del siglo V. Morfología y vitalidad urbana," *Hispania Antiqva* XXVII [2003]: 277).

[179] "*Corduba Acisclum dabit et Zoellum tresque coronas." Peristephanon* 4.19-20.

Priscillian and his teachings continued to have a strong presence in the province and the bishop was revered practically as a martyr.[180]

Finally, mention should be made of the provinces of *Mauretania Tingitana* and the Balearic Islands. This North African region was incorporated into the *diocesis Hispaniarum* with Diocletian's reform, while the Balearic Islands were detached from the *Carthaginiensis* at the end of the fourth century.[181] Regarding the latter, the exact date when it became an independent province is unknown, but it is possible that for the date of writing of the first hymns of the *Peristephanon* it was still part of the *Carthaginiensis*, since there is no mention of Prudentius to the Balearic Islands. Regarding *Mauretania Tingitana*, we do find a brief reference in the *Peristephanon* to a martyr of its capital, *Tingis*, named Cassian.[182] There is hardly any data on this martyr and the first thing that can be found about him is the reference that Prudentius makes in Hymn 4. Nothing indicates that a cult to this martyr existed in Hispania before Prudentius or that one was established after the writing of his hymns, since no reference to him is found in the liturgical calendars or the lives of saints of the Visigothic period.[183]

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[180] Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (University of California, 1995), 102.

[181] Catalina Mas Florit et al., "El poblamiento rural de Menorca durante la Antigüedad tardía: Primera aproximación," *Revista de Menorca* 90, no. 1 (2007): 177–215, at 178.

[182] "*ingeret Tingis sua Cassianum, festa Massylum monumenta regum, qui cinis gentes domitas coegit ad iuga Christi*. - What was built by Massylian kings is Tingis; the ashes it will bring are Cassian's—he who tamed the pagans under Christ's power." *Peristephanon* 4.45-48, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 158-159.

[183] Jonathan P. Conant, "Europe and the African Cult of Saints, circa 350–900: An Essay in Mediterranean Communications," *Speculum* 85 (2010): 16.

Moreover, the Spanish martyrial topography portrayed in the *Peristephanon* suggests that the focus of his audience and his source of inspiration were mostly in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula, with *Emerita Augusta* and *Valentia* as the only exceptions. Cassian of *Tingis* thus falls outside the geographical framework that Prudentius sets for the martyrs of Spain, beyond the brief references to martyrs of individual cities in Hymn 4, all of which are very superficial.

This brief overview of fourth-century Spain provides the necessary introduction to understanding the world in which Prudentius commemorates his martyrs. I will be developing more specific aspects of these cities and their environments in later chapters, but it can be glimpsed from this introduction that Prudentius had as a frame of reference for the Hispanic martyrs Hispania itself, a space in which the internal vicissitudes of the territory and the gradual expansion of Christianity throughout its provinces mark much of the worldview that Prudentius transmits through his hymns. Late Antiquity in the Iberian Peninsula has usually been characterized as a period of decadence, especially in the urban space, which would have led to a progressive ruralization of society in the fourth and fifth centuries. The third century would mark the turning point towards the "catastrophe" and "decline" that the arrival of Germanic peoples to the Iberian Peninsula would entail in the following centuries. However, as Michael Kulikowski rightly points out, "this interpretation has deep roots in traditional historiography" and therefore, "there is, in short, no reason to think that the Spanish provinces felt any great impact from the political disruptions of the third century."[184] Contrary to the traditional idea of decline,

[184] Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities*, 67.

Prudentius' hymns precisely reflect a great dynamism of the urban space, a space that in some cases was surely enhanced by the presence of spaces of martyrial worship and the elites who may have been the potential audience of his poems.

4. Dissertation thesis and structure

One of the main objectives of this dissertation is to study the hymns dedicated to Hispanic martyrs in the *Peristephanon* taking into account mainly the context of Spain, thus emphasizing their Spanish identity. The hymns that have traditionally received more attention have been those dedicated to martyrs of Rome and Prudentius' visit to this city has been considered the main inspiration to write the collection of his hymns, trying to evoke through his poems the places of memorialization to the martyrs that he himself had contemplated in his pilgrimage to the eternal city.

However, this perspective overlooks the fact that the world in which Prudentius' poetry takes place is primarily in Spain, and this worldview is reflected in his hymns to Hispanic martyrs. Rather than studying these hymns in isolation or connected solely to his experience in Rome, my thesis focuses on Prudentius as a believer in the saints whom he memorializes, but also as an individual whose life and career largely took place in Hispania. Prudentius' education, aristocratic tastes, and literary forms of communication influenced by classical literature are mixed in his work with references to Christian theology, the Bible, and a central concern for a newfound orthodoxy. That is why in this enterprise of creating a new imaginary of Christian *paideia* and civic identity we must look for Prudentius' primary audience in the Spanish context of the fourth century, not

only in the great aristocratic owners of *villae*, but also in urban Christian communities such as the one to which Prudentius most probably belonged in his native *Calagurris*.

My dissertation aims to answer the following research questions: Does Prudentius reflect in his hymns already existing cultic practices and literary traditions of martyr cult in Spain? How does the idealized vision of martyrdom and the cult of the saints in Prudentius' compositions correspond to the available archaeological evidence from the cities he celebrates? What role does the poet play in shaping a Christian civic identity for the inhabitants of Hispania? Where does Prudentius situate the cult of the martyrs within the broader construction of a Spanish Christian identity?

My hypothesis is that the dynamics of appropriation and individual interaction with the saints in Prudentius' work, suggest that he does not present a unitary and homogeneous view of the cult, grounded on the binary perspective that either takes his hymns as purely literary inventions or interprets them literally as a reflection of material reality. My dissertation takes a middle-ground approach, suggesting that some of Prudentius' hymns are reflective of an already existing cult and these align with material evidence, while others are the product of Prudentius' desire of create and promote new cults for his audience. Prudentius' audience was not only the elites already established in Christianity but also potential new believers in a Hispanic context where we also find an important competition in this period between various religious affiliations.

The project has two starting points in terms of prior secondary scholarship. First, the fact that Prudentius is not a figure that has received extremely prolific historiographical attention like other authors of the period, such as Augustine or Jerome.

Anglophone scholars have generally dismissed him as a figure of local significance or focused on his work for its literary style and theological ideas. However, this approach has often overlooked Prudentius' influence on the evolving cultic practices of saint veneration. His work needs to be explored in terms of his role in incorporating traditions of storytelling and martyr worship that predate his work. In addition, most of the scholarship on Prudentius and the cult of the saints has been written in Spanish and relegated to a more local scope of research, preventing the incorporation of a whole series of invaluable evidence, especially archaeological, into the literary analysis of his work in English.

Chapter Two offers a close comparative reading of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 6 alongside the *Passio Fructuosi*, highlighting how the poet reworks earlier martyr literature to create his vision of the martyrs of *Tarraco*. The analysis shows how Prudentius preserves key narrative elements of the *Passio* while transforming its style, tone, and emphasis to suit new audiences and devotional contexts. This chapter thus argues that *Peristephanon* 6 stands at the intersection of transmission and innovation: it secures the memory of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius within a distinctly Spanish literary tradition while embedding their story in the broader Christian identity that Prudentius constructs across the *Peristephanon*.

Chapter Three extends the analysis to both textual and material evidence by examining Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 6 on Fructuosus of *Tarraco* and *Peristephanon* 3 on Eulalia of Mérida in light of the archaeological record. On the one hand, it evaluates the epigraphic and architectural remains that attest to the established cult of Fructuosus in

Tarraco; on the other, it considers how Eulalia's hymn presents her as an archetype of the virgin martyr, contrasting the literary representation of her devotion with the archaeological evidence for her cult site in Mérida. By situating the poet's account against the evidence of actual cult practice, chapter three demonstrates that the veneration of Fructuosus and Eulalia were already firmly established before Prudentius, and that his hymn both reflects and reshapes this lived devotional tradition.

Chapter Four will be devoted to the martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius of *Calagurris* (*Peristephanon* 1 and *Peristephanon* 8). I suggest that it is in these hymns that Prudentius finds himself in the most creative state, taking the aforementioned influences to shape and promote a cult to the martyrs of his hometown, based on the archetype of the soldier-martyrs. The programmatic nature of this hymn is noticeable in the city of *Calagurris*, where the poet applies all the available strategies of individual appropriation to elaborate a cult of saints Emeterius and Chelidonius and, eventually, create a community around them. I also propose in this chapter that Prudentius conceived the environment of the Ebro River valley as a "Christian space" as a whole and, therefore, his vision of the cult aims to create a connection between the cities of Tarragona, Zaragoza and Calahorra, conceiving the community of believers on the martyrs as a unit.

I will close the dissertation with a short concluding chapter in which I will reinforce the hypotheses presented in the text, as well as the final results. Throughout the text, I will interweave elements of archaeological evidence and material culture with the analysis of the texts. I will also take into consideration the context of the fourth century in

Spain for the writing of the *Peristephanon*, analyzing Prudentius' attitudes and concerns about paganism and heresy in the Spanish territory.

Chapter 2. Prudentius and the Martyrs of *Tarraco*: Engaging with an Established Tradition

Introduction

One of the central questions addressed in this dissertation concerns whether some of the saints praised by Prudentius in his *Peristephanon* were already venerated or known by the Christian communities of the cities he celebrates. This chapter specifically addresses Prudentius' representation of the martyrs of the Spanish city of *Tarraco* (modern Tarragona), a case where the poet demonstrably engaged with a pre-existing hagiographical tradition in constructing his martyrial narrative. By analyzing Prudentius' engagement with an earlier textual hagiographical tradition—the *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Fructuosi episcopi, Augurii et Eulogii diaconorum*—this study addresses a fundamental question in Prudentian scholarship: to what extent did the poet incorporate and transform pre-existing martyr traditions in his construction of saint cult in Spain?

This chapter will evaluate the rhetorical and theological modifications that Prudentius introduced to the narrative of these martyrs. As I will show, Prudentius' text confirms his familiarity with the earlier *passio* while revealing his particular doctrinal and literary concerns. The comparison reveals more than literary influence; it highlights Prudentius' conscious reconfiguration of the martyrial narrative for new theological, social, and cultural purposes in late fourth-century Hispania.

1. Introducing *Tarraco*: A central city in Roman Spain

To contextualize Prudentius' literary analysis, it is important to briefly introduce *Tarraco*'s urban and historical setting. As the capital of *Hispania Tarraconensis*, *Tarraco* governed the largest province in the Iberian Peninsula until the reorganization of the empire under Diocletian at the end of the third century.[185] The province encompassed the northeastern region of the Iberian Peninsula, bordered to the north by the Pyrenees, a mountain range traditionally regarded by Hispania's inhabitants as their natural frontier with the Gallic provinces.[186] Its eastern boundary followed the Mediterranean coastline, facilitating maritime connections with Rome and other significant Mediterranean commercial centers.[187] *Tarraco*'s port remained a hub of commercial and civic life into the sixth and seventh centuries, as evidenced by the repeated renovations of the port district's public baths throughout the fourth century. As Pilar Diarte-Blasco notes, the sustained maintenance of these baths—identified as the *Thermae Montanae*—indicates the enduring strength of the local *curia*, with sufficient resources to preserve essential

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[185] Until Diocletian's reforms, *Hispania Tarraconensis* comprised most of the northern, central, and eastern territory of the Iberian Peninsula, including the north of present-day Portugal. To make such a large territory more manageable in administrative and fiscal terms, Diocletian's reform modified the previous Augustean division, leaving the province of *Tarraconensis* with only the northeastern territory. The northwest was added to the province of *Gallaecia*, and the southeast and part of the center made up the new province of *Carthaginiensis*. *Tarraco* remained the capital of the new territorial division of the province, which retained other important urban centers such as *Caesaraugusta* and *Calagurris*. See Lauren Brassous, "Late Roman Spain," in *The Visigothic Kingdom. The Negotiation of Power in Post-Roman Iberia*, ed. Sabine Panzram and Paulo Pachá, Late Antique and Early Medieval Iberia (Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 39–58.

[186] Strabo, *Geography* 3.4.19.

[187] Patricia Terrado Orduño, *El Puerto de Tarraco En Época Romana (Siglos II a. C. – III d. C.). Fuentes, Historiografía y Arqueología* (Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, 2019), 47. See also César Carreras and Pau de Soto, "The Roman Transport Network: A Precedent for the Integration of the European Mobility," *Historical Methods* 46, no. 3 (2013): 117–33.

public infrastructure.[188] Although *Tarraco* began to lose prominence to *Barcino* (modern Barcelona) toward the end of the fifth century, particularly due to the disruptions caused by military activity in the region, it nevertheless persisted as a significant urban center throughout the period of invasions.[189]

As one of the most prominent cities in the Iberian Peninsula, *Tarraco* almost certainly supported a substantial Christian community by the late fourth and early fifth centuries, when Prudentius composed his martyrial hymns. However, given the long-standing status and regional significance of the city, it is reasonable to conclude that Christian presence in *Tarraco* extended back earlier. The earliest literary evidence suggesting the possible existence of a Christian community in *Tarraco* appears in the *Passio Fructuosi* itself, which portrays an organized ecclesiastical structure under episcopal leadership by the mid-third century.

This foundational text not only preserves the memory of bishop Fructuosus and his deacons but also provides essential context for understanding how their cult was later reshaped by Prudentius. In the following section, I turn to a comparative analysis of the *Passio Fructuosi* and *Peristephanon* 6, exploring how Prudentius draws upon, reinterprets, and recasts this earlier martyrdom narrative within the poetic and theological framework of his own time. This comparative approach reveals not only Prudentius'

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[188] Pilar Diarte-Blasco, *Late Antique and Early Medieval Hispania: Landscapes without Strategy?*, 39.

[189] Josep M. Macías, "*Tarraco* en la Antigüedad Tardía: Un proceso simultáneo de transformación urbana e ideológica," in *Los Orígenes Del Cristianismo En Valencia y Su Entorno*, ed. Albert Ribera i Lacomba (Ajuntament València, 2000), 265. See also Josep M. Gurt Esparraguera and Cristina Godoy Fernández*, "Barcino, de sede imperial a urbs regia* en época visigoda," in *Sedes Regiae: (Ann. 400-800)*, ed. Gisela Ripoll López et al. (Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres, 2000), 425-466.

literary techniques but also the evolving theological and cultural concerns that shaped Christian identity in Hispania between the third and fifth centuries.

2. From *passio* to hymn: Tracing Martyr Narratives in the *Passio Fructuosi*

2.1. The Decian and Valerian Persecutions: Setting the Stage for Fructuosus' Martyrdom

The primary evidence for Prudentius' engagement with pre-existing martyrial traditions in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon* is, as mentioned above, the *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Fructuosi episcopi, Augurii et Eulogii diaconorum*, a text composed prior to his poetic work.[190] This hagiographical account documents the martyrdom of Bishop Fructuosus of *Tarraco* and his deacons, Augurius and Eulogius, on January 21, 259 CE, during the persecution initiated by Emperor Valerian and his co-regent son Gallienus in 257.

The historical context of this martyrdom is a particularly turbulent period in Roman history, characterized by both political upheaval and religious transformation. The intensified scrutiny of Christian communities must be understood within a broader imperial context marked by internal instability and external threats. Between the assassination of Severus Alexander in 235 and the rise of Diocletian in 284, the Roman

[190] Augustine delivered a sermon, likely based on his knowledge of the *Passio Fructuosi*, "*In natali martyrum Fructuosi episcopi, Augurii et Eulogii diaconorum*" (On the birthday of the martyr Fructuosus, bishop, and Augurius and Eulogius, deacons, ca. January 21, 391/396), (*PL* 38, 1247-1252; English translation in Augustine, *Sermons (273-305A) on the Saints*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. 8, Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century, Part III [New City Press, 1994], 17-22; *cf.* Robert Wiśniewski, Cult of Saints, E02218 - http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02218). This suggests that their fame had reached well beyond Hispania by the end of the fourth century, and that the martyrs' tradition was known by others besides Prudentius prior to the writing of the *Peristephanon*.

Empire endured a period of political instability, with military coups and frequent changes of leadership that undermined the authority of imperial rule.[191] Within this climate, imperial concerns about Christian loyalty were not merely religious but political: Christians' refusal to offer sacrifices to the gods was perceived as a direct challenge to imperial cohesion and civic unity, as it undermined the expected public expressions of loyalty to the state.[192]

These conditions shaped the imperial response to religious minorities, especially Christians, and set the stage for the events narrated in the *Passio Fructuosi*. However, the martyrdom of Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius is framed not only within this turbulent political context, but also amid significant internal ecclesiastical controversy surrounding the treatment of *lapsi*—those who had apostatized during the Decian persecution (249–

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[191] The period of instability in the third century did not affect the various regions of the Empire uniformly. At the provincial level, we observe divergent patterns of social and economic development, with some areas remaining relatively insulated from the disruptions experienced elsewhere. The once-prevailing notion of a generalized, systemic "total crisis" has been largely overturned by recent scholarship, as archaeological and textual evidence increasingly demonstrates that widespread social, economic, and demographic collapse was not a universal phenomenon. See Lukas De Blois, "The Crisis of the Third Century A.D. in the Roman Empire: A Modern Myth?," in *The Transformation of Economic Life under the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Second Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, C. 200 B. C. - A. D. 476), Nottingham, July 4-7 2001*, ed. Lukas De Blois and John Rich (J. C. Gieben, 2002), 204-217.

[192] It is unclear whether the first empire-wide persecution initiated by Decius in the mid-third century was specifically directed at Christians. Available evidence suggests that the edict was framed as a universal command, binding all inhabitants of the empire without explicitly singling out any particular religious group. However, its implementation at the provincial level would have required extensive supervision by local authorities. As Robin Lane Fox points out, the enforcement of the edict across the entire empire by local officials would have been "a bureaucratic nightmare." Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (Penguin, 2006), 420. It makes sense to think that just some part of the population, maybe only Christians, were the ones to submit to this procedure. As Garnsey and Saller note: "It is not even clear that the original edict of Decius was aimed at Christians as such, although the authorities would certainly have been aware that there were 'atheists' abroad who would absent themselves from the great religious jamboree planned by the emperor." (Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire. Economy, Society and Culture* [University of California Press, 2015], 198). In any case, Decius was surely not unaware that the orders of this edict would particularly affect Christians.

251 CE). Decius was the first emperor to mandate that all imperial subjects sacrifice to Rome's deities and obtain certificates (*libelli*) documenting their compliance.[193]

The Decian persecution also provides the earliest mention to Christian communities in Hispania.[194] In Epistle 67 of his correspondence, Cyprian of Carthage references events in Spain during the aftermath of Decius' edict.[195] Addressed to the Spanish bishop Felix of *Legio-Astorga* and Aelius, a deacon representing the bishopric of *Emerita Augusta*, the letter responds to an earlier inquiry concerning the possible

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[193] There is no surviving copy of Decius' edict, nor do we know its precise wording. However, the general content of the edict and the orders it imposed can be reconstructed with reasonable reliability through various Christian sources that are contemporary with, or close in time to the events. Among these, the most significant are the letters of Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, written during his time in hiding during the persecution, and his treatise *De Lapsis*. Additionally, forty-six *libelli*—certificates of sacrifice from Egypt preserved on papyrus—offer invaluable material evidence of the edict's orders. See James B. Rives, "The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 135–136 and more recently Paul Schubert, "On the Form and Content of the Certificates of Pagan Sacrifice," *Journal of Roman Studies* 106 (2016): 172–98.

[194] Irenaeus of Lyon makes a passing reference to Spain in his treatise *Against Heresies* (ca. 200 CE) when speaking of the universality of the Church: "*Nam etsi in mundo loquelae dissimiles sunt, sed tamen uirtus traditionis una et eadem est. Et neque hae quae in Germania sunt fundatae Ecclesiae aliter credunt aut aliter tradunt, neque hae quae in Hiberis sunt, neque hae quae in Celtis, neque hae quae in Oriente, neque hae quae in Aegypto, neque hae quae in Libya, neque hae quae in medio mundi sunt constitutae* - For, though the languages throughout the world are dissimilar, nevertheless the meaning of the tradition is one and the same. To explain, the churches which have been founded in Germany do not believe or hand down anything else; neither do those founded in Spain or Gaul or Libya or in the central regions of the world." (Irenaeus of Lyon, 10.2, *Against the Heresies (Book I)*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, vol. I, Ancient Christian Writers 55 [New York-Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 1992], 49; Latin from Irénée de Lyon, *Contre Les Hérésies. Livre I. Introduction, Notes Justificatives, Tables*, trans. Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau, Tome II, Sources Chrétiennes 264 [Les Editions du Cerf, 1982], 158, 160). This would technically be the first reference to Christianity in Spain, but it is too brief and vague to conclude that Christianity was present in the Iberian Peninsula so far back in time.

[195] The opening of Epistle 67 identifies the ecclesiastical authorities present at the synod—more than thirty-seven attendees, most of them African bishops—and specifies its recipients by name—Felix and Aelius—as well as the cities they represented: *Legio-Asturica*, both cities located within the large third-century province of *Hispania Tarraconensis*, and *Emerita Augusta*, the capital of *Lusitania*; Cyprian *Ep.* 67, *Saint Cyprian. Letters (1-81)*, trans. Sr. Rose B. Donna, vol. 51, The Fathers of the Church (The Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 230-231. I will be using this translation from now on for the analysis of Cyprian's correspondence. For the Latin text I use *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III, 2*, ed. G. F. Diercks, CCSL 3C (Brepols, 1996).

readmission of two bishops—Basilides and Martial—who had apostatized during the persecution by acquiring certificates of sacrifice. The ecclesiastical authorities in Spain had opposed their readmission and appointed replacements—Felix for Basilides in *Legio-Asturica* and Sabinus for Martial in *Emerita Augusta*—viewing their capitulation to imperial demands as unacceptable.[196]

The response from the African synod, convened by Cyprian in 254, clearly supported the decision of the Spanish Church: neither bishop was to be reinstated. Their previous acceptance of *libelli* and renunciation of the Christian faith were seen as acts of moral failure and weakness. The bishop of Carthage asserts categorically that:

> Having these matters before our eyes and carefully and religiously considering in the ordinations of bishops, we ought to choose none but spotless and upright priests who, offering Sacrifices holily and worthily to God, may be able to be heard in the prayers which they offer for the safety of the people of the Lord … Basilides and Martial have been contaminated with the abominable certificate of idolatry.[197]

Apostasy, in Cyprian's view, disqualified Basilides and Martial from holding ecclesiastical office, as bishops were expected to be free from all stain of sin and serve as

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[196] "*Cum in unum conuenissemus, legimus litteras uestras, fratres carissimi, quas ad nos per Felicem et Sabinum coepiscopos nostras pro fidei uestrae integritate et pro dei timore fecistis, significantes Basilidem et Martialem libellis idolatriae conmaculatos et nefandorum facinorum conscientia uinctos episcopatum gerere et sacerdotium dei administrare non oportere*. - When we had come together, dearly beloved Brethren, we read your letter which you sent to us through Felix and Sabinus, our fellow bishops, in the integrity of your faith and fear of the Lord, signifying that Basilides and Martial, contaminated by the certificates of idolatry and bound by the consciousness of heinous deeds, ought not to govern the bishopric and administer the priesthood of God." (Cyprian *Ep.* 67. I.1*,* G. F. Diercks, *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III, 2*, 447; *Letters (1-81)*, trans. Sr. Donna, Fathers of the Church 51*,* 231-232).

[197] Cyprian *Ep.* 67.II.2 and VI.1, *Letters (1–81),* trans. Sr. Donna, *Fathers of the Church* 51, 233 and 236. "*Quae ante oculos habentes et sollicite ac religiose considerantes in ordinationibus sacerdotum non nisi inmaculatos et integros antistites eligere debemus, qui sancte et digne sacrificia deo offerentes audiri in precibus possint … Basilides et Martialis nefando idolatriae libello contaminati sint*." (G. F. Diercks, *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III, 2*, 449 and 456).

moral exemplars for their communities. He further frames this concern in terms of spiritual contagion, warning of the communal consequences of reinstating apostates:

> Let not the people flatter themselves as if they could be safe from contagion of sin, communicating with a sinful priest and yielding their obedience to the unjust and unlawful episcopacy of their leader… Because of this, a people who obey the precepts of the Lord and fear God ought to separate themselves from a sinful leader and should not take part in the sacrifices of a sacrilegious bishop …[198]

This fragment clearly reflects Cyprian's concern that reinstated apostate bishops might influence their congregations to follow their example, obtaining sacrificial certificates and abandoning Christian faith in times of persecution.

Cyprian endorsed the decision of the Spanish bishops not to reinstate the apostates and supported the appointment of Felix and Sabinus to the episcopal sees of *Legio-Asturica* and *Emerita Augusta*. His response to the Spanish episcopate also stands in contrast to the more lenient approach taken by the Roman Church in this matter. The complexity of the case is evident in Basilides' actions; having initially resigned his episcopal office voluntarily following his apostasy, he subsequently approached Pope Stephen seeking reinstatement through what Cyprian characterized as deceptive means.

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[198] Cyprian *Ep.* 67.III.1, *Letters (1–81),* trans. Sr. Donna, *Fathers of the Church* 51, 233-234. "*Nec sibi plebs blandiatur quasi inmunis esse a contagio delicti possit cum sacerdote peccatore communicans et ad iniustum atque inlicitum praepositi sui episcopatum consensum suum commodans … Propter quod plebs obsequens praeceptis dominicis et deum metuens a peccatore praeposito separare se debet, nec se ad sacrilegi sacerdotis sacrificia miscere …*" (G. F. Diercks, *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III, 2*, 450-452).

In his response to the bishops of Hispania, Cyprian strongly criticizes this maneuver and reaffirms the local Church's decision to reject Basilides' readmission to the episcopal office:

> We cannot rescind this ordination [of Felix and Sabinus], valid according to the law, because Basilides, after his crimes had been detected and laid bare by the confession of his own conscience, hastening to Rome, to solicit for himself unjustly to be reinstated in the bishopric from which he had rightly been deposed, deceived our colleague, Stephen, who is far away and unacquainted with the truth of the matter presented.[199]

Drawing on different passages from Scripture, Cyprian argues that bishops tainted by the sins of idolatry and deceit should not only be prevented from being reinstated to their ecclesiastical offices but also required to demonstrate genuine repentance. For those who had performed sacrifices to pagan deities, Cyprian prescribed rigorous penance, stipulating that reconciliation with the Church should only be granted under this condition.[200] The fact that the bishops of Hispania addressed their inquiry to the African synod suggests that they anticipated support for their decision not to reinstate apostates and recognized a shared doctrinal position with the Church of Carthage.

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[199] Cyprian *Ep.* 67.V.3, *Letters (1–81),* trans. Sr. Donna, *Fathers of the Church* 51, 236. "*Nec rescindere ordinatione iure perfectam potest quod Basilides post crimina sua detecta et conscientiae etiam propriae confessione nudata Romam pergens Stephanum collegam nostrum longe positum et gestae rei ac ueritatis ignarum fefellit, ut exambiret reponi se iniuste in episcopatum de quo fuerat iure depositus.*" (G. F. Diercks, *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III, 2*, 455).

[200] "*Cornelius collega noster, sacerdos pacificus ac iustus et martyrio quoque dignatione domini honoratus, decreuerit eiusmodi homines ad paenitentiam quidem agendam posse admitti, ab ordinatione autem cleri atque sacerdotali honore prohiben*. - Cornelius, our colleague, a bishop, peaceful and just and honored by the condescension of the Lord with martyrdom also, decreed that men of this type could, indeed, be admitted to the performance of penance, but that they were to be excluded from clerical ordination and from the episcopal honor." (Cyprian, *Ep.* 67.VI.3, G. F. Diercks, *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III, 2*, 457; *Letters (1–81),* trans. Donna, *Fathers of the Church* 51, 237).

In times of persecution, bishops were expected to exemplify irreproachable conduct. As Christian communities framed persecution as spiritual warfare, clergy were called to act as soldiers in God's army—prepared to fight and die for their faith:

> Christ everywhere looks upon His soldier who fights because of the persecution for the honor of His Name, and gives a reward to him when he dies, as He promised that He would give in the resurrection (...) Let us imitate, dearly beloved Brethren, the just Abel, who initiated martyrdoms since he was the first to be killed for justice.[201]

In this view, bishops should be the first to offer themselves in defense of the faith, providing moral and spiritual leadership through their willingness to endure martyrdom. The Spanish bishops' appeal to Cyprian suggests their adherence to this martyrological ideal, expecting their ecclesiastical leadership and the entire Christian community to prefer martyrdom over apostasy. All believers— "the soldiers of Christ"—were expected to embody the same steadfastness, making episcopal martyrdom a model of spiritual strength for the entire congregation.

The Decian persecution uncovered internal divisions within the Christian churches on how Christian communities should respond to persecution. The position of Cyprian and the bishops of Hispania helped establish a normative model of behavior, particularly for bishops, emphasizing their obligation to serve as exemplary witnesses to

[201] Cyprian, *Ep.* 58. And V.1, *Letters (1–81),* trans. Donna, *Fathers of the Church* 51, 166-167. "*spectat militem suum Christus ubicumque pugnantem et persecutions causa pro nominis sui honore morienti praemium reddit quod daturum se in resurrectione promisit. … Imitemur, fratres dilectissimi, Abel iustum qui initiauit martyria dum propter iustitiam primus occiditur*." (G. F. Diercks, *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III, 2*, 325).

the faith before Roman authorities. For these leaders, dying for their faith is unquestionably a higher spiritual calling than earthly survival.[202]

This paradigm was soon put to the test in the Iberian Peninsula. Only six years after the Decian persecution ended, Fructuosus and his deacons were martyred during the renewed wave of repression under Emperor Valerian (257–260 CE). In this same period, Cyprian himself was executed in 258 CE, thus fulfilling the ideals he had once set forth for others.

Valerian's persecution emerged from contextual pressures similar to those shaping Decius' earlier persecution. Although his early reign was marked by relative peace and religious tolerance, this abruptly shifted in response to growing internal instability and external military threats, particularly along the eastern frontier with the Sasanian Empire.[203] In 257 CE, Valerian issued his first edict against Christians, one that directly targeted the ecclesiastical hierarchy in an attempt to dismantle the Church's

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[202] "In strong opposition to post-Yavneh rabbinic Judaism, early Christianity unabashedly presented itself as a sacrificial religion … The language of martyrdom, strikingly, is replete with allusions to sacrifice. [But] the martyrs do not offer sacrifice, they are the sacrifice, and no reciprocity, no immediate *quid pro quo* is expected from the divinity. In that sense, Christian martyrdom reflects a radical change in the conception of sacrifice, a fundamental break in the very nature of religion." (Guy G. Stroumsa, "The End of Sacrifice: Religious Mutations of Late Antiquity," in *The Roman Empire in Context: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Johann P. Arnason and Kurt A. Raaflaub [Wiley-Blackwell, 2011], 142).

[203] "In the first years of his reign Valerian made a serious attempt to restore a measure of peace and stability to all of the empire's inhabitants, including the Christians … What prompted Valerian's abrupt change in imperial religious policy in August 257? The extant sources indicate that this shift in policy resulted from the vast number of disasters, both political and economic, which rocked the empire from 255 to 258." (Christopher J. Haas, "Imperial Religious Policy and Valerian's Persecution of the Church, A.D. 257–260," *Church History* 52, no. 2 [1983]: 135-136).

organizational structure.[204] A subsequent rescript in 258 CE expanded these measures; as Cyprian's correspondence confirms, Valerian specifically ordered the imprisonment of bishops, priests, and deacons, intensifying pressure on the Church's leadership.[205]

Having established the historical context within which Fructuosus and his deacons faced martyrdom, this analysis now turns to a detailed examination of the literary accounts documenting their sacrifice. The following section provides a comparative study of the *Passio Fructuosi* and Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 6, beginning with critical questions concerning the authorship and chronology of the earlier martyrial narrative.

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[204] Once again, the content of Valerian's edicts must be reconstructed through contemporary Christian authors or those writing shortly after the events. Among the principal sources are Cyprian's correspondence and the letters of Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, addressed to a bishop named Germanus—whose see remains unknown—and to two other figures, Domitius and Didymus, both otherwise unidentified, preserved in Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* (7.10–12). The *Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani*, which narrates the events surrounding the execution of the bishop of Carthage and was likely composed shortly after his martyrdom, also records in detail the contents of Valerian's first edict through the interrogation conducted by the proconsul Paternus. The first edict issued by Valerian contained the standard requirement to participate in the rites of the state religion. However, it also introduced new measures that made it clear this time that Christians were its specific targets: "[*Valerianus et Gallienus*] *Praeceperunt etiam ne in aliquibus locis conciliabula faciant nec coemeteria ingrediantur. si quis itaque hoc tam salubre praeceptum non obseruauerit, capite plectetur*. - The emperors have also given orders that no meetings are to be held anywhere, nor shall they [Christians] enter the burial areas. Hence if anyone does not observe this very sound order, he will receive the capital penalty." (*Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani* 1.7, Herbert A. Musurillo, ed., *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs. Introduction, Texts and Translations by Herbert Musurillo* [Clarendon Press, 2000], 171).

[205] "*Quae autem sunt in uero ita se habent, rescripsisse. Valerianum ad senatum ut episcopi et presbyteri et diacones in continenti animaduertantur, senatores uero et egregii uiri et equites Romani dignitate amissa etiam bonis spolientur et si ademptis facultatibus christiani esse perseuerauerint, capite quoque multentur*. - But the things which are true in them are these: that Valerian had sent a rescript to the Senate that bishops and priests and deacons should be punished immediately, but senators and outstanding men and Roman knights should lose their rank and should also be deprived of their goods and, if, after their means had been taken away, they still persevere as Christians, they should also be deprived of their heads." (Cyprian, *Ep.* 80.I.2, G. F. Diercks, *Sancti Cypriani Episcopi Opera. Pars III, 2*, 626-627; *Letters (1–81),* trans. Donna, *Fathers of the Church* 51, 323).

2.2 Chronology and Authorship of the *Passio Fructuosi*

The arrest of Fructuosus and his deacons occurred on January 16, 259 CE, just one year after the promulgation of Valerian's rescript in 258. Unlike the bishops discussed in Cyprian's correspondence, none of these three clerics apostatized from their faith. Consistent with the ecclesiastical position advocated by Cyprian and apparently embraced by the Spanish church, Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius faced public execution in the amphitheater of *Tarraco*, embodying the ideal of episcopal steadfastness under persecution.

The *Passio Fructuosi* is the first hagiographical account of which we have evidence for Hispania. Its primary function was likely commemorative, recording the martyrdom of the bishop of *Tarraco* and his deacons while facilitating liturgical remembrance through recitation on the martyrs' *dies natalis*.[206] However, the precise date when this account became part of the saints' celebrations in the city remains unknown.

Hippolyte Delehaye and Franchi di Cavalieri argue that the *Passio Fructuosi* exhibits a level of historical realism and literary coherence that rules out the possibility of forgery or of a mythologized reconstruction produced long after the event.[207] While the

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[206] Andreu Muñoz Melgar, *Sant Fructuós de Tarragona. Aspectes Històrics i Arqueològics del seu culte, des de l'Antiguitat fins a l'actualitat* (Ateneu Universitari Sant Pacià - Facultat Antoni Gaudi d'Historia, Arqueologia i Arts Cristianes - Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya i Institut Catala d'Arqueologia Classica, 2022), 36. Given that Augustine knew and recited passages from the *passio* on this significant date, it is reasonable to infer that the Christian community in *Tarraco* similarly commemorated the occasion by reading the *Passio* or quoting excerpts from it.

[207] "La simplicité des données, l'originalité des détails, la netteté de la situation, le naturel du dialogue ne laissent aucun doute sur l'existence d'une relation qu'un témoin seul a pu écrire et dont la substance a été respectée." (Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Passions Des Martyrs et Les Genres Littéraires*, Deuxième Édition, Revue Et Corrigée, Subsidia Hagiographica, 13 B [Société des Bollandistes, 1966], 105).

preserved version is not a verbatim transcript of the official trial records, the accuracy with which it conveys the interrogation of the martyrs by the provincial *praeses*, as well as its archaic language and stylistic features, suggest that the author either had access to judicial documents, attended the proceedings, or was an eyewitness to the execution.[208] According to Franchi de Cavalieri, chapters one through five demonstrate a stylistic and structural cohesion that indicates they were written by a single author. In contrast, he identifies chapters six and seven as later interpolations, which he dates to sometime between the sixth and seventh centuries, noting a shift in style and content inconsistent with the preceding narrative.[209]

Cavalieri suggests that the original author of the *Passio Fructuosi* was likely not a member of the clergy, nor formally literate, but rather someone who witnessed part of the judicial process and supplemented his account with direct testimonies of "all that he did not see with his own eyes or hear with his own ears."[210] Based on textual evidence, Cavalieri proposes that the original author of the *passio* may have been a soldier present during the judicial process, citing specific details such as the precise identification of the

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[208] "Nulla è in questo racconto che vieti di ritenerlo contemporáneo degli avvenimenti, redatto cioè nel volgere del secolo III a Tarragona. Lo storico e il filologo parmi non possano dire di più." Pio Franchi De' Cavalieri, "Gli Atti di S. Fruttuoso di Tarragona," in *Note Agiografiche*, Fascicolo 8 (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1935), 159. Both Ángel Fábrega Grau and Pilar Riesco Chueca in their respective editions of the *Passionarium Hispanicum* (1950s and 1990s respectively) also date the *Passio Fructuosi* to the end of the third century. See Ángel Fábrega Grau, *Pasionario Hispánico (Siglos VII-Xl)*, vol. 1, 2 vols., Monumenta Hispaniae Sacra 6 (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1953), 86; and Pilar Riesco Chueca, *Pasionario Hispánico. Introducción, edición crítica y traducción* (Universidad de Sevilla, 1995), xii.

[209] Cavalieri, "Gli Atti di S. Fruttuoso di Tarragona," 163 and 165.

[210] Cavalieri, "Gli Atti di S. Fruttuoso di Tarragona," 129.

beneficiarii ordered to arrest Fructuosus and his deacons and the recurring use of military terminology.[211]

This hypothesis of military authorship looks plausible given the available evidence. Several textual elements support this suggestion, particularly the precise and aseptic manner in which the imprisonment and interrogation of Fructuosus and his deacons is reported. The questions posed by the governor of the *Tarraconensis* in their interrogation are reproduced with notable fidelity, and the narrative consistently names individuals involved in the events—for example, the six *beneficiarii* who arrested the bishop. This level of detail, particularly in chapters one through three of the *passio*, supports the argument that the author was an eyewitness to at least these stages of the trial, which culminated in the martyrs' transfer to the amphitheater of *Tarraco*, the site of their execution.

Herbert Musurillo later builds upon Franchi di Cavalieri's textual analysis, corroborating the assessment that the *passio* predominantly adheres to historical events. According to Musurillo, this factual reliability is most evident in the first portion of the text—chapters one through four—which recount the arrest of the martyrs on January 16, their time in prison, and their execution on January 21. He underscores the text's plain and concise narrative style, noting its focus on everyday details and its avoidance of

[211] "Appena Fruttuoso si è tolte le scarpe, ecco farsi avanti un altro cristiano di nome Felice, che, presagli la mano, lo prega a volersi ricordare di lui nella gloria … Erano dunque entrambi militi, Felice e l'agiografo: circostanza degna di nota, in quanto spiega la premura che lo scrittore si diede di trasmetterci i nomi dei beneficiarii, dai quali Fruttuoso fu catturato e die presiedettero al suo supplizio; spiega l'accenno ai sentimenti di ammirazione e di dolore insieme, manifestati per l'eroica vittima dai soldati della scorta." (Cavalieri, "Gli Atti di S. Fruttuoso di Tarragona," 150).

embellishment or epic tropes. Rather than dramatizing the account, the *passio* appears to preserve a version of events closely aligned with official court records and eyewitness recollection.[212] Musurillo observes that the concluding sections—chapters five through seven, which recount post-martyrdom miraculous events— contain a more noticeable rhetorical dimension. However, even here, the text retains a remarkable degree of restraint, avoiding the more fabulous exaggerations common to later hagiography. He proposes that these final chapters may represent a later interpolation, possibly composed in the early fourth century, after the Edict of Milan.[213]

Gennaro Luongo expands on Musurillo's proposal by attributing the authorship of chapters four through seven of the *Passio Fructuosi* to a skilled hagiographer who elaborated upon and expanded the original author's account, which had more faithfully preserved the historical circumstances of the martyrdom. Luongo argues that the expanded narrative reflects a later theological and liturgical agenda and identifies chapter six as particularly significant for dating the text's revision. This chapter recounts Fructuosus' posthumous instruction to his followers to return the portions of the martyrs' ashes they had previously collected and narrates the translation of the relics to their burial

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[212] "Known to Augustine and Prudentius at least in substance, the *acta* surely existed before 400, and were perhaps composed shortly after the peace of the Church." Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxxii.

[213] "Only the edifying conclusion (5-7), relating the appearances of Fructuosus after death, with the eulogistic ending, might have come from a later, more pious hand." (Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxxii). The initial proposal by Franchi de Cavalieri of a single authorship of chapters one to five by a non-literate person and possibly a soldier loses force at this point. The inclusion of multiple biblical references in chapters five to seven leads Herbert Musurillo to conclude, rightly, that this interpolation was this time added by a hand not only literate, but also well-versed in the Holy Scriptures and the theological discussions of his time.

site. As Luongo observes, concern regarding relic fragmentation becomes theologically significant only in later periods and appears anachronistic for the mid-third century context of the martyrdom itself.[214] The numerous biblical allusions throughout these chapters demonstrate the author's sophisticated familiarity with sacred scripture, presuming a similarly educated audience.[215]

In support of this thesis, Francesco Scorza proposes that the author of this later version was likely a member of the ecclesiastical community in Tarragona. Working from an earlier, contemporary account of the martyrdom, this ecclesiastic may have supplemented the original martyrdom account with additional material derived from personal knowledge or local oral traditions circulating within the Christian community.[216]

The structural and narrative shifts that emerge from chapter four onwards strongly support the hypothesis proposed by Gennaro Luongo and Francesco Scorza regarding the dating and layered authorship of the *Passio Fructuosi*. According to this view, the text comprises two distinct strata: first, an early account of the martyrdom, composed

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[214] "Ma al di là di queste sottigliezze, l'episodio dell'accaparramento dei resti santi per il fatto in sé si dimostra poco congruente con l'epoca del martirio, nella quale non abbiamo altra testimonianza di simile usanza, mentre troverebbe ampia rispondenza nella prassi devozionale del culto delle reliquie a partire dal IV secolo." (Gennaro Luongo, "La *Passio Fructuosi*. Un approccio storico-letterario," in *Pau, Fructuós i El cristianisme primitiu a Tarragona (segles I-VIII)*, ed. Josep M. Gavaldà Ribot, Andreu Muñoz Melgar, and Armand Puig i Tàrrech, Actes del Congrés de Tarragona [19-21 de Juny de 2008] [Fundació Privada Liber - Instituto Superior de Ciencias Religiosas San Fructuoso, 2010], 275).

[215] "L'individuazione dei riferimenti biblici nella nostra *Passio* va ben al di là di là, quindi, della mera rilevazione statistica e può provare il livello di conoscenza della Scrittura e anche il grado di penetrazione del libro sacro in Spagna, e non ultimo indicare anche il testo latino adottato dall'agiografo." (Luongo, "La *Passio Fructuosi*. Un approccio storico-letterario," 278).

[216] Franceso Scorza, "Anàlisi literària i històrica," in *Les actes del martiri de sant Fructuós, bisbe de Tarragona, i dels seus diaques Sant Auguri i Sant Eulogi. Context historic, teologia i espiritualitat*, ed. Josep M. Gavaldà Ribot (Publicacions de I'Abadia de Montserrat, 2009), 46.

proximate to the martyrdom itself—likely the late third century— and preserved largely intact in chapters one through three. Second, a revised version, probably dating to the first half of the fourth century, which incorporates theological and doctrinal concerns more characteristic of that later period— particularly regarding Trinitarian controversies amid Arian proliferation and emerging debates surrounding saints' relics. These later additions strategically position Fructuosus as an exemplary figure whose authority reinforces orthodox theological positions on Trinitarian doctrine and relic preservation, practices increasingly associated with episcopal authority throughout the fourth century.

Meritxell Pérez advances a compelling hypothesis that the fourth-century redaction of the original martyrial narrative potentially coincided with the establishment of a commemorative site near the Francolí River, connected to the martyrs' burial location.[217] While this archaeological evidence will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Three, Pérez's proposal offers a persuasive explanation for the text's revision. The question remains: if an earlier *passio* documenting Fructuosus and his deacons' martyrdom existed shortly after the events themselves, why was it revised in the mid-fourth century, a period relatively close to the composition of the original? The answer

[217] Meritxell Pérez also proposes that the author responsible for the additions found in chapters four to seven of the *passio* may have been a Christian notary, likely a layman, who served *Tarraco*'s episcopate. This would account for the greater literary sophistication displayed in these chapters, which contrasts with the sobriety and conciseness of the first three (Meritxell Pérez, *Tarraco En La Antigüedad Tardía. Cristianización y Organización Eclesiástica (Siglos III a VIII)* [Arola Editors, 2012], 60-61). However, this hypothesis is not supported by concrete evidence. Even if a lay notary were responsible for the additions, the authorship would be of limited significance, since the text would, in any case, have been subject to the supervision of an ecclesiastical authority within the bishopric of Tarragona.

likely lies in the evolving ecclesiastical context and emerging cultic practices surrounding the martyrs' veneration in the Christian communities of the *Tarraconensis* province.

The prominence of biblical references and theological discourse in chapters four through seven of the *Passio Fructuosi* suggests that this revised narrative was intended primarily for circulation within the ecclesiastical circles of *Tarraco*. It is reasonable to assume that, by this point, the core facts of the martyrdom of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius were already broadly known among *Tarraco*'s Christian community. The purpose of the later additions, then, was likely to adapt the narrative for a more theologically informed audience—most likely members of the local clergy—who may have begun to incorporate the *passio* into the liturgic celebrations of the martyrs.

To properly evaluate Prudentius' subsequent literary adaptation of the *Passio Fructuosi*, it is first necessary to synthesize the structure and content of the original text and examine its key elements in detail. This analysis provides the foundation for understanding the theological and rhetorical aims of the fourth-century redactor and for assessing how these modifications compare, both content and purpose, to the version presented in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*.

3. Echoes of Martyrdom: A Comparative Study of the *Passio Fructuosi* and Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*

3.1 Brief synthesis of the *Passio Fructuosi*

To establish a foundation for the later analysis, a brief chapter-by-chapter summary of the *Passio Fructuosi* is essential for understanding its narrative structure and content, as each chapter functions as an independent unit depicting vivid scenes of the experience of the martyrs from their arrest to their execution. A more detailed analysis of each chapter will follow in the next section.[218]

Chapter One opens by situating the narrative in the consulate of Emilianus and Bassus, reporting the arrest of bishop Fructuosus and his deacons, Augurius and Eulogius, on January 16, 259 CE. The arrest was carried out by six *beneficiarii* serving under the governor of *Hispania Tarraconensis*, Aemilianus. The scene presents Fructuosus in a markedly familiar setting—resting in his chamber when the soldiers arrived—and depicts his composed reaction; anticipating the purpose of their visit, he simply requested permission on put on his shoes before calmly departing with the soldiers, who transferred the three clerics to prison.

Chapter Two describes the six days the martyrs spent in custody. During this time, Fructuosus baptized a Christian brother named Rogacianus. On Friday, January 21, the bishop and his deacons were brought before the governor Aemilianus for

[218] For both the summary and the subsequent analysis of the *Passio Fructuosi*, I will use the Latin-English edition by Herbert A. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs. Introduction, Texts and Translations by Herbert Musurillo* (Clarendon Press, 2000).

interrogation. The *praeses* questioned them about their refusal to comply with Valerian's edicts of 257 and 258 CE, which required sacrifice to the state gods. The interrogation was brief, culminating in the immediate sentencing of the three men to be burned alive.

Chapter Three recounts the transfer of the martyrs to the amphitheater for execution later that same day. The narrative highlights the presence of a large crowd—composed of both Christians and pagans—who followed the martyrs in a spirit of sympathy and reverence. Along the way, several members of the Christian community offered Fructuosus a mixture of spiced wine, which he refused in order to continue observing the Friday fast, just as he had during his imprisonment on Wednesday. As they reached the amphitheater, a *lector* named Augustalis approached the bishop and pleaded to be allowed to remove his sandals, a gesture Fructuosus declined. Another member of the Christian community, Felix, took the bishop's hand and asked him to remember him in the afterlife.

Chapter Four describes the martyrs' entrance into the amphitheater, where they prepare to face their execution. Fructuosus offers words of consolation to his fellow Christians, facing death with serenity and joy. The hagiographer introduces significant Trinitarian symbolism in this scene: the three martyrs, bound to stakes and subjected to flames, are explicitly likened to the three young men of Babylon whom God preserved from Nebuchadnezzar's furnace (Daniel, 3). This biblical parallel is further reinforced through reference to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as divine presences accompanying the martyrs during their execution. After enduring the flames for a time, Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius die with their arms extended in the shape of a cross.

Chapter Five introduces the first of the customary *magnalia dei* (divine wonders) that typically follow martyrdom narratives. Two Christians, Babylas and Mygdonius—who served in the household of the governor —witness a posthumous apparition of the three martyrs, who appear to them crowned with glory as they ascend into heaven. The governor's daughter is likewise granted this vision, while Aemilianus himself is excluded, deemed unworthy to witness the miracle.

Chapter Six recounts another miracle. That night, members of the Christian community return to the amphitheater to extinguish the martyrs' smoldering remains with wine. They begin to divide the ashes among themselves as relics, but Fructuosus appears once more, this time alone, instructing them to return the fragments and preserve the remains intact.

Chapter Seven, the final chapter of the *passio*, presents a final epiphany. The three martyrs, now clothed in divine glory, appear before the *praeses* to mock him and demonstrate the futility of their condemnation. The text concludes with a eulogy to the martyrs, full of biblical allusions that emphasize the martyrs' victory over evil and their eternal reward.

The *Passio Fructuosi*, despite its relative sobriety and restrained rhetoric compared to later hagiographic elaborations, nevertheless follows a broadly conventional structure typical of early martyrdom narratives. As Michael Lapidge observes in his study of Roman martyrial texts, the typical *passio* follows a recognizable narrative pattern:

> In the days of such-and-such an emperor, there was vigorous persecution of Christians. A certain Christian comes to the notice of the authorities. The Christian is accordingly brought for trial before a magistrate … In the end, the magistrate remains unconvinced by the Christian's arguments and the Christian is asked to sacrifice; on refusal to sacrifice the Christian is beaten and tortured at length, all the while confessing the faith: so vehemently and inflexibly does the Christian refuse to cooperate with the magistrate's requests that his/her behavior can be described only as "voluntary martyrdom". Finally, the Christian is executed. Pious Christians recover the martyr's body and give it decent burial. In some *passiones*, divine retribution is visited on the persecuting magistrate.[219]

The *Passio Fructuosi* mirrors this general pattern: the arrest of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, their brief interrogation, their firm refusal to sacrifice, their public execution, and the posthumous recovery of their relics all fit into this typical sequence. However, it notably omits extensive theological disputations, torture sequences, and miraculous healing episodes often found in later, more rhetorically elaborate *passiones*. As noted by the scholars cited above, the relative sobriety of the *passio*—its concise dialogues, minimal miraculous embellishment in the earlier chapters, and emphasis on communal solidarity—distinguishes it from the more florid accounts that became common in later martyrdom literature and further supports the hypothesis of its early composition and proximity to historical events.

[219] Michael Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs: Introduction, Translations, and Commentary*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford University Press USA, 2018), 19-20.

Having established the narrative structure of the *Passio Fructuosi* and situated it within broader hagiographical conventions, it is now necessary to turn to a systematic examination of the text's key theological and rhetorical elements. By proceeding chronologically through the *passio* and juxtaposing each significant episode with Prudentius' corresponding treatment in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, this comparative approach reveals both the continuities and transformations in the martyrial tradition. The following analysis illuminates how Prudentius strategically adapted the earlier narrative for his late fourth-century audience, reconfiguring theological emphases, amplifying certain narrative elements, and introducing new dimensions of meaning while maintaining the essential content and martyrological framework of the *Passio Fructuosi*. Significantly, Prudentius' modifications also reveal his personal devotional relationship with these martyrs, demonstrating how the poet actively participated in and helped shape their cult through his literary intervention. This methodical comparison not only clarifies Prudentius' compositional techniques but also provides insight into evolving ecclesiastical concerns and devotional practices in Late Antique Hispania.

3.2 Reframing Martyrdom: Literary Adaptation and Devotional Innovation in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 6

Beginning with chapter one of the *Passio Fructuosi*, the chronological precision of the opening lines has frequently been cited by scholars as supporting evidence for the authenticity of the events described in it, at least in its earliest chapters. The narrative opens with a formal consular date—*Aemiliano et Basso consulibus*—followed by the exact day of the martyrs' arrest: *XVII kalendas februarias die dominica* (January 16, 259

CE).[220] The *fasti consulares* confirm that Aemilianus and Bassus did, in fact, hold the consulship that year, though additional biographical information about this Aemilianus remains elusive, as his complete nomenclature is not documented.[221] It is likewise unclear whether this Aemilianus was the same individual who imprisoned the martyrs and held the office of *praeses* of *Hispania Citerior* at the time.[222]

Although it is possible that the dating in the *Passio* was retroactively aligned to correspond with a known calendar year—particularly given the potential for later editorial interventions—Gennaro Luongo's analysis persuasively argues that the *passio*'s opening lines are consistent with the procedural language of a judicial record. This stylistic resemblance supports the hypothesis that the original author either had access to official court documents or was personally present at the proceedings.[223] Further

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220 *Passio Fructuosi,* 1.1, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 176. The date of January 16 is also exact, and several scholars as Pilar Riesco Chueca have pointed out that it was indeed Sunday, which has served to reinforce the hypothesis that it is not a forgery (Riesco Chueca, *Pasionario Hispánico*, 73, n. 1).

221 Willy Liebenam, ed., *Fasti Consulares Imperii Romani: Von 30 v. Chr. Bis 565 n. Chr. Mit Kaiserliste Und Anhang*, Reprint 2020 (De Gruyter, 1909), 31. Also A.H M. Jones et al., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume I A.D. 260-395*, 22.

222 The *Passio Fructuosi* refers to Aemilianus generically as *praeses*, although—given that *Hispania Tarraconensis* was an imperial province—his full title would certainly have been *legatus pro praetore Hispaniae Citerioris*. While the title *praeses* became more common for governors after Diocletian's reforms, there are examples of its use in other martyrial texts from the same period. The term also begins to appear more frequently in epigraphic sources from the late third and early fourth centuries (Muñoz Melgar, *Sant Fructuós de Tarragona. Aspectes Històrics i Arqueològics del seu culte, des de l'Antiguitat fins a l'actualitat,* 31, n. 25). Its use in the *passio* may suggest a redaction closer to the end of the third century. Alternatively, if the author of the first chapters was a witness to the events and the text derives from procedural notes or contemporary testimony, *praeses* may have simply served as a convenient shorthand for referring to the governor without recording his full official title (Scorza, "Anàlisi Literària i Històrica," 47-48.

223 The *passio* begins as follows: "*Aemiliano et Basso consulibus XVII kalendas februarias die dominica comprehensi sunt Fructuosus episcopus, Augurius et Eulogius diacones*" (*Passio Fructuosi,* 1.1, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 176). As noted by Herbert Musurillo, the structure of the opening conforms to the language of trial protocol, presenting the consular date, the day and month of the arrest, and the names and status of the accused (Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxxii).

supporting this theory is the mention of the six *beneficiarii*—Aurelius, Festucius, Aelius, Pollentius, Donatus, and Maximus—who arrested Fructuosus and his deacons.[224]

The first chapter of the *Passio Fructuosi* also functions as an introduction to the martyrs, offering basic information about them: Fructuosus is identified as bishop, and Augurius and Eulogius are introduced as his deacons. The bishop is depicted resting quietly in his room at the moment of arrest—a mundane, everyday detail that contributes to the sober, almost documentary tone of these early chapters. The hagiographer's attention to this circumstance serves to emphasize the simplicity and accessibility of Fructuosus, presenting him as a humble and relatable figure. Significantly, the account avoids fantastical elements such as prophetic dreams or premonitory visions that frequently appear in contemporary hagiographical literature.[225]

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[224] These six *beneficiarii* were almost certainly attached to the *Legio VII Gemina*, stationed at the camp of *Legio* (in *Hispania Tarraconensis*). This was the only legion that remained in Hispania after Vespasian's reorganization of the army (Patrick Le Roux, "Ejército y Sociedad En La *Tarraco* Romana," *Butlletí Arqueològic. Reial Societat Arqueològica Tarraconense*, no. 19–20 [1998]: 87). The *beneficiarii consularis* belonged to the military but mostly carried out administrative tasks on behalf of high-ranking officials and sometimes engaged in police work. It would be inaccurate to equate them directly with modern "military police." (Christopher J. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire. Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* [Oxford University Press, 2012], 206).

[225] Visions in martyrdom accounts have often been interpreted as reflecting a Montanist background or influence. Montanism (2nd century CE) placed particular emphasis on dreams, prophetic speech, and ecstatic expressions—frequently by women—regarded as authoritative revelations for guiding the Christian community and announcing the imminence of the end of times (Antti Marjanen, "Montanism: Egalitarian Ecstatic 'New Prophecy,'" in *A Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics,"* ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 76 [Brill, 2005] 185-212, at 196-199). The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* is one of the texts considered to be a true expression of Montanist thought, since it records four visions received by Perpetua during her imprisonment and another by her companion Saturus, all of which announce their imminent execution, confirm their eschatological hope, and anticipate their heavenly reward (Rex D. Butler, *The New Prophecy & "New Visions." Evidence of Montanism in The Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* [The Catholic University of America Press, 2006], esp. 127-132). Other scholars, however, such as Barbara Gold, reject this interpretation, noting the difficulty of isolating Montanism as a movement distinct from "orthodox" Christianity, particularly since features often associated with it—such as visionary experiences—are also attested in other martyr narratives. As she concludes: "It is more likely that the elements we see in the *Passio* were typical of

In the *Passio Polycarpi*, the second-century account of the martyr of Smyrna, Polycarp receives a vision three days before his arrest in which his pillow is consumed by fire—an omen prefiguring the flames of his execution.[226] The *Passio Sanctorum Montani et Lucii*, whose martyrdom occurred in the same year as Fructuosus (259 CE), provides another instructive comparison.[227] Montanus recounts a quarrel with a fellow Christian, Julian, and later that night has a vision in which centurions seize them and lead them to a vast field where their garments shine with divine light. The vision foreshadows their arrest and execution while symbolically presaging their divine glorification through martyrdom. [228] In contrast to such narratives, the *Passio Fructuosi* refrains from supernatural foreshadowing, reinforcing its tone of unembellished realism and suggesting a deliberate choice to emphasize historical credibility over hagiographic dramatization.

From the moment of his arrest, Fructuosus sets an important precedent. Calmly putting on his shoes, he marches resolutely with the soldiers, fully aware that his likely fate was death. Yet he does not approach martyrdom with fear but with serene confidence and spiritual joy, anticipating the "crown of God" (*certus et gaudens de corona domini*)

Christianity in North Africa in the early third century." (Barbara K. Gold, *Perpetua. Athlete of God* [Oxford University Press, 2018], 22).

[226] *Passio Polycarpi,* 5.2, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 7.

[227] The date of composition of the *passio* of Montanus and Lucius remains uncertain, but several scholars agree that it was written shortly after their martyrdom, with some even suggesting that it may have been authored by a disciple of Cyprian. (Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxxv).

[228] *Passio Sanctorum Montani et Lucii,* 11, 1-4, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 225. The martyrs were eventually beheaded but according to the text, they had been threatened by the governor earlier with being burned alive. (*Passio Sanctorum Montani et Lucii,* 3.1, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 214-215).

toward which he is being called.[229] Through this exemplary behavior—accepting martyrdom rather than denying his Christian identity—Fructuosus personifies the ideal bishop-leader articulated by the bishops of Spain in their correspondence with Cyprian (Epistle 67) and subsequently endorsed by the Carthaginian bishop. His attitude reflects the same ethos of self-sacrifice and witness to the faith that Cyprian himself promoted throughout his correspondence: the bishop was expected to accept martyrdom with joy, demonstrating the perseverance of Christians in their faith through his personal example.[230]

The first chapter concludes with Fructuosus already imprisoned, where the narrative portrays him surrounded by fellow Christians. These companions are not described as fellow prisoners but as visitors who come to offer comfort and support (*refrigerans et rogans ut eos in mente haberet*)[231] urging the bishop to remember them in his prayers. The *Passio* refers to this group collectively as the *fraternitas*, consistently using the term *fratres* to introduce Christian characters throughout the text.[232]

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[229] "*certus et gaudens de corona domini*." *Passio Fructuosi,* 1.4, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 176.

[230] While the *Passio Fructuosi* conveys the ideal attitude toward martyrdom primarily through the example of the bishop, the *passio* of Montanus and Lucius addresses this theme more explicitly: "*deinde lapsorum abruptam festinantiam; negationem pacis ad plenam paenitentiam et Christi sententiam differebat* ... / Next he (Montanus) criticized the hasty desertion by apostates, and he put off their pardon until full repentance and the decision of Christ," *Passio Sanctorum Montani et Lucii* 14. 4, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 226-227. The *Passio Fructuosi* touches on similar themes, particularly in relation to the ongoing disputes concerning the *lapsi* around the time of Fructuosus' martyrdom. However, it presents these ideas in a more succinct and restrained manner, reinforcing the "factual" and almost clinical tone characteristic of the first chapters of the text.

[231] *Passio Fructuosi,* 1.4, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 176.

[232] The terms *frater*, *fraternitas*, and *refrigerium* appear in early Christian writings and are sometimes cited as indicators of a third-century composition of the *Passio Fructuosi*, given their perceived decline or

The presence of the Christian *fraternitas* of *Tarraco* providing comfort to the bishop and his deacons shows the communal nature of early Christian identity, emphasizing the supposed familial bonds among believers and their practice of *caritas*.[233] Although the *passio* does not specify whether the visitors were officially allowed to enter, their presence could have entailed significant risk for the *fratres*.[234] Beyond offering physical and spiritual support to the imprisoned Christians, the community also serves as a living testimony to the suffering of the martyrs and the persistence of their followers in the faith.

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shifting nuance in later texts (Pérez, *Tarraco En La Antigüedad Tardía. Cristianización y Organización Eclesiástica (Siglos III a VIII)*, 59, n. 182). However, these terms remain in use into the fourth and fifth centuries. Augustine frequently addresses fellow Christians as *fratres* (e.g. *Ep.* 34: "*Domino Eximio Meritoque Suscipiendo Atque Honorabili Fratri Eusebio Augustinus*") and Ambrose refers to tears as a consolation or refreshment for the heart ("*Pascunt frequenter et lacrimae et mentem ablevant, fletus refrigerant pectus et maestum solantur affectum*," *De obitu Valentiniani* 38, CSEL 106: 140). Prudentius, by contrast, prefers *Christianus* over *frater*, possibly reflecting the shift in Christian self-identification after the end of persecution. Thus, lexical choices alone do not provide conclusive evidence for dating the *Passio Fructuosi*, and stronger arguments must be found elsewhere.

[233] This kind of support from the Christian community for imprisoned believers was not uncommon. For example, Cyprian, writing to fellow priests and deacons while in hiding during the Decian persecution, states: "As for the expenses to be supplied, whether for those who, having confessed the Lord with a glorious voice, have been put in prison, or for those who labor poor and indigent and yet persevere in the Lord, I ask that nothing be wanting ..." (*Ep.* 5.1, *Letters (1-81)*, trans. Sr. Donna, Fathers of the Church 51, 15). Support and charity, especially for those imprisoned for not renouncing their faith, are a constant theme in Cyprian's correspondence; see also Katherine E. Milco, "*O Beatum Carcerem*: The Rhetoric of Incarceration in the Letters of Tertullian and Cyprian," *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity* 28, no. 2 (2024): 196–222.

[234] In his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Eusebius refers to the dangers faced by Christians who visited imprisoned members of their community during Valerian's persecution: "But in the city there have concealed themselves [the presbyters], secretly visiting the brethren. … Eusebius, whom from the beginning God strengthened and prepared to render with all energy the services to the confessors that were in prison, and at no small risk to perform the task of laying out the corpses of the blessed and perfect martyrs. - *ἐν δὲ τῇ πόλει καταδεδύκασιν ἀφανῶς ἐπισκεπτόμενοι τοὺς ἀδελφούς … Εὐσέβιος, ὃν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὁ θεὸς ἐνεδυνάμωσεν καὶ παρεσκεύασεν τὰς ὑπηρεσίας τῶν ἐν ταῖς φυλακαῖς γενομένων ὁμολογητῶν ἐναγωνίως ἀποπληροῦν καὶ τὰς τῶν σωμάτων περιστολὰς τῶν τελείων καὶ μακαρίων μαρτύρων οὐκ ἀκινδύνως ἐκτελεῖν*." (*Hist. Eccl.* 7.11.24, in *Ecclesiastical History, Volume II: Books 6-10*. Translated by J. E. L. Oulton. Loeb Classical Library 265 [Harvard University Press, 1932], 164-165).

In Peristephanon 6, Prudentius presents a markedly different narrative approach from the *Passio Fructuosi*, a difference explained in part by the distinct literary genres of the two texts. As discussed previously, the earlier document adheres to conventions of the *passio* genre—following structural patterns typical of contemporary *acta martyrum* that either preserved or imitated trial proceedings against the martyrs, generally beginning with their arrest. In contrast, *Peristephanon* 6 offers a poetic retelling of the suffering of the martyrs of *Tarraco*, composed in Phalaecian hendecasyllabic meter.[235]

The poetic form already justifies some of Prudentius' stylistic and narrative choices: unlike the *Passio Fructuosi*, his hymn is not divided into chapters, and the overall style is much more rhetorically embellished. Despite some substantial formal differences, *Peristephanon* 6 manifestly derives inspiration from the earlier *Passio Fructuosi*, with numerous passages demonstrating close narrative correspondence to the earlier martyrial account. The hymn also preserves the chronological sequence established in the *passio, as well as* certain thematic emphases. Therefore, the outline of

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[235] It remains uncertain whether Prudentius' Hymn 6—or, more broadly, the entire *Peristephanon*—was originally intended for sung performance within the liturgical celebrations of the saints' *dies natalis*, as may have been the case with the *Passio Fructuosi*, or whether it was conceived primarily as a form of "leisure literature." As Anne-Marie Palmer has noted, the question remains unresolved, though she leans toward interpreting the *Peristephanon* as belonging to the latter category: "Most critics have in fact accepted that these poems were not intended for liturgical use ... Room for controversy has been admitted, but where discussion of the problem has drawn on some analysis of the poems, the conclusion has been reached that they were indeed written expressly for sung performance." (Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 67-68 and 97). Nevertheless, Prudentius' hymns were later incorporated into the Mozarabic Liturgy (or Hispanic Rite), whose origins can be traced to the seventh century. While this incorporation does not constitute direct evidence that Prudentius composed the hymns with liturgical use in mind—particularly in connection with the martyrs of *Tarraco*—it does not exclude the possibility that he envisioned them as serving both communal worship and private devotional reading. For an overview of the Mozarabic Liturgy and its incorporation of Prudentius' hymns, see Carmen Julia Gutiérrez, "Iberia canta a sus santos. Los himnos de la liturgia hispánica dedicados a los santos ibéricos," *Anuario Musical*, no. 79 (2024): 1–41.

the seven chapters of the *Passio Fructuosi* provides a useful framework for comparing the content and structure of the two texts, even though Prudentius' poem does not explicitly divide its material in this way.

Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon* opens with a different narrative approach than the *Passio Fructuosi*, though Prudentius incorporates essentially the same factual elements from chapter one of the earlier text. He informs his audience that Fructuosus and his deacons, Augurius and Eulogius, were summoned abruptly and unexpectedly to appear before the governor for judicial proceedings, after which they were sent to prison for six days prior to their formal interrogation and subsequent capital condemnation by the *praeses*.[236] While the historical sequence remains faithful to the *Passio Fructuosi*, Prudentius introduces some significant alterations that exemplify his distinctive process of literary appropriation and adaptation to create a narrative aligned with his particular vision of Hispanic martyrdom.

The first element that calls the attention, which becomes a thematic constant throughout the hymn, is Prudentius' pronounced emphasis on *Tarraco* and Hispania as sacred grounds, blessed by the suffering and victory of the martyrs. By contrast, the *Passio Fructuosi* opens with a standard dating formula typical of judicial documents. The earlier text mentions *Tarraco* exclusively in its title, which replicates the opening formula while adding the city's name and substituting the emperors Valerian and Gallienus for the

[236] *Peristephanon* 6.1-28. For the content and analysis of Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, as well as in the entire dissertation, I am using the Latin-English edition by Henry J. Thomson, *Prudentius. Against Symmachus 2. Crowns of Martyrdom. Scenes From History. Epilogue*, trans. Henry John Thomson, vol. II, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library 398 (Harvard University Press, 1953).

consuls.[237] Beyond the title, *Tarraco* receives no further attention in the body of the text, as the primary focus of the *passio* remains on the figures of Fructuosus and his deacons rather than on the city itself.

This difference reveals an important contrast in audience and purpose. The original *passio* appears intended primarily for circulation within the nascent Christian community of *Tarraco*—particularly its ecclesiastical hierarchy—where , as proposed by Francesco Scorza, the local context was already familiar and did not require repeated emphasis.[238] In contrast, Prudentius, writing for a broader and perhaps less localized Christian audience, highlights *Tarraco* explicitly and repeatedly, anchoring the city as a visible witness and sacred landscape in the collective Christian memory.

In *Peristephanon* 6, Prudentius immediately highlights Hispania and the city of *Tarraco* as central elements of his narrative. From the opening verses, *Tarraco* is portrayed as a city blessed by the suffering of its bishop and deacons, shining from afar by the light of their martyrdom (*felix Tarraco … procul relucens*).[239] The geographical *locus* of the martyrs' sacrifice is as important for Prudentius as the martyrs themselves,

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[237] "*PASSIO SANCTORUM MARTYRUM FRUCTUOSI EPISCOPI, AUGURI ET EULOGI DIACONORUM, QUI PASSI SUNT TARACONA DIE XII KALENDAS FEBRUARIAS SUB VALERIANO ET GALLIENO IMPERATORIBUS*." Latin from Franchi di Cavalieri, "Gli Atti di S. Fruttuoso di Tarragona," 183. Musurillo uses an adapted version from Cavalieri's that removes from the title any mention of *Tarraco* and Valerian and Gallienus as emperors: "*Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Fructuosi Episcopi, Auguri et Eulogi Diaconorum*" (Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxxii and 176).

[238] "Probablement la Passió fou concebuda com un document per a I'ús intern de la comunitat local, en la qual es donava per descomptat que es tractava d'un dels sens bisbes i dels seus dos diaques." (Scorza, "Anàlisi Literària i Històrica," 49).

[239] "*Felix Tarraco, Fructuose, vestris, attollit caput ignibus coruscum, Levitis geminis procul relucens*. *Hispanos Deus aspicit benignus, arcem quandoquidem potens Hiberam, trino martyre Trinitas coronat*." (*Peristephanon* 6.1-6; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 202).

for it is the sacred setting in which their memory will be eternally preserved. The poet consciously integrates the local element into his praise of the martyrs, forging an indivisible bond between them and the city. Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius are presented as belonging intrinsically to *Tarraco* as its celestial patrons and protectors, while *Tarraco* itself achieves prominence and projects its significance universally through their sacrifice.

Prudentius' emphasis on the local setting reveals a deeper cultural awareness. Although the Christian faith aspired to universality, place—its soil, memory, and cultural proximity—remains a vital element of Christian identity for Prudentius. This attention to locality echoes the concerns of the clergy who approached Cyprian regarding the case of the apostate bishops, for whom local identity also played a significant role, as scholars such as Josep Amengual i Batle have observed.[240] This elevation of *Tarraco* and Hispania recurs throughout the hymn and is emphasized again in its concluding verses, reinforcing the idea that local geography becomes permanently sanctified through martyrdom.

In terms of narrative structure, the opening section of the hymn (ca. verses 1–27) parallels closely the first chapter of the *Passio Fructuosi*, although some other significant differences emerge. One notable modification lies in Prudentius' approach to introducing the martyrs. While the *passio* succinctly recounts the factual events of their arrest and

[240] "El bisbe Feliu d'Astorga i altres eclesiàstics hispans havien arribat a Cartago, i havien informat bé el bisbe local, sant Cebrià, sobre el mode de procedir per ordenar els successors dels bisbes que havien caigut en la idolatria. Cebrià no solament ens transmet els trets principals de la praxi africana, ans ens diu que també aquell mode d'actuar era el de les esglésies hispanes … És una de les mostres de la consciència del fet que el lloc, el sòl, la proximitat cultural pertanyen també a l'eclesialitat, per més que l'Església sigui universal." (Josep Amengual i Batle, "L'església paleocristiana de *Tarraco*," in *Tarraco Christiana Ciuitas*, ed. Josep M. Macías Solé and Andreu Muñoz Melgar [Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica, 2013], 70).

transfer to prison—providing minimal characterization beyond identifying Fructuosus as bishop and Augurius and Eulogius as deacons—Prudentius reshapes the opening to draw attention to the moral and spiritual stature of Fructuosus. Rather than narrating the circumstances of the arrest, Prudentius prioritizes a formal introduction of his narrative's protagonist, Fructuosus, emphasizing foremost the distinguished honor conferred through his martyrdom—*ex episcopali clarus nomine*—deriving from his venerable episcopal status.[241]

In Prudentius' retelling, Fructuosus emerges not only as a martyr but as a leader and exemplar for his community. He is introduced as the *dux et praevius et magister* of his deacons, Augurius and Eulogius—a "leader, guide, and teacher"[242]—who rallies them with words of encouragement as they are led to prison: "Stand firm with me, men. Let death not frighten you … Prison is for the worshippers of Christ a step toward the crown."[243] While this rhetorical emphasis on martyrdom's spiritual rewards parallels the theological perspective found in the *Passio Fructuosi*, the texts differ in the presentational approach of the bishop of *Tarraco*. In the *passio*, Fructuosus calmly asks to put on his shoes before departing with the soldiers who arrest him, a mundane but

241 *Peristephanon* 6.11-12; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 204.

242 "Leader, guide, teacher." *Peristephanon* 6.10; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 204.

243 "*mecum state, viri. vocat cruentus, ad poenam coluber Dei ministros; ne mors terreat; est parata palma. carcer Christicolis gradus coronae est, carcer provehit ad superna caeli, carcer conciliat Deum beatis*." (*Peristephanon* 6.22-27, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 204). Note the use of *Christicolis*—rather than *fratribus*—to refer to Christians (see no. 232).

telling detail that demonstrates his inner strength without the need for direct speech.[244] Prudentius, by contrast, shifts the focus away from everyday actions and dramatizes the bishop's leadership through inserted dialogue. By placing a formal exhortation in Fructuosus' mouth, Prudentius intensifies the bishop's role as a moral guide, almost casting him as a general giving a speech to his soldiers before battle. This literary choice reinforces the bishop's active authority, embodying the virtues expected of a Christian leader facing persecution.

Episcopal authority—both in leadership and social status—emerges as a central thematic concern in Prudentius' construction of Fructuosus' martyrdom narrative. Although the *Passio Fructuosi* already presents Fructuosus as an ideal bishop who models fortitude and communal solidarity, Prudentius' portrait exhibits significantly greater. He consciously elaborates the bishop's elevated social status, inserts speeches to dramatize his leadership, and constructs a more vivid and deliberate image of episcopal dignity. This intensified representation reflects broader late fourth-century concerns with the role of bishops as public exemplars of Christian virtue and as pillars of communal identity.

Continuing with the events of chapter two of the *Passio Fructuosi*, the narrative briefly recounts the imprisonment of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, before turning to the central focus of the chapter: their interrogation by the *praeses*. The narrative

[244] "*Quibus Fructuosus dixit: Eamus; aut si uultis, calcio me. Cui milites dixerunt: Calci te ad animum tuum* … - Fructuosus said to them: 'Let us go; or, if you will allow me, I shall put my sandals on.' The soldiers said to him: 'Put on your sandals as you like …" (*Passio Fructuosi* 1.3, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 176).

highlights only two significant elements concerning their confinement: first, Fructuosus baptizes a fellow Christian (*frater*) named Rogatianus on the day following their incarceration; second, the accused remain imprisoned for precisely six days, from Sunday, January 16, to Friday, January 21, 259 CE.[245]

In this depiction, Fructuosus continues to exercise his pastoral duties even under the threat of death, reinforcing his firm commitment to the faith and the spiritual care of his community. Although it is impossible to verify the historical accuracy of such an event, the motif of baptism within prison settings is a recurrent feature in martyrial literature of the period, serving both to illustrate the perseverance of Christian witness and to emphasize the transformative power of faith even in the most adverse circumstances.

The reference is again very succinct and stripped of any rhetoric or embellishment: "*Alia die baptizavit in carcere fratrem nostrum nomine Rogatianum*"[246] A single sentence records the event as the most memorable detail of the martyrs' stay in

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[245] It is unclear whether Rogatianus was a *frater* from the group that visited the martyrs in prison or whether he had already been imprisoned earlier. As described in Tertullian's writings on baptism, the sacrament by this time generally required significant preparation for catechumens, including instruction, fasting, and, crucially, access to water for the rite. Tertullian writes: "Those who are at the point of entering upon baptism ought to pray, with frequent prayers, fastings, bendings of the knee, and all-night vigils, along with the confession of all their former sins, so as to make a copy of the baptism of John …" (Øyvind Norderval, "Simplicity and Power. Tertullian's *De Baptismo*," in *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, ed. David Hellholm, Tor Vegge, *et al*. [De Gruyter, 2011], 957). According to the *Didache*, the use of "living water" is preferred but not required: "If for some reason you do not have living water, baptize in other water …" (*Didache,* 7.2; Willy Rordorf, "Baptism According to the *Didache*," in *The Didache in Modern Research*, ed. Jonathan A. Draper [Brill, 1996], 212). In the case of Rogatianus, access to water may not been a significant obstacle, as it could have been brought during the visit of the *fraternitas* to prison.

[246] *Passio Fructuosi* 2.1, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 176. As stated above, at no point it is specified that Rogatianus was a *catechumen*–although his mention as *fratrem nostrum* suggest that he probably was.

prison, consistent with the direct style characteristic of the first three chapters. This restrained treatment stands in contrast to other martyrdom accounts of the period, where episodes of baptism are often expanded into central scenes, dramatized to highlight the effect of the martyrs' faith on those around them.[247] In many of these narratives, such scenes emphasize the evangelizing power of the martyrs' steadfastness, showing how their courage and example move others to convert and receive baptism before sharing in their fate.[248]

Equally significant in these traditions is the theological association between baptism and martyrdom itself. Early Christian authors such as Origen and Tertullian describe martyrdom as a "second baptism"—a baptism not of water but of blood.[249] This

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[247] Several martyrdom accounts from this period include scenes of baptism taking place in prison, often identifying by name those who received the sacrament while under arrest or awaiting execution. These narratives frequently feature catechumens, who appear either as companions of the martyrs or as protagonists themselves. A representative example of these narrative patterns is the *Passio of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which recounts both the baptism of catechumens under arrest and their prominent role as central characters of the story. Perpetua herself narrates that, along with her fellow catechumens, she was baptized shortly after their arrest but before being transferred to prison (*Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, 3.4-5, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 108). Later in the narrative, while imprisoned, Perpetua describes a vision of her younger brother Dinocrates, who had died of cancer at the age of seven. In the vision, Dinocrates stands beside a pool of water, trying unsuccessfully to drink from it (*Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 7.7, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs,* 114–115). This imagery likely symbolizes that Dinocrates had died unbaptized, still lacking full participation in the Christian community. The inclusion of this vision, pausing the account of Perpetua's own martyrdom, once again highlights the central role of baptism in early Christian narratives of martyrdom, portraying the spiritual consequences for those who died without receiving the sacrament.

[248] "It will be seen that this simple framework offered many possibilities for expansion: the number of persons who come into contact with the original Christian martyr and then seek to become Christians can be extended so as to create a lengthy concatenation of converts." (Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs*, 20).

[249] "*Est quidem nobis etiam secundum lavacrum, unum et ipsum, sanguinis scilicet ... venerat enim per aquam et sanguinem, sicut Ioannes scripsit, ut aqua tingueretur sanguine glorificaretur* … - Indeed, we have also a second bath, one and the same, certainly of blood … For He had come 'by means of water and blood,' just as John wrote, with the result that He was being baptized by the water, glorified by the blood …" (own translation from the Latin). See Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, 16, in *Complete Works of Tertullian*, trans. Sydney Thelwall, (Delphi Classics 89, 2018), 2197. Similarly, we find examples of this association between the baptism of water and the second baptism of blood in other *passiones* of the third century. For

idea suggests that the act of dying for Christ, through the shedding of one's blood, serves as the ultimate cleansing of sins and the supreme expression of faith.[250] This theological framework elevates martyrdom to the highest form of Christian witness, capable of granting forgiveness and spiritual rebirth, even to those who might not have received baptism by water.[251]

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instance, in the *Passio of Marian and James* (ca. 300), both martyrs are led to a river valley "with high banks on either side" to be executed by sword. The author of the *passio* specifies that, at that moment, both sacraments—the baptism of water and the baptism of blood—were present since "they would be baptized in their blood and washed in the stream" ("*cum et baptizarentur suo sanguine et lauarentur in flumine*" *Passio Sanctorum Mariani et Iacobi*, 11.10, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 210-211).

[250] As Gordon Jeanes observes, the meaning of baptism gradually shifted from being primarily understood as a "ritualized entry into the messianic kingship of Christ" to emphasizing its purificatory and transformative character, particularly from the late third century onward. In this period, baptism was increasingly dramatized as a spiritual battle against Satan, in which purification through water marked a critical stage in the Christian's lifelong struggle against sin and evil. Jeanes further suggests that this evolving interpretation of baptism and its associated combat imagery was later integrated as a central motif in martyrial narratives and commemorations (Gordon Jeanes, "Baptism Portrayed as Martyrdom in the Early Church," *Studia Liturgica* 23, no. 2 [1993]: 158–159). Nevertheless, the association between baptism and martyrdom is not an entirely later development, as the Gospels themselves already reflect thematic connections between both rites. For example, Luke, 12:49-50, recounting Jesus' words: "I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" (unless otherwise noted, biblical translation is that of the English Standard Version).

[251] The *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* also emphasizes this symbolism of martyrdom as a second baptism—an ultimate cleansing not only of the martyr's own sins but, in some cases, those of others. Perpetua's martyrdom, for example, appears to secure the salvation of her younger brother Dinocrates, who had died unbaptized. After her earlier vision of him suffering beside an inaccessible pool of water, Perpetua later recounts a second vision in which his condition has dramatically improved: "On the day we were kept in chains, I had this vision shown to me. I saw the same spot that I had seen before, but there was Dinocrates all clean, well dressed, and refreshed. I saw a scar where the wound had been; and the pool that I had seen before now had its rim lowered to the level of the child's waist. And Dinocrates kept drinking water from it …" (*Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 8.1-2, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 117). This scene powerfully reinforces the belief that the salvific effects of martyrdom extend beyond the individual martyr, offering spiritual benefits to others through their sacrificial witness. As Jeffrey Trumbower notes: "Perpetua believed Dinocrates was suffering simply because he had not been a Christian, and that she, as a soon-to-be Christian martyr, had the power to ease his suffering." (Jeffrey A. Trumbower, *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* [Oxford University Press, 2001], 84).

Notably, the *Passio Fructuosi* does not develop this association between baptism and martyrdom. The baptism of Rogatianus is mentioned only in passing, without rhetorical amplification or theological reflection. The hagiographer's focus remains on portraying Fructuosus as a bishop who, even in the final days before his execution, continues to fulfill his episcopal duties with quiet perseverance. Rather than framing Rogatianus' baptism as part of a broader theological statement about martyrdom as a "baptism of blood," the narrative presents it as a small but telling detail—an example of Fructuosus' steadfast leadership, carried out without fuss even in the face of imminent death.

Prudentius, in turn, elevates this episode in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, integrating it into a richer theological framework. While he follows the *Passio Fructuosi* in noting that the martyrs performed a baptism in prison, he does not name the person being baptized. This omission shifts the focus away from historical detail and toward the symbolic and sacramental meaning of the act itself. Prudentius describes the rite as a *mysticum lavacrum*,[252] a mystical bath, and underscores its salvific power by claiming that even in the prison, the waters of baptism cleanse and purify the darkness—*et purgamen aquae stupent tenebrae*—.[253] In doing so, he presents baptism not merely as a ritual of initiation, but as an act of cosmic significance—an act that purifies not only the individual being baptized but symbolically overcomes the forces of darkness themselves.

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[252] "*exercent ibi mysticum lavacrum*," *Peristephanon* 6.29; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 204.

[253] "and the darkness was amazed at the cleansing power of water," *Peristephanon* 6.30; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 204.

Prudentius' description aligns with broader late antique developments in the theology of baptism, in which the rite is increasingly portrayed as a decisive spiritual victory over demonic forces and sin. As Dayna Kalleres has observed, this period saw a growing tendency to dramatize baptism as a moment of spiritual combat, preparing the believer for a lifelong struggle against evil.[254] In this light, Prudentius' emphasis on the transformative power of baptism in the *Peristephanon* frames the rite as the ideal preparation for the martyrs' final contest—their *baptismus sanguinis*, the ultimate act of witness that perfects the purification begun in the water.

This theological connection between baptism, purification, and martyrdom appears not only in Hymn 6 but also in other hymns of the *Peristephanon* (as will be analyzed in chapter 4), suggesting that Prudentius deliberately weaves this motif throughout his collection. This pattern, and its implications for understanding the relationship between sacramental theology and the cult of the saints, will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

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[254] Dayna Kalleres analyzes late antique discourses of spiritual warfare against demons in three important urban centers—Antioch, Jerusalem, and Milan—focusing on the roles of their most prominent church leaders: John Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Ambrose of Milan. As Kalleres demonstrates, these bishops pioneered demonological discourses that identified all non-Christian and non-orthodox as works of the devil, portraying them as spiritually dangerous. Such discourses played an active role in constructing the identity of baptized Christians as "spiritual soldiers" engaged in ongoing warfare against demonic forces in their cities. See Dayna S. Kalleres, *City of Demons. Violence, Ritual, and Christian Power in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 2015), 3-5. Particularly relevant to this point are John Chrysostom's *Baptismal Instructions*, where he describes the catechumen as "a ship without a seal … a dwelling place for demons" (*Catech. Illum.* 10.16), and those who receive baptism as "valiant and vigilant soldiers of the Spirit" (*Catech. illum.* 5.27, St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions. Translated and Annotated by Paul W. Harkins*, trans. Paul W. Harkins, Ancient Christian Writers [The Newman Press, 1963], 91 and 155).

The *Passio Fructuosi* remains similarly sparse regarding the martyrs' imprisonment duration. The text reports that Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius were confined for merely six days—a notably brief period compared with contemporaneous martyrological accounts that typically document more extended incarcerations.[255] Notably, the *passio* does not record either any episodes of torture or mistreatment during their confinement—a typical feature of martyr narratives.[256] The inclusion of suffering in prison generally served to highlight the cruelty of Roman state authorities at all levels, from soldiers to provincial governors, portraying them as agents of evil in stark opposition to the martyrs' perseverance, faith, and virtue.[257] Torture scenes were also

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[255] See, for example, the *passio* recounting the martyrdom of the presbyter Pionius and his companions, which was likely composed around the same time as the *Passio Fructuosi*—shortly before or after 300 CE, according to Herbert Musurillo (Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxix). The *passio* does not specify exactly how long Pionius spent in prison, but it may have been between two and three weeks. The date of his death, March 12, is specified in the text but not the date of his arrest. However, the reference to his capture "on the anniversary of the blessed martyr Polycarp" (*Passio Pionii,* 2.1, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 137) suggest he may have been arrested on or around February 23, being the exact year also difficult to pinpoint. Unlike the *Passio Fructuosi,* the martyrdom of Pionius also reports that during their time in prison, the presbyter of Smyrna and his companions were tortured, beaten, mocked, and dragged to the temple in an attempt to persuade them to sacrifice to the gods of Rome (*Passio Pionii* 10-20, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 148-163).

[256] See Pionius' example above, but also the *Acts of the Martyrdom of Carpus, Papylus and Agathonicê,* likely written as well between the second half and the end of the third century, since the martyrs are known to Eusebius and mentioned in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (4.15). According to the narrative, Carpus, bishop of *Gordos* (Lydia), Papylus or Pamfilus, deacon from *Thyatira* (also in Asia minor) and Agathonicê, Papylus' sister, are arrested by the proconsul of Asia while he was in residence in Pergamum. In both the Greek and Latin recensions of the text, Pionius is tortured uring his interrogation by order of the proconsul, being hung up and scraped with claws: "*proconsul iussit eum* [Pionius] *suspendi et ungulari. cum autem ungularetur super modum, laborauit et uocem dare non ualuit*. - The proconsul ordered him to be hung up and scraped with claws. And when he was being scraped beyond all measure, he was in agony and could not utter a sound." (*Acts of Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonice*, 2.4, Latin Recension; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 30-31). His companion Papylus was subjected to the same torture afterwards (*Acts of Carpus, Papylus, and Agathonice*, 3.5).

[257] See, for example, the *passio* of the martyrs of Lyons (late 2nd century): "The tyrant's instruments of torture had been utterly overcome by Christ through the perseverance of the saints; and so the Devil turned his mind to other devices, confinement in the darkness of a prison or in most difficult places, the stretching of limbs in the stocks to the fifth notch, and all sorts of other indignities, which gaolers when aroused and filled with the Devil are accustomed to inflict upon their prisoners - *Καταργηθεντων δε των τυραννικών*

commonly used to illustrate attempts by Roman officials to coerce Christians into sacrificing to the gods, thereby securing their loyalty to the empire.

The absence of such episodes in the *Passio Fructuosi* is surprising, as these elements would have provided the hagiographer an opportunity to incorporate rhetorical embellishments emphasizing the martyrs' spiritual fortitude. The narrative remains restrained, limiting antagonism between the martyrs and the Roman authorities to what the facts themselves naturally imply.

In contrast, Prudentius, in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, takes full advantage of this rhetorical opportunity. His account constructs a much sharper opposition between the martyrs and their persecutors. While the *Passio* makes no mention of mistreatment, Prudentius vividly describes the authority transferring Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius to prison as a "blood-fed executioner," dragging the martyrs "in chains."[258] Although it is plausible that the martyrs were chained during their transfer, the *Passio* offers no such detail, nor does it mention any cruelty inflicted by the *beneficiarii*. This

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κολαστηρίων υπό τοῦ Χρίστου διά της των μακαρίων υπομονής, ετερας μηχανάς διάβολος έπενόει, τάς κατά την ειρκτήν εν τω σκότει καί τω χαλεπωτάτω χωρίω συγκλείσεις καί τάς εν τω ξύλω διατάσεις των ποδών επί πεμπτον διατεινομενων τρύπημα καί τάς λοιπάς αίκίας δσας είώθασιν ίο όργιζόμενοι υπουργοί καί ταῦτα διαβόλου πλήρεις διατιθεναι τούς εγκλειόμενους." (*The Martyrs of Lyons* 27; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 70-71). The *Passio* of Marian and James reports a similar scene: "Then they were assailed by the garrison soldiery with many cruel tortures, soldiers who are murderers of the just and the good, assisted in their viciousness by the centurion and the magistrates of Cirta, priests indeed of the Devil … - *Tunc attentantur numerosis durisque cruciatibus per stationarium mili tern iustorum piorumque carnificem, adhibitis in auxilium crudelitatis eius centurione et Cirtensium magistratibus, hoc est diaboli sacerdotibus …*" *Passio Sanctorum Mariani et Iacobi* 5.1, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 198-201).

[258] "*Inde ad carceream viros catenam, pastus sanguine carnifex trahebat …* - From there the blood-fed executioner was dragging them to bondage in prison …" (*Peristephanon* 6.16-17, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 204-205).

rhetorical contrast reinforces the elevated dramatic tone of Prudentius' version compared to the sober narrative style of the earlier *passio*.

The interrogation of Fructuosus and his deacons, which occupies nearly the entire second chapter of the *Passio Fructuosi*, further highlights the difference between the two texts. In the *passio*, the interrogation is framed within a broader ideological conflict: the authority of the Roman emperors and their gods versus the divine authority embodied by the Christian bishop. By contrast, Prudentius' account adopts a more rhetorically embellished style, intensifying the antagonism by framing the confrontation in stark moral terms, presenting a binary opposition between good and evil.

The *Passio Fructuosi* recounts that on Friday, January 21, the martyrs were brought before the *praeses*, who questioned them about their refusal to obey the edicts of Valerian and Gallienus. As Although, as mentioned before, the recorded questions and answers should not be regarded as a literal transcription, the text nonetheless conveys a sense of authenticity through careful selection and framing of the dialogue. As Gennaro Luongo notes: "The hagiographer here does a careful job of selecting the information so that in this interrogation the figure of Fructuosus as a bishop and exemplary Christian stands out above the harassment of the governor with his questions."[259] In the *passio*, the bishop emerges as the unambiguous center of the scene. The *praeses* opens the interrogation by asking whether he is aware of the emperors' orders. Fructuosus' replies by acknowledging his *nomen christianum*: "*Nescio quid praeceperunt. Ego Christianus*

[259] Luongo, "La *Passio Fructuosi*. Un Approccio Storico-Letterario," 264.

sum."[260] Through this response, Fructuosus asserts that being a Christian defines his entire existence; loyalty to God prevails over all earthly obligations, including those to imperial authority.[261] Implicit in this reply is the certainty of his death sentence, yet the hagiographer presents this acceptance of martyrdom as Fructuosus' supreme act of faith, offering an edifying model of courage and perseverance for the *fratres* who would hear or read the *passio*.

The hagiographer of the *Passio Fructuosi* places several allusions to the Holy Scriptures in Fructuosus' mouth during the interrogation. When the governor Aemilianus reminds Fructuosus that the emperors have ordered the veneration of the gods, the bishop responds with a verse from the *Acts of the Apostles*: "*Ego unum Deum colo qui fecit caelum et terram et mare et omnia quae in eis sunt*."[262] This verse, affirming the

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[260] "I do not know what they have commanded. I am a Christian." (*Passio Fructuosi* 2.3, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 177).

[261] The invocation of the *nomen Christianus* is a common feature in the early *Acta martyrum*, serving as a key act of self-definition that asserts Christian belonging over traditional social categories and underscores a deliberate rejection of pagan society: "The Christians we encounter often refuse to identify themselves in the traditional manner. Their social identity has shifted entirely from being a member of the polis to being a member of the Church. This is why, during interrogations, they refuse to answer questions regarding their name, descent and social status correctly. Stubbornly … they answered to all such questions with a simple: '*Christianus sum*'." (Danny Praet, "'*Meliore Cupiditate Detentus*': Christian Self-Definition and the Rejection of Marriage in the Early Acts of the Martyrs," *EVPHROSYNE* 31 [2003]: 457–73, at 458). See also, Thomas J. Heffernan, "*Nomen Sacrum*: God's Name as Shield and Weapon in the Acts of the Christian Martyrs," in *Scripture and Pluralism. Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas E. Burman (Brill, 2005), 11-28. Prudentius omits this element in his reworking of the *Passio Fructuosi*, since by his time the invocation of the *nomen Christianus* as a marker of self-definition had lost its meaning in an empire where Christianity had already triumphed—or at least that is how the poet seeks to present it.

[262] "I worship the one God who has made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them." (*Passio Fructuosi,* 2.4, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 178-179; *cf.* Acts, 4:24).The line in Acts refers to the prayer of the early community after Peter and John were taken into custody by the Sanhedrin for proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus and healing a lame man through his power. Despite being held by the authorities and facing the threat of punishment, they reaffirm the sovereignty of God and the power of Christ. In both texts, the confession proclaims the Christian God as creator and asserts his primacy over any earthly authority—a parallel context to that of Fructuosus and his deacons.

sovereignty of God as creator of all things and asserting His primacy over any earthly authority, appears in similar forms in other martyrdom accounts from the same period, particularly those reflecting events during the Decian persecution and the first edict of Valerian in 257 CE.[263]

The first author of the *Passio Fructuosi* took care in preserving the question-and-answer structure typical of judicial interrogations, and it is plausible that some of the governor's inquiries were originally framed in a comparable manner. However, the incorporation of scriptural references into the responses of Fructuosus and his deacons not only reflects a didactic purpose but also suggests that the intended audience of this first *passio* was the ecclesiastical circle and the small Christian community of *Tarraco,* who would have been familiar with the biblical verses cited.[264]

In contrast, *Peristephanon* 6 presents a much shorter interrogation scene, primarily serving to reinforce the antagonism between the Roman-pagan authority and the Christian martyrs following the good/evil binary mentioned above. Prudentius

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[263] For example, the *Passion of Carpus, Papylus, And Agathonice* ("*Carpus respondit*: *Dii, qui non fecerunt caelum et terram, permeant*" Latin Recension, 2), *The Acts of St. Cyprian* ("*Cyprianus episcopus dixit: Christianus sum et episcopus. nullos alios deos noui nisi unum et uerum deum qui fecit caelum et terram, mare et quae sunt in eis omnia*," 2) or *The Martyrdom of St. Crispina* ("*Crispina respondit: Numquam bene sit illis, ut me daemoniis faciant sacrificare, nisi uni Deo qui fecit caelum et terram, mare et omnia quae in eis sunt*" [1], and "*Crispina respondit: Dii, qui non fecerunt caelum et terram, pereant!*" [3]) (Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 28-29, 168 and 304).

[264] For example, Augustine quotes verbatim the *Passio Fructuosi*'s allusion to Acts 4:24 in his Sermon 273: "*Quale est etiam illud sancti diaconi, qui cum episcopo suo passus et coronatus est? Ait illi iudex:* '*Numquid et tu Fructuosum colis?*' *Et ille:* '*Ego non colo Fructuosum, sed Deum colo, quem colit et Fructuosus.*' - What kind of remark, too, was that of the holy deacon, who suffered and was crowned with his bishop? The judge said to him: 'Do you too worship Fructuosus?' And he answered, 'I do not worship Fructuosus, but I worship God, whom Fructuosus also worships.'" (*PL* 38, 1249. 3; *Sermons (273-305A)*, trans. E. Hill, 17). It may be assumed that the audience of this sermon was already sufficiently familiar with these biblical passages, just as the audience of the *Passio Fructuosi* would have been.

portrays the *praeses* Aemilianus as "fierce, violent, and arrogant,"[265] accusing Fructuosus of spreading "new inventions" and leading "light-minded girls" to desert the sacred groves and abandon Jupiter.[266] In Prudentius' version, instead of quoting the *Acts of the Apostles* as in the *Passio Fructuosi*, Fructuosus declares that he "worships the eternal sovereign of days, the maker and master of emperor Gallienus."[267] Although the tone in Prudentius is much harsher and the confrontation more dramatized, the fundamental thematic opposition remains somehow consistent with that of the *Passio Fructuosi*: the supremacy of divine authority over earthly power but framed now as an association of earthly authority with paganism and, therefore, evil, and divine authority with Christians, who represent the values of piety, compassion, and fortitude.[268] Prudentius expresses the argument without direct scriptural citation but emphasizes in more explicit terms God's authority as creator even over the emperors themselves, and, by extension, underscoring the bishop's role as His earthly representative.[269]

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[265] "*iudex Aemilianus inminebat atrox, turbidus, insolens, profanes …*" (*Peristephanon* 6.34-36; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 204-205).

[266] "*tu* [Fructuosus], *qui doctor —ait* [Aemilianus]— *seris novellum commenti genus, ut leves puellae lucos destituant, Iovem relinquant …*" (*Peristephanon* 6.37-39; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 206-207).

[267] "*aeternum colo principem dierum*, *factorem dominumque Gallieni*, *et Christum Patre prosatum perenni*, *cuius sum famulus gregisque pastor*." (*Peristephanon* 6.44-47; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 206-207).

[268] The entire interrogation between Aemilianus and Fructuosus, as depicted by Prudentius, reflects this association between pagan authority and evil. The comparison is made explicit and emphasized in Prudentius' depiction of Aemilianus and his enforcement of the orders given by the emperors: "*iudex Aemilianus ... aras daemonicas coli iubebat*. – Their judge Aemilianus … ordered them to worship at the alltars of devils." (*Peristephanon* 6.36, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 204-205).

[269] As Claudia Rapp observes, in Late Antiquity the bishop "has become distinct from the community and is distinguishable to outsiders. The virtues that some theologians two centuries previously demanded of all Christians are now expected primarily of the bishop. He is perceived by insiders and outsiders alike as the representative of Christianity." (Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* [University of California Press, 2005], 49-50).

Prudentius preserves the spirit of the *Passio Fructuosi* and retains the central theme around which the interrogation is structured, although he modifies the dialogues to make the theological message more explicit. Nevertheless, one particularly striking element he faithfully reproduces—almost as a direct quotation from the *Passio Fructuosi*—is the somewhat ironic, almost darkly humorous attitude of the governor just before condemning Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius to death. In the *Passio Fructuosi*, the final exchange between Aemilianus and Fructuosus is as follows: "*Aemilianus praeses Fructuosus dixit: Episcopus es? Fructuosus dixit: Sum. Aemilianus dixit: Fuisti*."[270] The ironic tone of this brief dialogue is unmistakable. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that this question may have served a practical function, confirming Fructuosus' episcopal status, since, according to Cyprian's correspondence, Valerian and Gallienus' rescript of 258 CE mandated the immediate execution of bishops, presbyters, and deacons.[271]

Following this morbidly prophetic exchange, Aemilianus decrees that the three martyrs must be burned alive.[272] Prudentius faithfully preserves the scene with minimal

[270] "Aemilianus the governor said to Fructuosus: You are a bishop? Yes, I am, said Fructuosus. You were, said Aemilianus." (*Passio Fructuosi* 2.8, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 178-179).

[271] See n. 205.

[272] "*et iussit eos vivos ardere*." (*Passio Fructuosi* 2.9, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 178-179). María Amparo Mateo Donet notes that, while execution by burning was a common method of punishment in martyr narratives, it was less frequently applied to high-ranking church officials, who were more often subjected to less violent penalties such as decapitation—or, in some cases, exile, as in that of Cyprian. Her argument is based on a study of judicial processes involving bishops during the persecutions, of whom three were executed by burning and six by beheading. She rightly observes that the choice of one form of execution over another cannot be attributed to specific legal or social criteria but suggests that it may have been influenced by the governor's intention to inflict greater or lesser humiliation upon the individual. Mateo Donet further proposes that, among the available options (exile, a less violent death such as beheading, or the pursuit of greater suffering), the governor Aemilianus likely chose burning in order to

alterations. In his version, as Fructuosus reaffirms his episcopal role— "I am the shepherd of His [God's] flock"—the governor responds with a smile, "*iam fuisti*."[273] Both the words spoken and the tone remain essentially identical to those in the *Passio Fructuosi*. This near-verbatim retention strongly suggests that Prudentius had direct access to the earlier *passio* and intentionally drew on this pre-existing tradition when crafting his literary reimagining of the martyrdom of Fructuosus and his deacons.

Chapter three of the *Passio Fructuosi* recounts the transfer of the martyrs to the place of their execution, the amphitheater of *Tarraco*, six days after their imprisonment, on Friday, January 21, 259 CE. This chapter aims to reinforce the idealized image of the bishop drawn from the Holy Scriptures, emphasizing the values of leadership, pastoral care, and perseverance in the faith that Fructuosus embodies. These qualities are conveyed through a series of scenes that unfold during the bishop's final journey to martyrdom.

First, a large crowd accompanies the martyrs, celebrating Fructuosus as they march toward their death and imminent crowning by God. The gathering includes not only Christian *fratres* but also *ethnici* — *gentiles* or pagans who admired the bishop—because Fructuosus was "much beloved of pagans and Christians alike."[274] This detail

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establish a strong deterrent—demonstrating what might happen to those who followed the example of Fructuosus (Mª Amparo Mateo Donet, "La ejecución de Fructuoso de Tarragona. Una condena romana inusual para un obispo," *Hispania Antiqua* 40 [2016]: 291–301).

[273] "*subridens ait ille*: '*iam fuisti*.' - But the judge says with a smile: 'You are so no longer.'" (*Peristephanon* 6.48; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 206-207).

[274] "*Et cum duceretur Fructuosus cum diaconibus suis ad amphitheatrum, populus Fructuosum episcopum dolere coepit quia talem amorem habebat non tantum a fratribus sed etiam ab ethnicis*." (*Passio Fructuosi* 3.1, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 178-179).

projects a powerful message of unity during a time of division and persecution, centering that unity around the bishop. The hagiographer draws a direct comparison between Fructuosus and the apostle Paul, describing him as "*vessel of election*"—God's chosen instrument to preach His name—and "*teacher of the Gentiles*" —as Paul himself — "all that [the Holy Spirit] declared that a bishop should be."[275] In this way, the bishop's evangelizing mission is elevated to apostolic status, particularly significant in the context of persecution, where Christian preaching was both politically disruptive and personally dangerous. Yet, the *Passio* portrays Fructuosus not as a subversive agitator, but as an exemplary leader whose moral authority and kindness had earned him the respect of both Christians and non-Christians alike.

The moral fortitude of Fructuosus is further highlighted through two additional episodes. First, during the journey to the amphitheater, a *frater* offers the bishop a cup of wine, probably mixed with some kind of sedative herb (*conditi permixti poculum*)[276] to help him endure the pain of martyrdom. Fructuosus, however, refuses the cup, choosing instead to uphold the *statio*, the Friday fast observed by the Christian community, just as he and his deacons had already respected the Wednesday fast while imprisoned.[277] Even

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[275] Acts 9.15: "Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."

[276] "*Cumque multi ex fraterna caritate ei offerrent ut conditi permixti poculum sumeret* …" (*Passio Fructuosi* 3.2, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 178-179).

[277] "[Fructuosus] *respondit: Non est, inquit, hora soluendi stationis.* (*agebatur enim hora diei quarta, siquidem in carcerem quarta feria stationem sollemniter celebrauerat.*)" (*Passio Fructuosi,* 3.2, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 178-179). The term *statio* refers to an early Christian fasting observance practiced on Wednesdays and Fridays, typically lasting until the ninth hour (around 3 p.m.). The use of *statio* for fasting derives from military terminology, designating a period of guard duty or watch, and by extension the act of "standing firm" against spiritual threat. The custom is already attested in early Christian texts such as the *Didache* (late first to mid-second century): "But do not let your fasts coincide

in the face of imminent death, Fructuosus demonstrates firm discipline and spiritual commitment.

Prudentius, in hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, preserves the entire scene of chapter three almost as it appears in the *Passio Fructuosi*, with practically no modifications. However, he amplifies its theological significance by explicitly linking Fructuosus' refusal of the cup to Christ's own rejection of a similar offer before his crucifixion:

> The priest, seeing some of the people offer him a cup to sip, says: 'We are fasting; I will not drink; not yet does the ninth hour break the seal of the day; never shall I do violence to the sacred law, nor shall death itself relax my observance. Thus did Christ, though He thirsted, in the hour of crucifixion reject the cup that was offered to Him and refusing to drink of it He carried on his thirst to the end.'[278]

In Prudentius' version, the imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*) becomes an even more central theme, highlighting the bishop's role not merely as a model of Christian leadership but as a faithful imitator of Christ's own path to martyrdom.

with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Monday and Thursday, so you must fast on Wednesday and Friday - *Αἱ δὲ νηστεῖαι ὑμῶν μὴ ἔστωσαν μετὰ τῶν ὑποκριτῶν. νηστεύουσι γάρ δευτέρᾳ σαββάτων και πέμπτη, ὑμεῖς δὲ νηστεύσατε τετράδα καὶ παρασκευήν*." (*Didache,* 8.1, in Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3rd ed. [Baker Academic, 2007], 354-355). A similar conceptualization of the *statio* can be found in the *Shepherd of Hermas* (second century): "While I was fasting and sitting on a certain mountain, thanking the Lord for everything he had done for me, I saw the shepherd sitting next to me. And he said to me: 'Why have you come here so early?' 'Because, Lord,' I said, 'I have a station.' 'What is the station?' he asked. 'I am fasting, Lord,' I replied. - *Νηστεύοντός μου καὶ καθημένου εἰς ὄρος τι εὐχαριστῶν τῷ κυρίῳ περὶ πάντων ὧν ἐποίησεν μετ' ἐμοῦ, βλέπω τὸν ποιμένα παρακαθήμενόν μοι καὶ λέγοντά μοι28 τοιαῦτα· τί ὀρθρινὸς ὧδε ἐλήλυθας; ὅτι, φημί, κύριε, στατίωνα ἔχω. τί, φησίν, ἐστὶν στατίων; νηστεύω, φημί, κύριε.*" (*Shepherd of Hermas*, 54 [V.1], 1-2; Bart D. Ehrman, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume II: Epistle of Barnabas. Papias and Quadratus. Epistle to Diognetus. The Shepherd of Hermas*, Loeb Classical Library 25 [Harvard University Press, 2003], 318-319).

[278] "*quosdam de populo videt Sacerdos libandum sibi poculum offerentes: 'ieiunamus,' ait; 'recuso potum nondum nona diem resignat hora numquam conviolabo ius dicatum, nec mors ipsa meum sacrum resolvet. sic Christus sitiens crucis sub hora oblatum sibi poculum recusans nec libare volens sitim peregit.'*" (*Peristephanon* 6.52-60; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 206-207).

From chapter four onward, the *Passio Fructuosi* adopts a noticeably different style, reflecting the intervention of a later hagiographer, most likely writing at the beginning of the fourth century. This chapter is structured around two dominant motifs: first, the bishop's pastoral role in providing spiritual consolation to his grieving community; second, the execution itself, where the martyrs are bound to wooden stakes and burned alive.

The first motif is shown in the scene that depicts the transfer of Fructuosus and his deacons to the amphitheater to face their death. Here, the bishop addresses the community that was mourning his upcoming execution—significantly including even the governor's *beneficiarii* who had initially imprisoned him. The bishop exhorts them not to see martyrdom as a tragic end but rather as a triumph of faith, offering the promise of union with God: "You will not long be lacking a shepherd, nor can the love and promises of the Lord fail you either here or in the hereafter. For what you look upon now seems but the weakness of a single hour."[279] His words of consolation are intended to reframe martyrdom not as a tragic conclusion but as a spiritually uplifting event that offers the faithful an opportunity to demonstrate their religious devotion and thus ensure the divine reward of heavenly communion.

The account of the execution is notably restrained in its depiction of physical suffering. Instead, the emphasis falls on the theological symbolism of the Holy Trinity,

[279] "*Iam non deerit uobis pastor nec deficere poterit caritas et repromissi Domini tam hie quam in futuro. hoc enim quod cernitis unius horae uidetur infirmitas*." (*Passio Fructuosi* 4.1; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 180-181).

conveyed through repeated references to the number three: three martyrs endure the flames, recalling the three Hebrew youths who survived the furnace in Babylon.[280] The hagiographer makes the Trinitarian presence explicit: the Father is present in the fire, the Son aids the martyrs in their suffering, and the Holy Spirit walks among them.[281] The martyrs ultimately die kneeling, with their arms extended in the form of a cross, evoking Christ's own crucifixion.[282] This image is the only instance of *imitatio Christi* in the *Passio Fructuosi*, where the martyrs, by adopting the physical posture of the crucified Christ, embody a visual and symbolic act of union with Christ's own passion.[283]

Prudentius maintains this fundamental structure, thematic concerns, and sequential events in his poetic adaptation, though he adapts them to his own literary and theological aims. While retaining the basic sequence of events, Prudentius introduces

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[280] "*similes Ananiae, Azariae, et Misaheli exstiterunt ut etiam et in illis diuina Trinitas compleretur*. – They were like Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, so that the divine Trinity was visible also in them." (*Passio Fructuosi* 4.2; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 180-181). The *Passio* equates Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who, thanks to God's intervention, emerged unharmed from the fiery furnace to which King Nebuchadnezzar II had condemned them (Daniel, 3:13-26).

[281] "*siquidem iam in ignem saeculi singulis constitutis, et Pater non deesset, sed et Filius subueniret et Spiritus in medio ignis ambularet*. - For to each at his post in the flames the Father was present, the Son gave his aid, and the Holy Spirit walked in the midst of the fire." (*Passio Fructuosi* 4.2; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 180-181).

[282] "*… orationis diuinae et solitae consuetudinis memor gaudens positis genibus, de resurrectione securus in signo tropaei Domini constituti Dominum deprecabatur. –* … recalling the Lord's prayer and their usual custom, they knelt down in joy assured of the resurrection, and stretching out their arms in memory of the Lord's cross, they prayed to the Lord until together they gave up their souls." (*Passio Fructuosi* 4.3; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 180-183).

[283] The *imitatio Christi* is a recurrent theme in early Christian martyr narratives, which sought to present the martyr's death as a conscious reenactment of Christ's passion. As Candida Moss notes: "By presenting a martyr as an *alter Christus*, an author or homilist unwittingly created the potential for the complete assimilation of the martyr to Christ. Such assimilation encompassed not only the manner of death but also Christ's saving function and divine status." (Candida Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* [Oxford University Press, 2010], 46). See also her discussion of the topic in chapter 2, pp. 45–74.

significant modifications. In the *Passio*, the emotional focus is on the bishop's role as a loving shepherd, concerned primarily with the consolation of his community in their moment of grief and uncertainty. In contrast, Prudentius shifts the narrative perspective: words of encouragement are now placed in the mouth of a "*caelo spiritus*," a heavenly spirit who delivers a thunderous proclamation that terrifies those present.[284]

This transformation in narrative focus serves several purposes. By introducing a portent, Prudentius elevates the scene to a cosmic struggle between divine justice and earthly wickedness. This supernatural manifestation functions rhetorically to emphasize divine intervention, heightening the miraculous dimension while simultaneously employing the persecutors' own religious framework against them. The spirit, described in language that echoes the language of Roman religious portents, repurposes imagery that persecutors might have interpreted as signs from the pagan gods.[285] Prudentius appropriates pagan religious terminology, even employing the epithet "*Tonans*" (the Thunderer)—traditionally associated with Jupiter—to designate the Christian God,

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[284] "*… resultat ecce caelo spiritus et serit loquellam, quae cunctos tremefecit audientes:*'*… felices animae, quibus per ignem celsa scandere contigit Tonantis, quas olim fugiet perennis ignis*.' - Suddenly the voice of a spirit rang from heaven uttering speech which made all tremble as they heard it: '…Happy the souls whose lot it is to mount through fire to the high place of the Thunderer, for one day the everlasting fire will flee from them.'" (*Peristephanon* 6.91-93 and 97-99; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 208-209).

[285] As Dennis Trout remarks, "Readers who view late Latin epic from an early imperial perspective meet the unexpected as well as the familiar. Late antique epics still center their attention upon the *gesta* of 'heroes,' though these are now Christ, the patriarchs, apostles, and saints (or personified virtues)." At the same time, they preserve many of the conventions of classical epic—invocations, direct speech, epithets, and epic diction—such as the preference for nuntius over *angelus* and the application of *Tonans* to God (Dennis E. Trout, "Latin Christian Epics of Late Antiquity," in *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, ed. John Miles Foley [Blackwell, 2005], 551).

thereby emphasizing the martyrs' righteous cause against their impious persecutors.[286] Thus, whereas the *Passio Fructuosi* emphasizes the bishop's pastoral concern, hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon* presents the martyrs' suffering as part of a broader cosmic narrative, showing the evil nature of the persecutors and the heavenly vindication awaiting the faithful.

The *Passio Fructuosi* presented the execution scene as a dichotomy between a pious bishop, whose only "crime" was his firm Christian faith, and Roman authorities, misguided in their fulfillment of imperial duty. In this account, the central issue is framed as one of law and justice: the officials act wrongly not out of personal malice, but by enforcing laws hostile to Christianity. By contrast, Prudentius reformulates this dichotomy in *Peristephanon* 6 not as a question of justice but as a moral struggle between virtue and evil. His target is not the Roman system *per se*, but the outright wickedness of the persecutors, rooted in their adherence to paganism. In Prudentius' account, there is no trace of sympathy from the soldiers who imprison the martyrs, nor compassion from the crowd witnessing the execution. All expressions of empathy present in the *Passio Fructuosi*—even among non-Christians—are erased in favor of a binary contrast: the faithful Christians versus the godless persecutors.

[286] The motif of a divine voice resounding from heaven evokes biblical theophanies in which the Father publicly confirms divine authority. By applying the epithet *Tonans*—traditionally associated with Jupiter—to the Christian God, Prudentius fuses scriptural imagery with a deliberate polemic against Rome's highest deity. He employs the same tactic in the *Contra Symmachum*, *Cathemerinon*, and *Psychomachia*, where *Tonans* becomes a Christianized title that asserts God's supremacy over the pagan pantheon. As Erika Loic notes, late antique Christian poets did not seek to erase pagan gods entirely but to "despoil and exploit [their] obsolete structures." Thus, Prudentius can both condemn Jupiter as "*atrox Iuppiter*" and simultaneously reassign some of his attributes to Christ (Erika Loic, "*Dominus Tonans*: The Voice and Light of Christianity's Tempestuous God in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Word & Image* 35, no. 4 [2019]: 403–25, at 404).

Despite these important shifts, Prudentius retains key elements of the *Passio Fructuosi*. He preserves, for instance, the detail that the martyrs died with their arms extended in the form of a cross, reinforcing their imitation of Christ.[287] He also preserves the allusion to the three young men of Babylon but deploys it with a different emphasis. In the *Passio Fructuosi*, the reference serves to draw a threefold parallel: the three martyrs, the three biblical youths, and the three persons of the Trinity, emphasizing the theological symbolism of the number three.[288] In Prudentius' version, by contrast, the reference primarily highlights the miraculous nature of the martyrdom itself and the triumph of Christianity over the tyranny of the Roman authorities: "It was like the sight of the three in olden times whom the trembling despot was amazed to hear singing in the midst of the fire at Babylon."[289] Prudentius evokes the wonder of the Babylonian king, who was amazed to see the young men unharmed amid the flames, to underscore the

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[287] "*non ausa est cohibere poena palmas in morem crucis ad Patrem levandas solvit bracchia, quae Deum precentur* - The torture dared not constrain the hands they purposed to lift up to the Father after the fashion of the cross; it set their arms free to pray to God." (*Peristephanon* 6.106-108; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 210-211). As Diane Fruchtman has shown through the concept of "pedagogical ekphrasis," similar motifs appear elsewhere in the *Peristephanon*, such as in Hymn 10 to Romanus: "Through his depiction of a young boy's martyrdom and his mother's interpretation of both her son and herself as imitators of Christ, Prudentius offers a model by which Christians removed from persecution could configure themselves as Christ-like martyrs. Rather than simply teaching his audience how to see, Prudentius teaches them how to be—that is, how to see themselves as Christians and enact their own *imitatio Christi* through perceived martyrdom." (Diane Fruchtman, "Modeling a Martyrial Worldview: Prudentius' Pedagogical *Ekphrasis* and Christianization," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 7, no. 1 [2014]: 131-158, at 132).

[288] In the *Passio Fructuosi*, the bishop is depicted as praying three times over the course of the narrative: first, at the moment of his arrest in his *cubiculum* (*orabat sine cessatione*, 1.4); second, during his interrogation before Governor Aemilianus (*Fructuosus respexit ad Dominum et orare coepit intra se*, 2.5); and finally, at the moment of his death, when the three martyrs pray together with their arms extended in the form of the cross (*in signo tropaei Domini constituti Dominum deprecabatur*, 4.3).

[289] "*priscorum specimen trium putares, quos olim Babylonicum per ignem cantantes stupuit tremens tyrannus*." (*Peristephanon* 6.109-111; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 210-211).

extraordinary, almost supernatural triumph of the Christian martyrs at their most dramatic moment of physical suffering.

Both the pro-Trinitarian emphasis and the theme of *imitatio Christi* are central to the *Passio Fructuosi*'s account of the execution, aligning with the concerns of a second hagiographer writing in the early fourth century, a period when debates over the Trinity were particularly acute.[290] Structurally, the *Passio Fructuosi* reinforces this theological emphasis through the persistent motif of "three": the three martyrs, Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, are paralleled to the three persons of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, this Trinitarian symbolism is less explicit. Prudentius retains the reference to the three young men of Babylon, but rather than using it to advance a theological argument, he deploys it primarily as a literary resource to emphasize the extraordinary victory of the martyrs, as mentioned above. The three martyrs, like the three biblical youths, bravely face the fury of an evil persecutor—Aemilianus in the case of Fructuosus and his companions, and Nebuchadnezzar II in the case of the youths of Babylon.[291] The motif of the *imitatio Christi in the execution*

[290] On Trinitarian debates in the fourth century, see, among others, Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Baker Academic, 2011); and David E. Henderson, *Constantine and the Council of Nicaea, Second Edition: Defining Orthodoxy and Heresy in Christianity, 325 CE* (Reacting Consortium Press, 2024).

[291] A similar reference appears in *Apotheosis* 129-131: "… *quem videat Babylonis ab arce tyrannus innocuas inter flammas procul exspatiantem, calcantem rapidos inadustis fratribus ignes*. - … then tell me who it is that from Babylon's throne the king sees at a distance walking unharmed through the flames, and trampling on the consuming fires with his brethren unscorched." (Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 130-131). In

scene—represented by the martyrs' cruciform posture reflecting Christ's suffering—is also preserved in the *Peristephanon*. Prudentius closely parallels the *Passio Fructuosi* but incorporates heightened dramatic elements, notably the detail that despite their bonds being consumed by flames, the martyrs' flesh remained miraculously intact (*intacta cute*).[292]

Following the martyrs' execution, chapters five and six of the *Passio Fructuosi* document post-mortem miracles that demonstrate their intercessory power from heaven. Chapter five recounts a vision experienced by two of the governor's household servants, Babylas and Mygdonius, along with the governor's daughter—whose name is not mentioned. In this vision, the three martyrs are seen crowned and ascending into heaven, thereby validating their triumph and divine acceptance.[293]

Prudentius closely follows the sequence of events of the *Passio Fructuosi* but modifies certain details to heighten the heroic tone of the narrative. In his version, only a single servant and the governor's daughter witness the miraculous ascension; he omits the

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this doctrinal poem, Prudentius develops a lengthy a defense of the Trinity, since much of the work is devoted to refuting heresies opposed to Trinitarian doctrine, particularly Patripassianism and Sabellianism.

[292] "*nexus denique, qui manus retrorsus in tergum revocaverant revinctas, intacta cute decidunt adusti*. - Thereupon the fastenings which kept their hands pulled back and tied behind them are burned and fall off, but the skin is unhurt." (*Peristephanon* 6.103-105; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 210-211).

[293] "*Post haec solita Domini non defuere magnalia, apertumque caelum, Babyla et Mygdonio fratres nostri ex familia Aemiliani praesidis, filiae eius, dominae suae carnali, ostendebant Fructuosum cum diaconibus suis, adhuc stipitibus quibus ligati fuerant permanentibus, ad caelum ascendentes coronatos*. - After this the usual miracles of the Lord were not lacking. Babylas and Mygdonius, two of our brethren in the household of the governor Aemilianus, saw the heavens open, and this they also revealed to Aemilianus daughter, their mistress according to the flesh: there was the saintly bishop Fructuosus together with his deacons rising crowned up to heaven, with the stakes to which they had been bound still intact." (*Passio Fructuosi* 5.1; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 182-183)

names of the witnesses, focusing instead on the grandeur of the martyrs' heavenly reception.[294] While affirming the martyrs' power, this scene also sharpens the moral contrast by underscoring the governor Aemilianus' unworthiness: he is blind to the miracle because of his wickedness. Prudentius adds a further dimension not present in the *Passio Fructuosi*: he suggests that the governor's daughter was deemed worthy of witnessing the miracle by virtue of her *virginitas*: "*haec turn virginitas palam videre per sudum meruit parente caeco* …" This addition reflects the heightened value attached to virginity in late fourth-century Christian ascetic culture, where *virginitas*—especially for young women such as Eulalia (to be discussed in the following chapter)—was increasingly conceptualized as a spiritual ideal and a mark of social status.[295]

[294] "*vidit praesidis ex domo satelles caelum martyribus patere apertum insignesque viros per astra ferri. quin et filiolae monens erili ostendit sceleris notam paterni* … - An attendant belonging to the governor's household saw the heavens opened to receive the martyrs, and the illustrious three passing through the stars; yes, and he called the attention of his master's young daughter, showing her the token of her father's sin …" (*Peristephanon* 6.121-125; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 210-211). By referring to the martyrs as *insignes viros* ("illustrious men"), Prudentius not only emphasizes the prominence of their heavenly ascent but also employs language deeply rooted in Roman honorific discourse, where *insignis vir* denoted civic or military distinction. In this way, martyrdom is framed as a form of true distinction, surpassing and redefining traditional Roman ideals of honor through Christian victory.

[295] "That day her girlhood was deemed worthy to see these things plainly in the clear air, though her father was blind …" (*Peristephanon* 6.127-128; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 210-211). As Kate Cooper notes: "To consecrate a daughter's virginity afforded a family a privileged point of contact with church structure and tradition while affirming time-honored ideals of filial piety and innocence." (Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride. Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* [Harvard University Press, 1996], 79). Michele Salzman further notes that late fourth and early fifth century Christian leaders frequently associated the highest form of piety—and thus the greatest *nobilitas*—to the ascetic or virgin. While this association in theory redefined noble status as a spiritual quality accessible to all, in practice it was reshaped to accommodate traditional aristocratic values, softening its potentially radical implications (Michele R. Salzman, "Competing Claims to 'Nobilitas' in the Western Empire of the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 3 [2001]: 359–85, at 363). See also Lisa A. Alberici and Mary Harlow, "Age and Innocence: Female Transitions to Adulthood in Late Antiquity," *Hesperia Supplements* 41 (2007): 193–203; Sissel Undheim, *Borderline Virginities Sacred and Secular Virgins in Late Antiquity* (Routledge, 2018).

Chapter six of the *Passio Fructuosi* marks one of the pivotal moments of the text, recounting the second miracle associated with the martyrs, this time focused solely on Fructuosus. The hand of a second hagiographer is again evident in this scene, which centers on the preservation and treatment of the martyrs' relics.

After the execution, the *fratres* of *Tarraco*, mourning the loss of their bishop and his deacons, come to the amphitheater at night to honor the remains. Following traditional Roman funerary practices, they sprinkle wine upon the martyrs' smoldering remains.[296] After this, each participant collects a portion of the ashes. In response, Fructuosus appears alone to the *fratres*, instructing them *sine mora* ("without delay") to restore the ashes they had divided among themselves, offering a model of correct behavior (*parvulis monstraretur exemplum*).[297]

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[296] "*superveniente nocte ad amphitheatrum cum uino festinauerunt ut semiusta corpora exstinguerent*. - When night fell, they hastened to the amphitheatre with wine in order to quench the smouldering bodies." (*Passio Fructuosi,* 6,1; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 182-183). The sprinkling of wine over the ashes recalls traditional Roman cremation practices. Virgil, for example, describes it at the funeral of Misenus in the *Aeneid*: "*postquam conlapsi cineres et flamma quievit, reliquias vino et bibulam lavere favillam, ossaque lecta cado texit Corynaeus aëno* - After the ashes fell in and the flame died away, they washed with wine the remnant of thirsty dust, and Corynaeus, gathering the bones, hid them in a brazen urn." (*Aeneid*, 6.226-228 in *Virgil: Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, Revised Edition with new Introduction, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 [Harvard University Press, 1999], 548-549). See also J. M. C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1971), 50; The act of the *fratres* in the *Passio Fructuosi* thus illustrates a funerary gesture in which inherited Roman ritual was reinterpreted within the emerging framework of Christian martyr veneration.

[297] "*quo facto cineres eorum collectos prout quisque potuit sibi uindicauit. sed et in hoc Domini et saluatoris nostri non defuere magnalia ut credentibus tides augeretur et paruulis monstraretur exemplum. … igitur post passionem apparuit fratribus et monuit ut quod unusquisque per caritatem de cineribus usurpauerat, restituerent sine mora*. - This done, each one collected the ashes of the martyrs, so far as he could, and claimed them for his own. And here too the miracles of our Lord and Saviour were not wanting to increase the faith of believers and to set an example to the young. … And so, after his death, he appeared to his brethren and urged them that what each had taken of his ashes out of love for him should be restored without delay." (*Passio Fructuosi,* 6.2-3; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 182-183).

This scene reflects a notable concern on the part of the later hagiographer regarding the unity and preservation of the martyrs' remains. Although the debate over the treatment of relics may not have been as central as the Trinitarian controversies of the time, the dedication of an entire chapter to this theme indicates its growing importance.[298] As the *Passio* implies, despite the fire consuming much of their bodies, it would have been difficult for them to be reduced entirely to dust; likely, fragments of bone and charred remains mixed with ashes survived. This mixture of body remains would have rendered identification of individual martyrs' remains virtually impossible.

Three elements in this episode stand out. First, despite the absence of fully intact bodies, the ashes of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius are treated with the same reverence as if they were the whole martyrs' flesh. The *Passio* portrays the Christians' act of collecting ashes not as a formal cultic practice but as a personal gesture of love (*per caritatem*) from Fructuosus' community. There is no suggestion of private household relic veneration; rather, the focus is on communal remembrance of the event.

Second, the appearance of Fructuosus alone—without his deacons—emphasizes his singular role as the leader and teacher of the Christian community. The second hagiographer deliberately stresses the hierarchical distinction between the bishop and his

[298] We find a similar request not to take portions of the martyrs' remains for personal possession in the *Testament of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*, a document probably from the early fourth century and therefore roughly contemporary with the additions of the second hagiographer of the *Passio Fructuosi*. The martyrs' petition reads: "Furthermore, we beg you all that no one should take for himself one particle of our remains removed from the furnace; rather they should hand them over to the aforementioned, bearing in mind that they are to be collected in one place. - *ἔτι δέ ἀξιοῦμεν πάντας μηδένα τών έκ της καμίνου ἀνελομένων λειψάνων ημών έν έαυτώ περιποιήσασθαι, αλλά και της έν ταύτω συναθροίσεως φροντίσαντα ἀποδοῦναι τοῖς προειρημένοις*." (*The Testament of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*, 1.3; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 354-357).

deacons, presenting Fructuosus as the enduring guide to his flock even after death. The appearance of Fructuosus before his flock simultaneously accomplishes dual narrative functions: it reaffirms Fructuosus' pastoral authority while demonstrating the martyrs' *potentia*—their miraculous capacity for posthumous earthly intervention—providing visible confirmation of their spiritual *praesentia* among the community, in line with the concepts articulated by Peter Brown.[299]

The third significant element in this scene is its central message advocating for the unified preservation of martyrs' remains. While relic translation and distribution became increasingly common from the mid-fourth century onward (particularly in Eastern Christianity), the composition of chapters four through seven of the *passio* likely occurred no later than the early fourth century, when such practices remained relatively uncommon in Western ecclesiastical contexts.[300] The emphasis on preserving the ashes together does not necessarily imply that debates over relic division were absent at the time. However, the hagiographer's primary concern seems less about condemning relic

[299] Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), esp. chapters 4 and 5 (86-105 and 106-128).

[300] "However, whereas not a single body is recorded to have been moved from its original resting place before 350, it became common practice by 400 in both East and West." (Erik Thunø, "Reliquaries and the Cult of Relics in Late Antiquity," in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. Robin M. Jensen and Mark D. Ellison [Routledge, 2018], 152). Concern about the growing practice of distributing relics toward the end of the fourth century is reflected in an imperial ruling issued in 386 CE under Theodosius I, addressed specifically to Maternus Cynegius, praetorian prefect of the East (384–88), which forbade both the transfer of bodies and the sale or trafficking of saints' relics: "No person shall transfer a buried body to another place. No person shall sell the relics of a martyr; no person shall traffic in them." (*Codex Theodosianus* 9.17.17 [26 February 386 CE]; Clyde Pharr, trans., *The Theodosian Code and Novels and The Sirmondian Constitutions. A Translation With Commentary, Glossary, And Bibliography By Clyde Pharr in Collaboration with Theresa Sherrer Davidson and Mary Brown Pharr* [Princeton University Press, 1952], 240). The edict suggests that these practices already existed by the last decades of the fourth century, at least in the East, to which the legislation was directed.

distribution itself and more about reinforcing the communal nature of Christian remembrance: the *fratres* were to honor the martyrs collectively, rather than through private possession of the martyrs' relics.[301]

Prudentius' version of the scene in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon* strongly supports this interpretation. He essentially preserves the sequence of events reported in the *Passio Fructuosi*—the Christians of *Tarraco* pour wine over the martyrs' remains and attempt to take portions of their ashes for themselves.[302] Like the *Passio*, he describes the subsequent miraculous intervention, in which the martyrs instruct the Christians to restore the remains to a single resting place.

Despite the shared narrative structure, Prudentius introduces important nuances that reflect late fourth- and early fifth-century Christian thought. Whereas the *Passio Fructuosi* portrays the taking of the ashes primarily as an act of love and remembrance, Prudentius casts it explicitly in terms of relic veneration. He describes the ashes as *sanctorum cinerum dicata dona*— "the consecrated gifts of the holy ashes"[303]—thus emphasizing their sanctified nature and the spiritual power now associated with them. In

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[301] Franchi di Cavalieri identifies the narrative of chapter 6 as one of the sections interpolated by a later hagiographer, noting its lack of specific detail, such as the place of deposition of the relics: "Ma il racconto che ne leggiamo nella *passio*, generico, scolorito, senza nomi di persone, senza precise indicazioni di tempo, senza alcun accenno al luogo in cui furono deposte le reliquie, fa pensare a, una mano diversa da quella del primo redattore e non così vicina agli avvenimenti." (Franchi di Cavalieri, "Gli Atti di S. Fruttuoso di Tarragona," 163).

[302] The action in Prudentius' hymn does not take place in secret, at night, as in *Passio Fructuosi,* since the risk of persecution no longer existed at this time.

[303] "*tum de corporibus sacris favillae et perfusa mero leguntur ossa quae raptim sibi quisque vindicabat*. - Then the glowing ashes and the bones of the sacred bodies were sprinkled with wine and gathered up, each man eagerly taking for himself." (*Peristephanon* 6.130-132; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 210-213).

Prudentius' account, the faithful wished to either take the ashes home with them—implying some sort of private shrine—or carry them as tangible attestations of their devotion and faith in the martyrs' intercessory power: "such was the desire of the brethren to take home consecrated gifts of the holy ashes, or to carry them in their bosoms as a trusty pledge."[304]

This shift reflects the changing mentality surrounding relics in Prudentius' own time: by the late fourth century, the belief in the relics' protective and miraculous power had become more widespread, influencing both private devotion and public liturgical practices.[305] Nevertheless, despite this broader cultural shift, Prudentius remains faithful to the central message of the *Passio Fructuosi* by condemning the division of the martyrs' remains. Like the hagiographer of the earlier *passio*, he stresses the importance of preserving the integrity of the relics, maintaining the communal dimension of relic veneration over private appropriation.[306]

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[304] This is the only instance in which Prudentius employs the term *fratres* to describe the Christian community of *Tarraco*, in contrast to the *Passio Fructuosi*, where the designation appears more frequently.

[305] The role of relics in Prudentius' hymns to the martyrs of Spain will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 4.

[306] Contemporaries of Prudentius, such as Ambrose—whose hymns served as a significant source of inspiration for the Spanish poet—had no objection to the division and distribution of relics and actively promoted it, seeing in this practice an extension of the martyrs' presence and power among the faithful. We have evidence about Ambrose's activity in this regard in Victricius of Rouen's *In Praise of the Saints*, where he reports having received relics of the apostles Andrew, Luke, and Thomas, as well as those of John the Baptist and the martyr Euphemia, sent to him by Ambrose of Milan around 396 CE (Matthieu Pignot, *Cult of Saints*, E00717 - http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E00717). As Robert Wiśniewski has noted, these relics had likely been sent to Ambrose from Constantinople at some point in the 380s, before the promulgation of the edict of 386 CE (Robert Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* [Oxford University Press, 2019], 163). Ambrose clearly felt unconstrained by the imperial ruling, though it seems plausible that the legislation was intended primarily for the eastern provinces.

This development ties closely to another important modification introduced by Prudentius in this scene. In the *Passio Fructuosi*, it is only Fructuosus who appears to the *fratres* of *Tarraco* to instruct them to return the martyrs' remains. This choice reflects the hagiographer's intent to emphasize Fructuosus' singular authority as bishop over the community, as well as over his deacons, Augurius and Eulogius: only the bishop could deliver such a lesson to his flock. By contrast, in *Peristephanon* 6, Prudentius introduces a notable shift by presenting all three martyrs—Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius—appearing together to the faithful to deliver the instruction.[307] In doing so, Prudentius subtly conveys that the three martyrs are equal in dignity, authority, and cultic significance. This adjustment crystallizes the strong tripartite imagery already present throughout the *Passio Fructuosi*, where the martyrs are compared to the three young men of Babylon and evoke the unity of the Trinity. In Prudentius' hymn, this theological symbolism is reinforced by establishing a threefold cultic devotion: no longer centered solely on the bishop, but honoring all three martyrs equally.

The final and most significant element of this scene lies in the instruction the martyrs deliver to the faithful upon their miraculous appearance. In Prudentius' version, Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius not only urge the Christians of *Tarraco* to restore the relics they had taken, but further command that their bones be enclosed collectively in a

[307] "… *cernuntur niveis stolis amicti* - … the three appeared, clad in snow-white robes …" (*Peristephanon* 6.139; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213). The three martyrs are depicted as wrapped in robes of pristine white, a detail that further underscores the reverence they inspire as *coronati* martyrs. This reverential presentation is consistent with their earlier characterization as *insignes viri* ("illustrious men") in verse 123 of the hymn. Prudentius' imagery of the martyrs covered in white robes further resonates as a symbol of purity, victory, and eternal reward in this scene.

marble chamber or tomb (*mandant restitui cavoque claudi mixtim marmore pulverem sacrandum*).[308] Prudentius' addition clarifies the ultimate purpose of preserving the martyrs' remains together: to create a sacred *locus* where their *praesentia*—their continued divine presence—could be accessed, and where the faithful could seek their intercession before God.[309]

While the *Passio Fructuosi* had emphasized communal memory and the shared celebration of the martyrs' sacrifice, Prudentius expands this vision to align with the late fourth-century theological understanding of saint cults. By the time of the *Peristephanon's* composition, the burial site of a martyr was not merely a place of remembrance but an active center of divine grace, where the saint's proximity to God empowered their relics with miraculous potency.[310] Thus, while Prudentius retains the *Passio's* call for collective remembrance and reverence, he layers upon it the theological developments of his own era, emphasizing not merely the memory but the living presence and power of the saints at their resting places.

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[308] "*mandant restitui cavoque claudi mixtim marmore pulverem sacrandum* - [Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius] enjoined that the hallowed dust be given back and enclosed together in a marble chamber." (*Peristephanon* 6.140-141; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213).

[309] In Peter Brown's words: "The graves of the saints … were privileged places, where the contrasted. poles of Heaven and Earth met. … This was because the saint in Heaven was believed to be 'present' at his tomb on earth." (Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 3).

[310] As noted by Robert Barlett, "God is great but not easily accessible; human life is full of dangers; the saints are "sown" across the land by a loving God to act as the bridge between desperate human beings and his divine power." (Robert Barlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* [Princeton University Press, 2013], 103). The martyrs, through their sacrificial death, acquire a distinctive status as mediators and dispensers of divine grace. Their intercession is perceived as granting them privileged access to the highest levels of the "cosmic hierarchy," enabling them to stand beside God and to act on behalf of the faithful.

By preserving the *Passio Fructuosi's* foundational narrative while introducing these modifications, Prudentius adapts his account to *Tarraco's* specific devotional context. He portrays martyrial practices already familiar to the Christians of the city—such as the recitation of the earlier *passio* on the martyrs' *dies natalis* and the likely gatherings at their burial site—while simultaneously infusing these traditions with the evolving devotional sensibilities of the late fourth century. Notably, Prudentius introduces the idea that the martyrs themselves desired the monumentalization of their resting place in marble, a development reflecting broader trends in contemporary saint cults. In Chapter Three, I will return to the mention of the marble shrine, exploring the archaeological evidence for the possible existence of such a structure in *Tarraco* during Prudentius' time.

Chapter seven—the final chapter of the *Passio Fructuosi*—presents the most important divergence between the original *passio* and Prudentius' version in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*. In both accounts, the narrative concludes with a prayer to the martyrs of *Tarraco*, functioning as a final tribute to their sacrifice. However, in the *Passio Fructuosi*, this prayer is preceded by the account of a third posthumous miracle performed by the martyrs.

Following the appearances of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius to the governor's daughter and her servant (chapter five) and to the *fratres* who came to collect their remains (chapter six), the *Passio* recounts a third apparition: the martyrs appear to the governor Aemilianus himself, mocking him and demonstrating the futility of his actions:

> "Fructuosus also appeared to Aemilianus, who had condemned him to death, together with his deacons in robes of glory. And he scolded and mocked him, saying that it was of no use for him to believe vainly that, stripped of their bodies, they would remain in the earth, now that he could see them in glory."[311]

Franchi de Cavalieri has observed that this particular scene is likely a later interpolation, not introduced by either the first or second hagiographer of the *Passio Fructuosi* (to be expanded when adding the precise dating of this interpolation).[312] Prudentius, significantly, omits this scene in Hymn 6—a notable absence, given that he otherwise consistently preserves the essential events from the *Passio* even while adapting them to his own style and purposes. It is very likely, therefore, that this third miracle narrative was added after Prudentius' time, reinforcing some major thematic elements already present in the original *passio*.[313]

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[311] "*Aemiliano etiam qui eos damnauerat Fructuosus pariter cum diaconibus suis ostendit se in stolis repromissionis increpans pariter et insultans, nihil illi profuisse quod frustra exutos a corpore in terra crederet futuros quos cerneret gloriosos*." (*Passio Fructuosi* 7.1; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 184-185).

[312] "Ma che questa visione risalga alla prima redazione, non solo è dubbio, come non mancò di rilevare il Tillemont, ma, a mio senso, è addirittura inammissibile." (Franchi De' Cavalieri, "Gli Atti di S. Fruttuoso di Tarragona," 165).

[313] Franchi De' Cavalieri theorizes that this interpolation may have been introduced in one of the many manuscript copies of the text, since all extant codices of the *Passio Fructuosi* derive from a recension later than the one Prudentius himself had access to (Franchi De' Cavalieri, "Gli Atti di S. Fruttuoso di Tarragona," 166). The addition of this third miracle by the later redactor of the *passio* strengthens the

After this third miracle, the *Passio Fructuosi* concludes with a prayer in honor of the martyrs. A corresponding moment of exaltation is found in Prudentius' hymn, although with notable differences in tone and focus. The final prayer in the *Passio* weaves together multiple biblical references to emphasize the martyrs' glory and their place at the right hand of God. The emphasis remains on the memory of their martyrdom and their function as models for the Christian faithful, rather than on the immediate intercessory power later associated with saintly relics.

The prayer constructs a vivid theological and moral portrait of the martyrs through its biblical allusions: "*O beati martyres in igni probati sicut aurum pretiosum*"—"O blessed martyrs, who were tested in the fire like precious gold"[314]—depicting martyrdom as a purifying trial that proves their faith and virtue. The prayer subsequently employs military metaphors, portraying the martyrs as divine soldiers "clad in the breastplate of faith and the helmet of salvation" (*uestiti loricam fidei et galeam salutis*), echoing Pauline imagery.[315] In this martial paradigm, faith and perseverance constitute

antagonism between the Roman authorities and the *fratres* of *Tarraco,* led by their bishop, by highlighting the conflict between earthly and divine authority, and by asserting the superiority of God's judgment. The martyrs' appearance *in stolis repromissionis* ("in the garments of the promise") to mock the governor dramatizes this victory. On the other hand, the interpolation continues the *passio*'s emphasis on the number three as a symbolic allusion to the Trinity. The final three chapters — five, six, and seven—each narrate a miracle, reinforcing the Trinitarian framework established earlier in chapter four.

[314] *Passio Fructuosi* 7.2; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 184-185. *Cf.* Proverbs 17:3: "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts."

[315] *Passio Fructuosi* 7.2; *cf.* Ephesians 6:14-17: "Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness … In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Also, Isaiah 59:17: "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak."

the martyrs' spiritual weaponry; though their physical bodies suffered torture, their "spiritual armor" secures heavenly victory, as evidenced by the miraculous manifestations documented in preceding chapters, which testify to the *militia Christi's* ultimate triumph. The prayer culminates in triumphal language, proclaiming that the martyrs are "crowned with a diadem and a crown that does not fade" (*coronati sunt diademate et corona immarcescibili eo quod diaboli caput calcauerunt*),[316] linking their earthly suffering to ultimate spiritual victory in heaven.

In Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius fundamentally transforms the imagery of the final eulogy to the martyrs, focusing it entirely on their enduring role as patrons and protectors of *Tarraco* and the surrounding territories of the Pyrenees. None of the elements emphasized in the final chapter of the *Passio Fructuosi*—the biblical imagery of the martyrs as soldiers of Christ, the invocation of their spiritual triumph, or their ultimate victory over the devil—are present in Prudentius' conclusion. Nor does Prudentius include the last miracle—the appearance of the martyrs to Aemilianus—which, as discussed above, was likely a later interpolation not found in the version of the *Passio* to which Prudentius had access.

Prudentius' concluding section exemplifies his process of selective literary appropriation and strategic modification. While remaining broadly faithful to the original *passio*'s outline in the rest of the hymn, Prudentius introduces a distinct vision of the martyrs' *praesentia* and *potentia* in *Tarraco*. His conclusion is structured around three

[316] "… crowned with a diadem and a crown that does not fade because they trod underfoot the Devil's head!" (*Passio Fructuosi* 7.2; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 184-185).

interrelated themes: first, the sacralization of *Tarraco* and the Pyrenean lands through the martyrs' presence; second, the redefinition of the martyrs' role from witnesses of faith during persecution to active patrons and protectors of the territory; and third, a model for ongoing devotion and cult to the martyrs.

Beginning with the first element, Prudentius' final eulogy explicitly links Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius to the territory of Hispania. In the opening lines of the eulogy, he recovers the Trinitarian symbolism prominent in the *Passio Fructuosi*—a theme that had been less emphasized throughout the rest of his hymn—by immediately highlighting the number three: *triplex honor, triforme culmen*. He proclaims that the triple sacrifice of the martyrs elevates *Tarraco* above all other cities of Spain: "O threefold honor, triple eminence, whereby our city's head is lifted up, towering over all the cities of Spain!"[317] Here, the martyrs are not only commemorated for their faith but are installed as pillars of civic and territorial identity, their sacrifice serving as a source of sacred prestige for their homeland.

Prudentius frames the triple martyrdom of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius as a direct echo of the Holy Trinity, highlighting the sacred significance of their unity in death as a sign of divine providence. By equating the three martyrs with the symbolic meaning of the number three, Prudentius not only preserves part of the theological message present in the *Passio Fructuosi*, but expands it to imply that *Tarraco*—and, by extension, the Iberian Peninsula—was divinely chosen. The city's association with this

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[317] "*o triplex honor, o triforme culmen, quo nostrae caput excitatur urbis, cunctis urbibus eminens Hiberis!*" (*Peristephanon* 6.142-144; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213).

triple martyrdom becomes a permanent mark of God's favor and grace. Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius are thus elevated in Prudentius' narrative not merely as examples of Christian perseverance, but as patrons and protectors of the territory itself, mediating divine blessings to their land through the devotion of the faithful: "We will rejoice in our three patrons, under whose protection all we peoples of the Pyrenean lands are cherished."[318] The concept of a Christian community rooted in the "Pyrenean lands" will reappear and be further reinforced in chapter four of the dissertation.

The most radical modification in Prudentius' conclusion concerns the specific manifestation of proper devotion to the martyrs of *Tarraco*, revealing the poet's distinctive conceptualization of martyrial cult. In the final lines of his hymn, he stages a vibrant communal liturgy: "Let a choir of either sex stand round about; grown men, girls and boys, old men and women, sing as befits you of your own Fructuosus. Let the hymn ring out in praise of Augurius and in mingled strains match Eulogius with him; let us render song equally to the equal."[319] The poet imagines a communal liturgy, a choral performance in honor of the martyrs, in which people of all sexes and ages participate collectively in the celebration of their memory. Through this imagery, Prudentius not only emphasizes the public and festive character of martyr veneration but also reaffirms the early Christian ideals of communal unity and familial bonds—ideals already evident

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[318] "*exultare tribus libet patronis, quorum praesidio fovemur omnes terrarum populi Pyrenearum*." (*Peristephanon* 6.145-147; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213).

[319] "*circumstet chorus ex utroque sexu heros, virgo, puer, senex, anulla, vestrum psallite rite Fructuosum. Laudans Augurium resultet hymnus mixtis Eulogium modis coaequans reddamus paribus pares camenas*." (*Peristephanon* 6.148-153; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213).

in the *Passio Fructuosi* through the repeated reference to the Christian community as *fratres*. Yet here, devotion is expanded: it is no longer limited to a local community mourning its bishop but is conceived as encompassing the broader Iberian Christian community, unified under the protection of the martyrs whose martyrdom sanctified their land.

In his concluding eulogy, Prudentius not only emphasizes the communal dimension of the cult of the martyrs but also stresses the equality of all the faithful within it and the equivalent status of all three martyrs as objects of veneration—another substantial modification of the *Passio Fructuosi's* hierarchical perspective.[320] The cult of the martyrs functions in the *Peristephanon* as a unifying communal element that transcends established social stratifications. Prudentius' deliberate terminological choices in this passage explicitly articulate this egalitarian vision, cataloging demographic inclusivity through comprehensive binaries: boys and girls, young and old, women and men as equal participants in martyrial veneration. This rhetorical strategy intentionally evokes scriptural passages that emphasize the dissolution of social divisions through baptism and the shared spiritual status of all believers.[321]

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[320] According to Mark Bilby, Prudentius presents the three martyrs as co-equals and universal objects of devotion in order to preserve the Trinitarian motif of the original passio and to "reinforce the pro-Nicene and anti-Eunomian Orthodoxy of Rome. Conversely, this Orthodox Trinitarian imagery helps to sacralise the cult of the martyrs even further." (Mark G. Bilby, "Christendom Witnesses to the Martyrs: Modulations of the *Acta Martyrum* in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* VI," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63, no. 2 (2012): 230).

[321] *Cf.* 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit;" and Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Moreover, in this final scene, Prudentius also redefines the relationship among the martyrs themselves. Whereas the *Passio Fructuosi*—while recounting the martyrdom of all three—clearly privileges Fructuosus by highlighting his ecclesiastical status and pastoral leadership, Prudentius consciously levels this hierarchy. In the poet's retelling, the distinctions of ecclesiastical office and earthly authority are rendered irrelevant after death. The three martyrs, united in their sacrifice, are to be celebrated and venerated equally. The communal choir envisioned by Prudentius does not offer greater honor to Fructuosus alone; instead, Augurius and Eulogius are explicitly named alongside him, with the following exhortation: "Let the hymn ring out in praise of Augurius and in mingled strains match Eulogius with him; let us render song equally to the equal."[322] Prudentius thus overturns traditional social and ecclesiastical hierarchies, presenting a vision of collective devotion that reflects the unity and equality of the faithful gathered under the protection of their martyrs.

Building on this vision of communal devotion, Prudentius also reimagines the form and setting of the martyrs' cult, blending sacred ritual with elements of Roman public spectacle. This transformation becomes particularly evident in his depiction of the martyrs' final journey and execution, where echoes of traditional Roman celebrations, such as triumphs and games, subtly inform his reconfiguration of Christian communal memory.

[322] "*laudans Augurium resultet hymnus mixtis Eulogium modis coaequans reddamus paribus pares camenas*." (*Peristephanon* 6.151-153; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213).

There is an implicit fusion of sacred ritual and public spectacle in the devotion envisioned by Prudentius, echoing the structures of civic celebration familiar to a Roman audience. This argument gains additional weight when considered alongside another important reference earlier in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*. As Fructuosus and his deacons are about to enter the amphitheater, Prudentius momentarily pauses the narrative to make a critique of traditional Roman spectacles, focusing particularly on beast hunts and gladiatorial combat: "By this time they [Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius] were entering a place enclosed by tiers of seats in a circle, where frenzied crowds attend and are drunk with much blood of wild beasts, when the din rises from the bloody shows…"[323] Through this digression, Prudentius effectively inverts the amphitheater's cultural significance, transforming it from a central institution of civic and public life into a vulgar entertainment venue characterized by gratuitous violence, where spectators gather exclusively to witness bloodshed: "as the gladiator, whose life is held cheap, falls under the stroke of the stark sword there is a roar of delight."[324]

Through this reversal, Prudentius redefines the amphitheater space, once a cornerstone of Roman civic identity and entertainment, as emblematic of a pagan moral failure. The same frenzy of violence that traditionally delighted Roman crowds now serves as the stage for the martyrdom of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, brutally

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[323] "*intrant interea locum rotunda conclusum cavea, madens ferarum multo sanguine quem furor frequentat, cum spectacula perstrepunt cruenta* …" (*Peristephanon* 6.61-64; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 206-207).

[324] "*ac vilis gladiator ense duro percussus cadit et fremit voluptas*." (*Peristephanon* 6.65-66; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 206-207).

exposing the cruelty and immorality of their persecutors. Their deaths, like those of gladiators, are treated as disposable by the authorities, yet for Prudentius, their sacrifice reclaims the space for Christian meaning: the martyrs' execution transforms a place of spectacle into a site of divine victory. The amphitheater's association with pagan Roman identity renders these spectacles morally reprehensible from a Christian perspective and fundamentally incompatible with Christian ethical principles of mercy and compassion.[325] Although by the late fourth century gladiatorial games and violent spectacles may have been declining in popularity—due in part to Christian critiques like Prudentius'—such events and the civic offices associated with them, including the quaestorship and praetorship, continued to represent essential components of Roman public life and the *cursus honorum*.[326]

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[325] Most notably, Tertullian: "*Huic quomodo cum spectaculis poterit convenire? Omne enim spectaculum sine concussione spiritus non est. ... ibi et furor et bilis et ira et dolor et cetera ex his, quae cum his non conpetunt disciplinae. Nam et si qui modeste et probe spectaculis fruitur pro dignitatis vel aetatis vel etiam naturae suae condicione, non tamen immobilis animi est et sine tacita spiritus passione*. - What concord can the Holy Spirit have with the spectacles? There is no public spectacle without violence to the spirit. … where there is rivalry, there also are madness, bile, anger, pain, and all the things that follow from them, and (like them) are incompatible with moral discipline. For even if a man enjoy the spectacles in modest and upright fashion, agreeably to his dignity, his age, and his natural character, still he cannot with a mind quite unstirred or without some unspoken agitation of spirit." (*De Spectaculis*, XV, in Tertullian, *Apology. De Spectaculis. Minucius Felix: Octavius*, trans. T. R. Glover and Gerald H. Rendall, Loeb Classical Library 250 [Harvard University Press, 1931], 268-271). A similar critique is found in Lactantius: "… [The philosophers] have no contempt for the great spectacle of the games. They are delighted with them and happily attend them too, but since these games offer great incitement to vice and are very powerful in corrupting the soul, we must abolish them … Anyone thinking his pleasure is served by the spectacle of someone being put to death, however deservedly condemned, pollutes his own conscience as much as if he were also taking part in the killing of which he is spectator." (*Divine Institutes*, 20.8-10, in Lactantius, *Divine Institutes. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey*, trans. Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey, Translated Texts for Historians 40 [Liverpool University Press, 2003], 374).

[326] As Michele Salzman notes, "Quaestors and praetors were expected to give games upon attaining office; indeed, by the late fourth century, this was their primary obligation" (Michele R. Salzman, *The Letters of Symmachus: Book 1*, trans. Michele R. Salzman and Michael Roberts [Society of Biblical Literature, 2011], xliii). Symmachus' correspondence reveals the continuing vitality and importance of the games in this period, as he spared no expense or effort in securing exotic animals such as bears and lions (*Letters,* Book

Building on this critique of Roman spectacle, Prudentius' position reflects a broader Christian condemnation of the games as morally and spiritually corrupt practices incompatible with Christian life. Numerous contemporary Christian authors similarly condemned gladiatorial combat and beast hunts as manifestations of spiritual and moral corruption that fostered violence and brutality among spectators.

Augustine of Hippo provides a helpful parallel to this perspective. In his *Confessions*, he recounts the story of Alypius, a student of law in Rome and one of his close companions, who struggled with what Augustine characterizes as an addiction to the "frenzy of the circus entertainments."[327] Augustine recounts how Alypius, while studying law in Rome, reluctantly accompanied friends to the amphitheater for gladiatorial games. His description of Alypius' response employs language remarkably similar to Prudentius' characterization of these spectacles in the *Peristephanon*: "As he [Alypius] saw the blood he gulped the brutality along with it; he did not turn away but fixed his gaze there and drank in the frenzy, not aware of what he was doing, reveling in the wicked contest and intoxicated on sanguinary pleasure."[328] Augustine's judgment

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II, 76, 393 CE), or in procuring horses from Hispania, asking his friend Euphrasius to make the selection personally: "*solam de amicitia tua electionis curam requiro factu facilem, cum sit diues equini pecoris Hispania et magnus gregum numerus copiam praestet examini*" (Book IV.58, in Jean-Pierre Callu, trans., *Symmaque. Lettres. Tome II (Livres III-V)* [Les Belles Lettres, 1982], 137-138).

[327] "*gurges tamen morum Carthaginiensium, quibus nugatoria fervent spectacula, absorbuerat eum in insaniam circensium*. - The whirlpool of Carthage's morals, which seethes with excitement over the nonsense of the theatrical shows, had sucked him down into the frenzy of the circus entertainments." (Augustine, *Confessions*, VI.7.11, in Augustine, *Confessions. Books 1-8*, trans. Carolyn J.-B. Hammond, Loeb Classical Library 26 [Harvard University Press, 2014], 258-259).

[328] "*ut enim vidit illum sanguinem, immanitatem simul ebibit et non se avertit, sed fixit aspectum et hauriebat furias et nesciebat, et delectabatur scelere certaminis et cruenta voluptate inebriabatur*. - For when he saw that blood, he drank deep of its barbarity and did not turn himself away but fixed his gaze and

directly parallels Prudentius' evaluation: traditional Roman games are *crudelis* (cruel) and *funestus* (deadly) spectacles, fundamentally incompatible with Christian life.[329]

This opposition creates a significant cultural paradox, as these entertainments remained essential components of imperial civic and public life despite growing Christian consensus regarding their moral incompatibility with Christian values. These same Christian authors had received traditional Roman education and thus comprehended the civic function of these spectacles in affirming Roman identity, establishing communal ritual spaces, constructing collective memory, and providing elites opportunities to demonstrate public munificence through sponsorship.[330]

Prudentius' attitude aligns closely with arguments developed by Peter Brown concerning the emerging civic role of saint cults and the gradual replacement of pagan public festivals with Christian feast days, often linked to the commemoration of

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drank in the torments and was unaware, and found gratification in the wickedness of the contest, and became drunk on the pleasures of blood." (Augustine, *Confessions. Books 1-8*, 264-265).

[329] "*familiari violentia duxerunt* [Alypis' friends] *in amphitheatrum crudelium et funestorum ludorum diebus*. - They used friendly force to drag him, still hotly protesting and resisting, into the amphitheater at a time when the deadly and cruel shows were taking place." (Augustine, *Confessions. Books 1-8*, 262-262). See also Richard Lim, "Augustine and Roman Public Spectacles," in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey and Shelley Reid (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 138-150.

[330] As Erik Gunderson notes: "The sand itself can be read as a symbolic space functioning to represent a select, idealized version of the empire to the audience. As far as geography was concerned, Rome was a small point at the center of a vast empire. This physical relationship was inverted, however, on the day of the shows: an orderly construct of Roman society ringed its own empire, contained, controlled and choreographed. The arena then proceeded to educate Romans about the contents of their empire" (Erik Gunderson, "The Ideology of the Arena," *Classical Antiquity* 15, no. 1 [1996]: 113–51, at 113). See also J. C. Edmonson, "Dynamic Arenas: Gladiatorial Presentations in the City of Rome and the Construction of Roman Society during the Early Empire," in *Roman Theater and Society: E. Togo Salmon Papers I.*, ed. W.J. Slater (University of Michigan Press, 1996), 69-112.

martyrdoms.[331] In the conclusion of hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius appropriates the traditional civic meaning of spectacle and radically transforms it. The poet reimagines public festival not as a celebration of violence, but as a collective act of sacred devotion to the martyrs—a new model of civic ritual centered around Christian ideals.

In doing so, Prudentius fundamentally reconfigures the final scene of the *Passio Fructuosi*. Whereas the original *passio* closed with a biblical meditation on the martyrs' perseverance aimed primarily at a small, educated Christian community, Prudentius opens the cult of the martyrs to the entire community. His vision no longer requires sophisticated theological literacy: to participate, one needs only to feel connected to the martyrs' sacrifice and to affirm their continuing *praesentia* through devotion at their tombs, veneration of their relics, and communal celebrations held in their honor.[332] His hymn reflects a deliberate reshaping of both public and religious life in late Roman *Tarraco*, channeling older forms of civic pride and spectacle into new expressions of Christian civic identity.

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[331] The festivals of the saints, however, still competed with "robust traditions of secular high holiday," although their role gained increasing importance due to their unique characteristics (Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 43-44). As Michele Salzman observes in her analysis of the Codex-Calendar of 354, pagan and Christian holidays continued to coexist within the fourth-century festive calendar, though the trend was toward a progressively advanced Christianization: "In this period, as the Calendar reflects, the forces for accommodation and assimilation facilitated the Christianization of Rome and the continuation of aristocratic culture into the Christian present." (Michele R. Salzman, *On Roman Time. The Codex-Calendar Of 354 And the Rhythms of Urban Life In Late Antiquity* [University of California Press, 1990], 5).

[332] As Michael Roberts points out, Prudentius places particular emphasis on liturgy, ceremony, and the organization of space as the three most prominent elements in the *Peristephanon* (Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 6).

Building directly upon this transformation of civic and communal memory, the final verses of *Peristephanon* 6 also reveal another critical dimension of Prudentius' reworking of the *Passio Fructuosi*: the urban character of the cult and the role of *Tarraco* itself as a sacred landscape. The city emerges in Prudentius' hymn as the geographical and spiritual heart of martyr devotion—the very place where Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius suffered martyrdom and where the sacred site of their tomb, the *locus* of their enduring *praesentia*, invites the faithful to seek their protection and patronage. Prudentius emphasizes this enduring bond in his final verses: "One day will come a time when in the dissolution of the world Fructuosus will free thee, *Tarraco*, from sore distresses, covering thee from fire."[333]

Prudentius' narrative of the martyrs of *Tarraco* both preserves an older, local tradition and integrates it into the broader, increasingly universal patterns of saint veneration that characterized the late Roman world. The adaptation of existing local traditions to the religious realities of Late Antiquity is a pattern visible in other contemporary authors, notably Paulinus of Nola. As Michael Stuart Williams notes, Felix was likely not originally venerated in Nola as a *confessor*—a status later attributed to him by Paulinus in his elaboration of the tradition—but as a "bloodless martyr." Williams remarks that "…Indeed, a cult-shrine dedicated explicitly to a confessor would be all but

[333] "*olim tempus erit ruente mundo, cum te, Tarraco, Fructuosus acri solvet supplicio tegens ab igni.*" Prudentius takes advantage of the moment to also claim for himself divine favor and protection earned by the poetic offering he is making to the martyrs: "and per chance under Christ's favor He will deign to give relief to my torments too, as he recalls my sweet hendecasyllables - *fors dignabitur et meis medellam tormentis dare prosperante Christo, dulces hendecasyllabos revolvens*." (*Peristephanon* 6.157-162; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213).

unique in the third and fourth centuries."[334] In reshaping Felix's figure, Paulinus carefully adapted his language to preexisting norms and to the cult already established at Nola, since the title of martyr resonated more deeply with local conceptions of the saint. As Lucy Grig has observed, in the Italian context of the late fourth century—saturated with martyr saints who acted as civic patrons, and whose cults were mediated and promoted by bishops in competition with one another—"only a martyr saint, it seemed, would really make the grade in Italy at this time."[335]

This case offers a useful parallel for Prudentius' reformulation of the *Passio Fructuosi*. Although in Hispania we do not find the same intense competition among cities to promote their local martyr cults—since, by Prudentius' lifetime, established cults appear to have been limited primarily to *Tarraco* and *Emerita Augusta*—the poet nevertheless had to reckon with an already consolidated tradition in *Tarraco* dating back to the composition of the *Passio Fructuosi*. Like Paulinus with Felix, Prudentius had to proceed carefully in imprinting his own vision onto the narrative. The Christian community of *Tarraco* would already have held its own established image of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, shaped by local memory and liturgical commemoration. It is therefore significant that in *Peristephanon* 6 Prudentius offers a subtly updated retelling: while introducing important innovations, he preserves the core of the narrative almost intact so that it remained recognizable—and thus acceptable—to the faithful of *Tarraco*.

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[334] Michael Stuart Williams, "Always Already a Martyr? Felix of Nola as Martyr and Confessor," in *Culte Des Saints et Litterature Hagiographique: Accords et Desaccords*, ed. Vincent Déroche et al. (Peeters Publishers, 2020), 150.

[335] Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (Duckworth, 2004), 107.

Yet the modifications made by Prudentius in this final eulogy signal a last and equally important shift. The poet's portrait invites deeper reflection on the role of personal experience in shaping religious devotion. Beyond the collective and urban dimensions, his depiction gestures toward what scholars—most notably Jörg Rüpke—have identified as *religious individualization*: the process by which individuals actively construct their religious identities through personal choices, reflections, and engagements with the divine.[336] Prudentius does not envision the faithful as passive participants in a communal ritual; rather, each individual, including himself, develops a personal and intimate connection with the martyr—what Peter Brown described as "intimate invisible friends"—thus enriching the communal experience of worship through their own memories, prayers, and acts of devotion.[337]

From this perspective, religious individualization and communal cult practice are not opposing forces but mutually reinforcing dynamics. Personal devotion shapes and deepens collective worship, just as communal rituals anchor and give expression to individual experiences of faith.

The fusion of communal ritual and individual participation in *Peristephanon* 6 becomes especially clear in the final section of Hymn 6, where Prudentius exhorts the

[336] "Individuality can be understood as the perception and practice of choices. Here, the norms of a tradition and a group do not determine actions as "individual." Understood as such, individuality can even be perceived within mass phenomena. Differences between individuals can even result from the fact that each individual combines different social roles and represents different intersections of different overlapping networks." (Jörg Rüpke, *On Roman Religion. Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome* [Cornell University Press, 2016)], 14).

[337] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 50.

community to "render song equally to the equal" and to "let the hymn ring out in praise of Augurius and in mingled strains match Eulogius with him." This passage reads as a liturgical call to action, but it is neither imposed nor prescriptive; rather, it is affective, invitational, and voluntary. Prudentius' exhortation presumes personal connection and emotional discernment on the part of the faithful, suggesting that collective praise is simultaneously a reflection of each participant's individual devotional investment. He invites his readers and compatriots to celebrate the martyrs of *Tarraco* simultaneously as communal guardians and personal patrons, presenting their narrative of martyrdom as spiritual *exempla* that each believer can internalize—models through which readers might pattern their own behavior and aspirations after the martyrs' heroic witness.

Prudentius' portrayal of collective devotion and his individual modifications to the earlier *Passio Fructuosi* reflect a new vision of sacred performance: one in which faith is expressed not merely through communal participation, but also through personal acts of memory and attachment. Just as Prudentius demonstrates an aspect of individual agency in selecting which martyrs receive commemorative hymns in the *Peristephanon*, members of the Christian community similarly exercised religious autonomy by choosing particular martyrs as intercessors and spiritual allies, offering votive gifts, promises, and petitions to certain saints over others. In this way, devotion emerges as a dynamic form of performance, actualized and reinterpreted through both collective and individual appropriations of ritual and its written communication.[338]

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[338] Jörg Rüpke proposes reframing "ritual" as *ritualization*, a form of performance in which communication about ritual becomes inseparable from the act itself. As he argues, ritual is not merely a repeated, normative

Conclusion. Between Memory and Innovation: Prudentius' Hymn 6 and the Cult of *Tarraco*

This chapter has explored one of the central questions of this dissertation: whether Prudentius, on his composition of the *Peristephanon,* was engaging with existing cults of the martyrs in Hispania. Through a comparative reading of hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon* and the earlier *Passio Fructuosi*, I have argued that Prudentius was not inventing a new cult *ex nihilo* but instead engaging with a well-established local cult and reworking a martyrial memory that was already known and cherished in the city of *Tarraco.* His literary project both preserves and transforms earlier memory, adapting it to the theological and devotional frameworks of the late fourth century.

The parallels between the *Passio Fructuosi* and *Peristephanon* 6 are numerous and substantial. Prudentius maintains the basic narrative structure and sequence of the *passio,* including the details of the arrest, imprisonment, trial, execution and posthumous apparitions of the martyrs. Prudentius also preserves the most climactic moments of the original narrative, quoting certain passages almost verbatim, which underscores his intention to safeguard the tradition and memory of *Tarraco*'s Christian past through the lived experience of its martyrs

These continuities, however, are also accompanied by significant modifications. Prudentius transforms several scenes of the narrative to accommodate to the poetic genre he chooses for his eulogy of the martyrs, as Virgil or Horace, the great poets he admires

structure but a process of ritualization, dependent on the performers' and observers' interpretations and appropriations (Jörg Rüpke, *On Roman Religion. Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome*, 119)

and adapts for his Christian reimagination would have done. He dramatizes several scenes with inserted speeches that emphasize the glory, heroism, and public significance of Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius' martyrdom.

One of the central findings of this chapter is that *Peristephanon* 6 redefines martyrial narrative from one of sober episcopal leadership and collective endurance, as seen in the *Passio Fructuosi,* to a celebration of triumphant sanctity and construction of Christian identity. The earlier *passio* presents Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius within a framework of communal solidarity and pastoral care. The tone is sober, the rhetoric restrained, and the narrative focused on the steadfastness and integrity of the Christian community, and the bishop's leadership in a moment of persecution. Prudentius, by contrast, writes with a different set of expectations and cultural references. The bishop Fructuosus, originally portrayed as a pastoral leader facing persecution with quiet dignity, becomes in Prudentius' hands a spiritual general and civic patron. The martyrs, one humble witnesses, are transformed into powerful intercessors who sanctify the city and anchor its Christian identity. The shift from the modest, pastoral tone of the *Passio* to Prudentius' elevated and rhetorical style signals a new mode of Christian memory—one in which martyrdom is not only recalled and reenacted but also monumentalized.

The comparison between the *Passio Fructuosi* and *Peristephanon* 6 further reveals that Prudentius transforms and adapts the narrative with a new potential audience in mind. This audience is not the ecclesiastical circle of *Tarraco* anymore but ordinary Christians and pagans who could potentially convert to Christianity. While the *Passio Fructuosi* made great use of biblical references to construct its image of the martyrs of

Tarraco, Prudentius reframes these biblical allusions into a less elaborate theological vocabulary, but clearly more reflective of the intimacy and local closeness that he wants his audience to establish with the martyrs. More than a century and a half after the execution of the martyrs, Prudentius constructs a memory of them that is not primarily focused on defending doctrinal positions through biblical argumentation, as the author(s) of the *Passio Fructuosi* appear to do. Instead, he seeks to bring the martyrs closer to their faithful by emphasizing the city of *Tarraco* as a sacred space—one in which ordinary Christians can experience the memory and presence of martyrs who might otherwise seem remote or inaccessible outside the bounds of ecclesiastical authority.

These transformations are not merely literary; they demonstrate Prudentius' broader goal of preserving and reshaping the cult of the martyrs in *Tarraco*. Through an approach that emphasizes communal worship, the reenactment of certain liturgical elements—such as the preservation of the traditional practice of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays—and the simultaneous promotion of an intimate connection between the martyrs and their believers, Prudentius ensures the survival of a local memory by adapting it to new devotional needs. The martyrs become figures through whom the community remembers its past, expresses its faith and connects with the martyrs not only through dramatic suffering, but also through the rhythms of faithful practice and disciplined remembrance of those who died for them.

Thus, I conclude that Prudentius functions as both a transmitter/guardian and a mediator of tradition. His engagement with the *Passio Fructuosi* illustrates a conscious strategy to preserve and monumentalize local cults through his poetry. In this process, the

cult of Fructuosus and his deacons is not erased or replaced, but elevated: it is made visible to a wider audience and integrated into his imagination of a Christian Hispania. Far from merely ornamental, Prudentius' contribution reveals the power of literary production to shape collective identity in Late Antiquity.

In broader terms, this chapter contributes to three important scholarly debates. First, it challenges views of Prudentius as a poet who passively compiled or invented martyrial cults by demonstrating his active engagement with an existing devotional tradition. Second, it offers a model for understanding how hagiographical texts interact with earlier sources to create new forms of community memory. Third, it helps us recognize the cultural work of Christian literature in giving shape and voice to individual Christian identities, showing Prudentius' engagement with the martyrs as an example of belief and personal interaction with these "holy humans."

This chapter also raises a broader question: what kind of Christianity does Prudentius construct though his rewriting of the *Passio Fructuosi*? Compared to the modest and scriptural-based Christianity of the *passio*, Prudentius offers a vision of the martyrs that is more heroic and monumental, but also more accessible and locally based for potential believers. His Christianity is one in which bishops are not only pastoral leaders but epic figures; in which cities become sacred landscapes; and in which martyrial memory is inscribed both in text and stone. Whether this version corresponds to the actual devotional practices of Late Antique *Tarraco* is a question that demands further exploration.

Chapter Three will test the historical reach of Prudentius' literary project by turning to the archaeological evidence for the cult of Fructuosus and his deacons in *Tarraco.* By examining inscriptions, shrines and burial sites the next chapter will assess to what extent the vision of Christianity that Prudentius constructs was reflected in the sacred spaces of the city. In doing so, it will further illuminate the relationship between text, memory, and space in the Christianization of Hispania.

Chapter 3. Memory and Sacred Space: Material Evidence for the Cults of Fructuosus and Eulalia before Prudentius

Introduction

One of the main questions of this dissertation if some of the Spanish saints praised by Prudentius in his hymns—Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius in *Tarraco* (Tarragona) and Eulalia in *Emerita Agusta* (Mérida)—were already venerated by the Christian communities of the cities described in the *Peristephanon.* This chapter explores the presence and development of local martyr cults in these two cities before the composition of Prudentius' *Peristephanon*, through the analysis of material evidence and the poet's literary reconstruction. While Prudentius' poetic language remains a key source for understanding his individual engagement and veneration of these martyrs, this chapter argues that his hymns also draw upon established traditions of local veneration in fourth- and fifth-century Hispania. Focusing on the cases of Fructuosus and his deacons in *Tarraco* and Eulalia in Mérida, this chapter argues that these were two cults already rooted in local devotional practice by the time Prudentius composed his hymns, and that his poetry, though rhetorically embellished, preserves elements of preexisting cults to the local veneration of Fructuosus and Eulalia.

The first part of the chapter centers on the archaeological record and material evidence associated with Fructuosus, bishop of *Tarraco*, and his deacons Augurius and Eulogius, whose martyrdoms are preserved in the *Passio Fructuosi* and celebrated in *Peristephanon* 6. While the existence of a primary account of Fructuosus' martyrdom

prior to the *Peristephanon* implies that there was already a memory of the martyrs in *Tarraco* from the early fourth century, the archaeological record provides additional and valuable insights. In particular, this chapter analyzes the evolution of the Francolí necropolis in *Tarraco*, where a basilica and possible evidence of burial *ad sanctos* suggest the emergence of a martyr cult. Drawing on the excavations of Joan Serra i Vilaró in the 1930s and more recent interventions on the site, I will analyze the material evidence in comparison with the textual sources to support this hypothesis.

The second part of the chapter turns to the case of Eulalia of Mérida, a young virgin martyr whose martyrdom is narrated in *Peristephanon* 3. Prudentius presents her as protector and civic patron of *Emerita*, whose tomb and cult site in the city are richly described in poetic terms. This section investigates whether Prudentius' description of her burial place, annual feast and celebration, and the monumentalization of her cult corresponds to the information of the archaeological record. The chapter will analyze the mausoleum that has been interpreted as be Eulalia's burial place and the subsequent fifth-century basilica dedicated to her cult. I will include both the excavations carried out by Pedro Mateos Cruz in the 1990s and later textual testimony such as the *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeretensium*.[339] This analysis highlights correspondences between Prudentius' rhetorical embellishment in *Peristephanon* 3 and the archaeological evidence associated

[339] The Latin text cited in this chapter follows A. Maya Sánchez, *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeretensium*, *CCSL* 96 (Brepols, 1992). For the English translation, I use A. T. Fear, trans., *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers* (Liverpool University Press, 1997).

with Eulalia, proposing that Prudentius' verses mirror an already locally rooted tradition honoring the martyr.

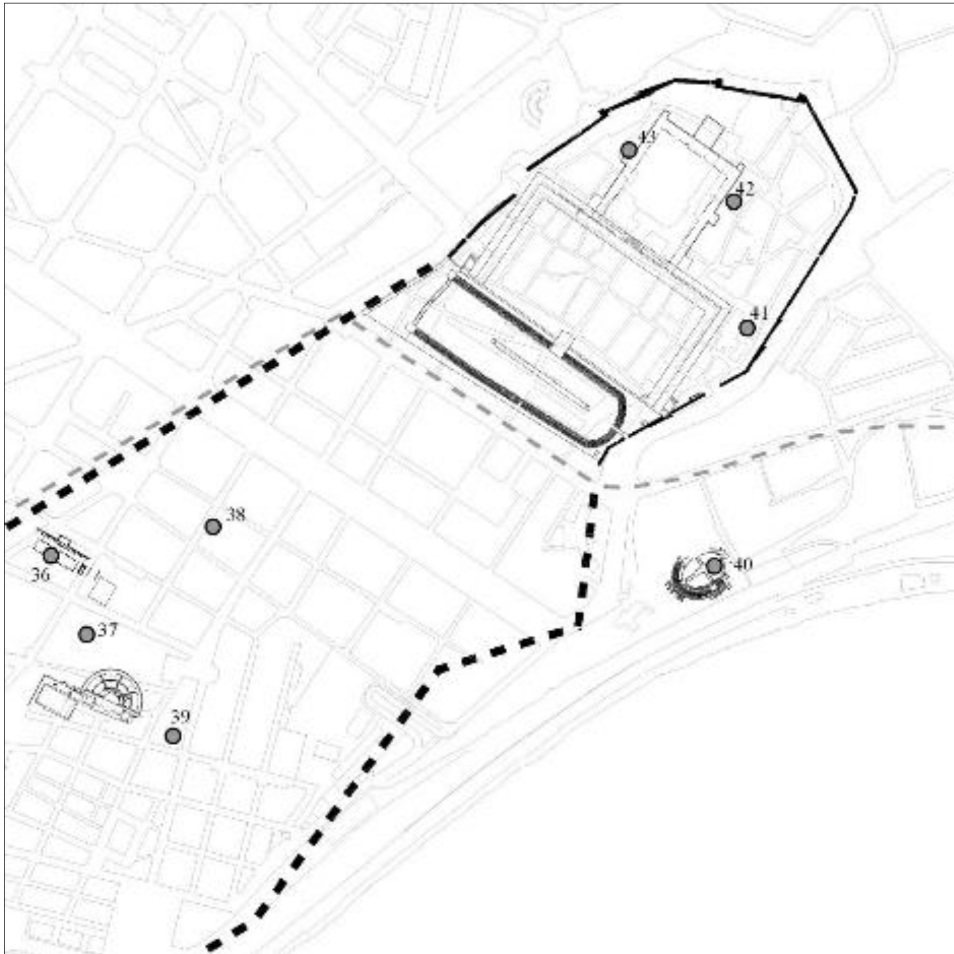
By bringing together these two case studies, the chapter advances one of the core arguments of the dissertation: for the martyrs Fructuosus and Eulalia, Prudentius built on a preexisting tradition of martyr worship, which was already reflected in the physical setting of their burial places. A close comparison of the poetic text with the material evidence will allow to uncover the traces of a martyrial memory that was spatially inscribed and preserved within the local communities of *Tarraco* and *Emerita*.

1. Fructuosus of *Tarraco*: Archaeological Testimonies of a Local Cult

1.1 Archaeological Evidence for the Cult of Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius

The origins of the material culture associated with the cult of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius in *Tarraco* can be traced to the site known as the necropolis of Francolí, near to the river with the same name. This was an open-air burial ground located in a southwestern suburb of the city, in keeping with Roman custom of situating cemeteries outside the city walls. Until the third century CE, archaeological investigations reveal a higher concentration of burials in the eastern sector of *Tarraco*—an area of greater prominence (**Figure 2**).

Figure 2. Burials in *Tarraco*'s eastern suburb (Tarragona, Spain)



Jordi López Vilar et al., "El cementiri i la basílica de Tarragona," in *L'arquitectura cristiana preromànica a Catalunya*, ed. J. Puig i Cadafalch et al. (Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2016), 232.

The nearest gate of the city wall served as a point of access to early mausolea and funerary enclosures from the Julio-Claudian period onward. These were typically enclosed burial spaces situated along the stretch of the *Via Augusta* that led directly to—or crossed through—the acropolis.[340] Funerary activity in this area intensified in the first

[340] Judit Ciurana Prast, "Prácticas y rituales en las áreas funerarias del suburbio oriental de *Tarraco*," in *Mors Omnibus Instat: Aspectos arqueológicos, epigráficos y rituales de la muerte en el occidente romano. Colección Estudios*, ed. Javier Andreu et al. (Ediciones Liceus, 2011), 334-336, at 335.

half of the second century with the construction of the amphitheater outside the city walls—one of the most significant public structures in *Tarraco*, and almost the only entertainment building to continue receiving maintenance from municipal authorities well into the early fifth century. The amphitheater was built outside the city walls in the southeast section of the city, parallel to the coastline and near a road that strategically connected this area to the port zone, located to the southwest.[341]

This funerary landscape began to shift in the third century, as burials came increasingly concentrated in the western extramural area. Burial activity slowed down in the eastern sector and gradually extended into the western suburbs. Until this time, the western zone had been dominated by luxurious suburban *domus*, alongside more modest domestic dwellings and spaces for artisanal or productive activities, due to its proximity to the port and to the present-day Francolí River (known in Roman times as the river *Tulcis*), which cut across the western edge of the region near the *pomerium* of *Tarraco*.[342]

These structures were mostly located near the city gates, which in turn pushed earlier burials in the western zone to the more peripheral areas, farther away from the city walls (**Figure 3**).[343]

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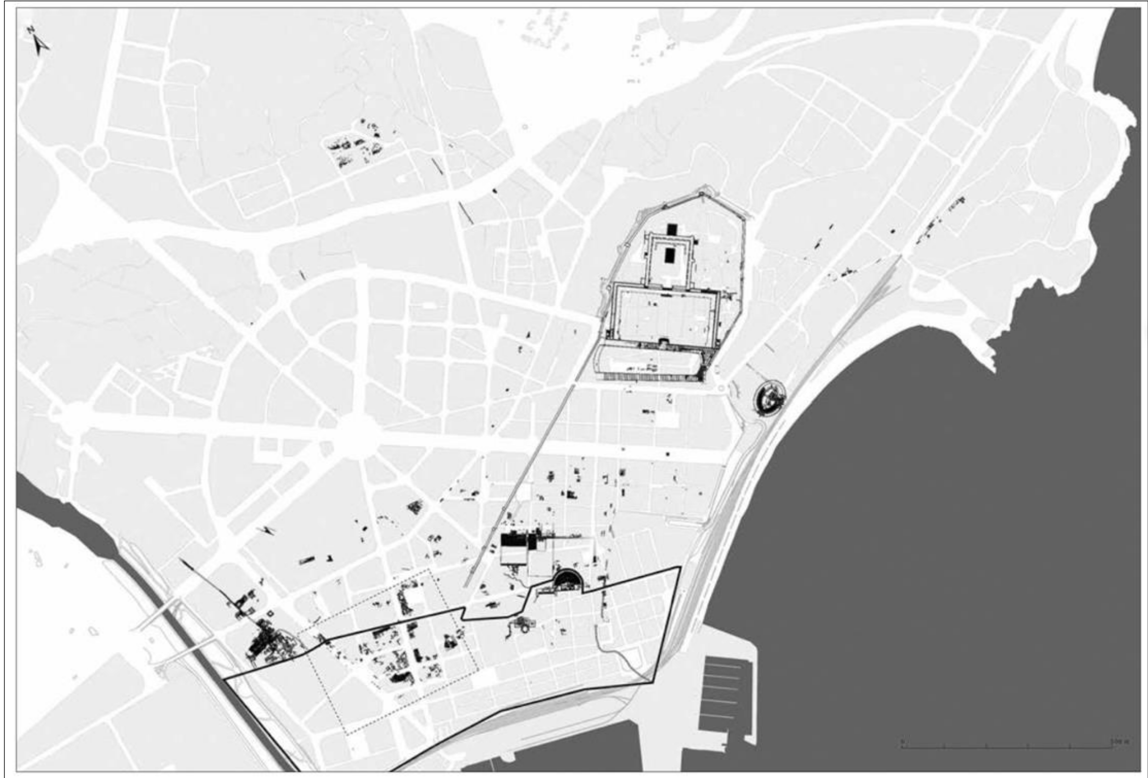
[341] Judit Ciurana and Josep M. Macías, "La ciudad extensa: Usos y paisajes suburbanos de *Tarraco*," in *Las áreas suburbanas en la ciudad histórica. Topografía, usos, función*, ed. Desiderio Vaquerizo Gil, Monografías de Arqueología Cordobesa 18 (Universidad de Córdoba, 2020).

[342] Ricardo Mar and José J. Guidi Sánchez, "Formación y usos del espacio urbano tardoantiguo En *Tarraco*," in *Espacios urbanos en el occidente mediterráneo (S. VI-VIII)* (Toletvum Visogodo, 2010), 93.

[343] Ricardo Mar, "Centro y periferia en la ciudad antigua: el suburbio portuario de *Tarraco*," in *Evolução da paisagem urbana: cidade e periferia*, ed. Maria do Carmo Ribeiro and Arnaldo Sousa Melo (CITCEM-Centro de Investigação Transdisciplinat Cultura, Espaço e Memória: IEM-Instituto de Estudos Medievais, 2014), 13-17.

Figure 3. Map of 4th century *Tarraco* (Tarragona, Spain)



Josep Anton Remolà Vallverdú and Ada Lasheras González, "Habitar en los *suburbia* portuarios de la Antigüedad tardía: el caso de *Tarraco* (*Hispania Tarraconensis*)," in *Abitare nel Mediterraneo Tardoantico*, ed. Isabella Baldini and Carla Sfameni (Estratto, 2018), 114.

Starting in the early third century, and due to a combination of factors, the buildings in the western zone were progressively abandoned.[344] Archaeological evidence suggests that the first burial sites developed in this area were primarily used by the lower strata of the population, who took advantage of the deteriorating state of the region beyond the walls to carry out inhumations.[345] There is also evidence of a slight reduction in the amount and size of storage facilities linked to the port, which freed up additional space for burial use.[346] This factor, along with funerary activity around abandoned imperial *domus* and production structures near the city's western gate, marked the beginning of the southwestern zone transformation into *Tarraco*'s main burial location throughout Late Antiquity.

[344] Judit Ciurana and Josep M. Macías cite as factors influencing the abandonment of buildings in the southern suburb a certain political decline suffered by Tarraco due to the alignment of the nobility of Hispania Citerior with the defeated Clodius Albinus in his dispute for the imperial throne with Septimius Severus (196–197 CE), as well as the partial destruction of the city by the Franks in the 260s CE (Judit Ciurana and Josep M. Macías, "Contextualization of the sites studied," in *The Funerary World of Tarraco. The Archaeological, Anthropological and Paleopathological Reality*, ed. Josep Giné i Gomà [Fundació Privada Liber, 2011], 219-220). On the epigraphic evidence attesting the support of *Hispania Citerior* for Clodius Albinus, see Christian Witschel, "La crisis del siglo III en Hispania: algunas reflexiones," in *Hispania: Las provincias hispanas en el mundo romano*, ed. Javier Andreu Pintado et al. (Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica [ICAC], 2009), 479. About the Frankish raid on *Tarraco* in the second half of the third century, see Josep M. Macías et al., "Crisi o invasió? els Francs i la destrucció parcial de *Tarraco* al s. III," in *Más allá de la batalla. La violencia contra la población en el mundo antiguo*, ed. Jordi Vidal and Borja Antela (Libros Pórtico, 2013), 193-224; and Pablo C. Díaz et al., *Hispania Tardoantigüa y Visigoda* (Istmo, 2007), 32-36.

[345] Judit Ciurana and Josep M. Macías, "Contextualization of the sites studied," 220.

[346] Nevertheless, archaeology has confirmed the construction of a set of baths in the port area, dated to the third century. Despite the transformations observed in the port of Late Antique *Tarraco*, the construction of these *thermae* attests that at least the port area continued to be a place of significant urban dynamism, extending into the Visigothic period (ca. late seventh century). See Josep M. Macías and Josep A. Remolà Vallverdú, "*Portus Tarraconensis* (Hispania Citerior)," *Bollettino Di Archeologia on Line* 1 (2010): 129-140, esp. 133-135.

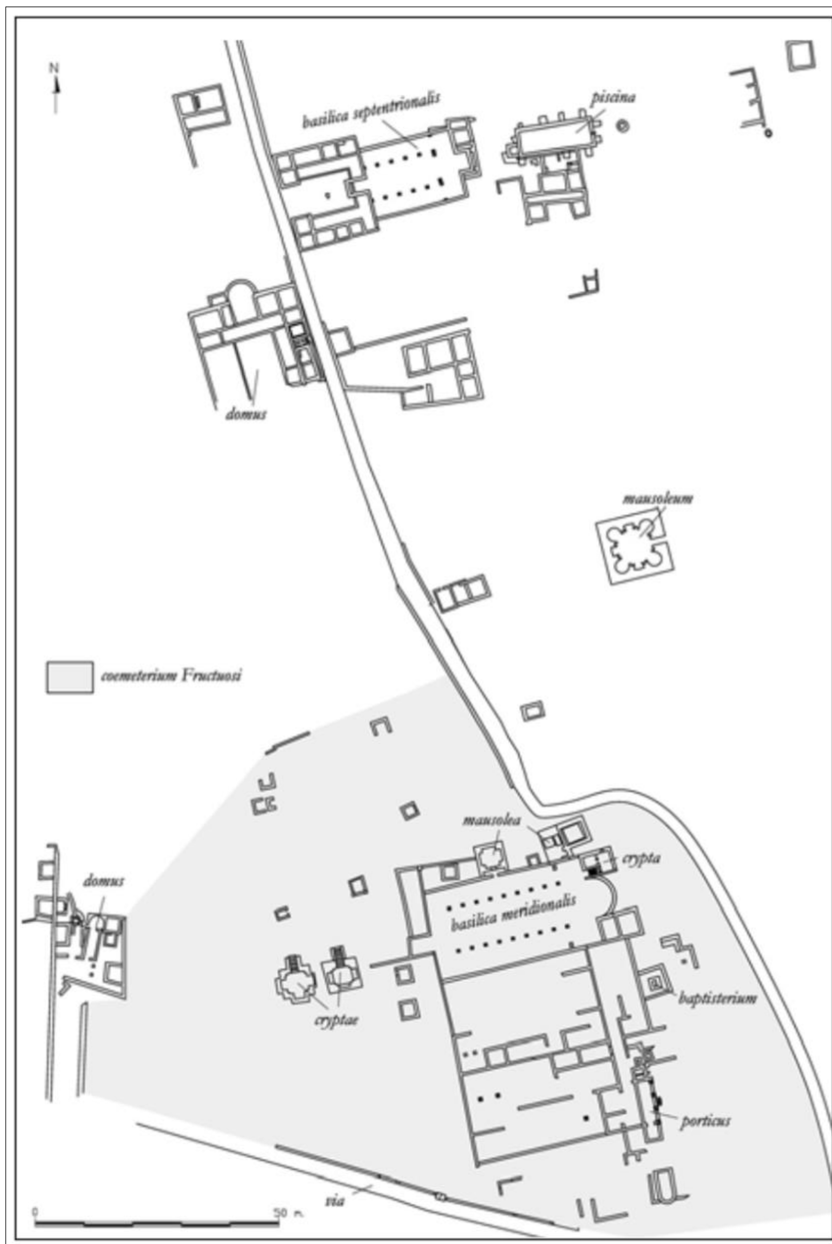
It is at this moment that the Francolí necropolis begins to emerge as the city's largest burial site. Located just north of the still-active port area, the necropolis developed along the banks of the *Tulcis* river, taking advantage of the road that paralleled the river and connected it to the port. Archaeologists who have excavated the site, such as Jordi López, date its peak development to the fourth and fifth centuries, although its use is already documented during the third-century shift in burial activity from east to west. The area extends over approximately 8,000 square meters and contains nearly 3,000 documented burials, most of which date to the necropolis' most active period.[347]

1.1.1 The basilica of Fructuosus

The Francolí necropolis was the chosen site for both the deposition of the martyrs' remains and for locating, for the people of *Tarraco*, the memory of their tomb and the subsequent spaces of cult. The area is clearly divided into two sectors: to the south lies the basilica dedicated to Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, which contains the highest concentration of burials, both within the basilica's structure and in the surrounding area. To the north, excavations uncovered the remains of a second, smaller basilica with burials concentrated solely inside the building itself (**Figure 4).**

[347] Jordi López Vilar, "El santuario paleocristiano de los mártires Frutuoso, Augurio y Eulogio en el suburbio de *Tarraco*," in *Acta XV Congressvs Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae*, ed. Olof Brandt et al., Pars I (Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2013), 343.

Figure 4. General plan of the necropolis of Francolí, showing the Basilica of Fructuosus (*basilica meridionalis*) and the northern basilica (*basilica septentrionalis*). Tarragona, Spain



Jordi López Vilar, "El santuario paleocristiano de los mártires Frutuoso, Augurio y Eulogio en el suburbio de *Tarraco*," 355.

Both the spaces associated with the cult of the martyrs and the burials in the southern zone of the necropolis were originally excavated by the historian and archaeologist Joan Serra i Vilaró, whose findings were published between 1928 and 1948.[348] These early excavations revealed the remains of the first basilica dedicated to the martyrs of *Tarraco*, as well as more than 2,000 burials clustered around the martyrs' tomb (**Figure 4b**).

Figure 4b. Necropolis of Francolí (Tarragona, Spain)

Museu Nacional Arqueològic de Tarragona (https://www.mnat.cat/necropolis-de-tarraco/)

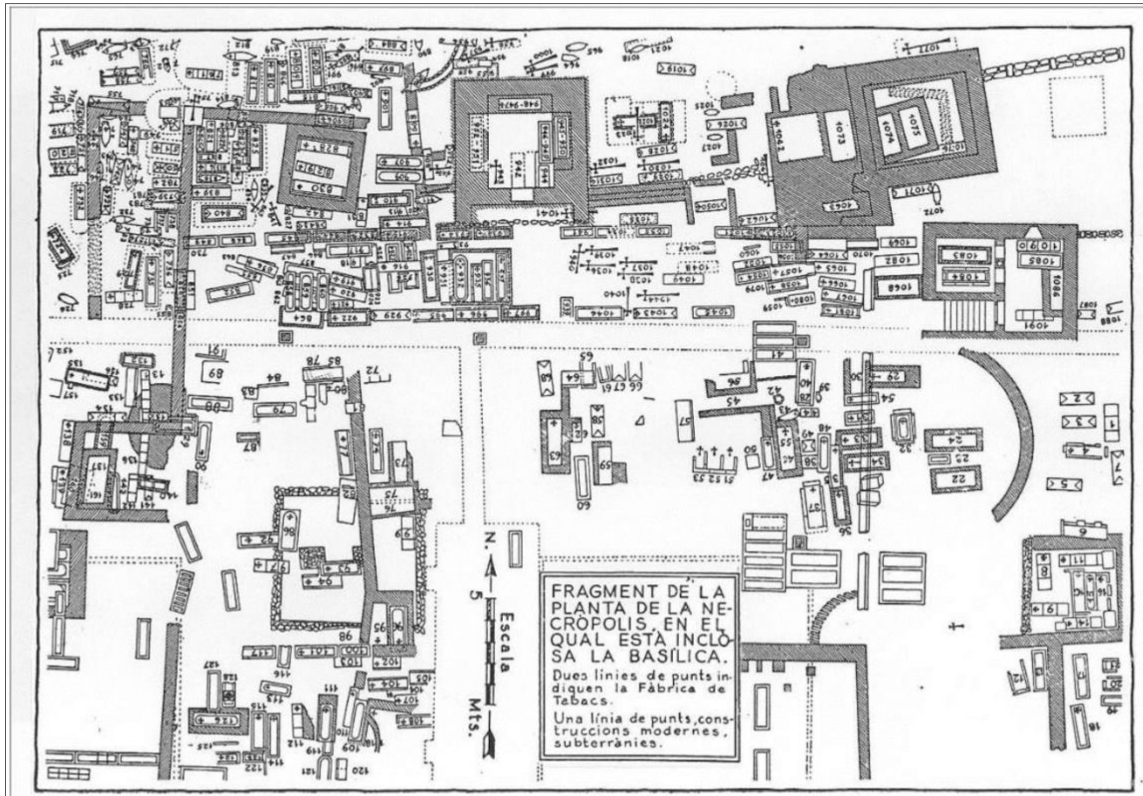
[348] The list of archaeological works and interventions carried out by Joan Serra i Vilaró in the Francolí necropolis is found in the following publications: Joan Serra i Vilaró, *Excavaciones en la necrópolis romano-cristiana de Tarragona*, Junta Superior de Excavaciones y Antigüedades, 93 (Madrid, 1928); *Excavaciones en la necrópolis romano-cristiana de Tarragona*, Junta Superior de Excavaciones y Antigüedades 104 (Madrid, 1929); *Excavaciones en la necrópolis romano-cristiana de Tarragona*, Junta Superior de Excavaciones y Antigüedades 111 (Madrid, 1930); *Excavaciones En La Necrópolis Romano-Cristiana de Tarragona*, Junta Superior de Excavaciones y Antigüedades 133 (Madrid, 1935); *Fructuós, Auguri i Eulogi : Màrtirs Sants de Tarragona* (Torres & Virgili, 1936); "Sepulcros y ataúdes de la necrópolis de S. Fructuoso (Tarragona)," *Ampurias* 4 (1944): 179–207; *La necrópolis de San Fructuoso* (Torres & Virgili, 1948).

Joan Serra i Vilaró dated the basilica to the late fourth century.[349] It is important to note that his excavation took place at an early date, when technical resources were more limited and the interpretive tools less developed. However, Serra i Vilaró's meticulous documentation—particularly his detailed planimetry of the site, with precise numbering and arrangement of burials (**Figure 5**)—has allowed later scholars to re-evaluate and confirm many of his conclusions. These later reassessments have led to a general consensus in Spanish scholarship that the basilica should be dated between the late fourth and early fifth centuries.[350]

[349] Joan Serra i Vilaró bases his conclusions on the discovery of two distinct pavements in the basilica area: on the one hand, that of the necropolis, with burials dating from the late third century, which—together with others surrounding the basilica structure uncovered during excavation—indicate a period of activity for the necropolis primarily in the fourth century. Serra i Vilaró also dates to the fourth century two mosaic tombstones found during his excavation, one bearing an inscribed chi-rho and the other an inscription identifying the site as holy; the basilica pavement is at the same level as these mosaics but overlies several burials dated to an earlier period. All of these elements will be analyzed in greater detail later in the chapter. Finally, four coins were found between the two pavement levels: issues of Gallienus and Constantine I (both relatively well preserved), and two more in poorer condition of Constantius II. These coins were found mixed into the floor of the burials beneath the upper pavement level corresponding to the basilica's construction, leading Serra i Vilaró to establish the *terminus post quem* for the basilica's construction based on Constantius II's coinage (Joan Serra i Vilaró, *Excavaciones En La Necrópolis Romano-Cristiana de Tarragona* (1928), 7, 26, 94-100 and 105-107).

[350]Among others, see Ricardo Mar et al., "El conjunto paleocristiano del Francolí en Tarragona. Nuevas aportaciones," *Antiquité Tardive: Revue Internationale d'histoire et d'archéologie* 4 (1996): 320–24; Josep M. Macías, "*Tarraco* en la Antigüedad Tardía: Un proceso simultáneo de transformación urbana e ideológica," in *Los orígenes del cristianismo en Valencia y su entorno*, ed. Albert Ribera i Lacomba (Ajuntament València, 2000), 263; Jordi López Vilar, *Les basíliques paleocristianes del suburbi occidental de tarraco el temple septentrional i el complex martirial de Sant Fructuós*, vol. 1 (Universitat Rovira i Virgili - Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica [ICAC], 2006), 214-219; Meritxell Pérez, *Tarraco en la Antigüedad Tardía. Cristianización y organización eclesiástica (siglos III a VIII)* (Arola Editors, 2012), 103; Josep A. Remolà Vallverdú and Ada Lasheras González, "*Ad suburbanum Tarraconis*. Del área portuaria al conjunto eclesiástico Del Francolí," in *4t Congrés Internacional d'Arqueologia i Món Antic - VII Reunió d'Arqueologia Cristiana Hispànica. El Cristianisme En l'Antiguitat Tardana: Noves Perspectives (21-24 Noviembre, 2018)*, ed. Jordi López Vilar (Universitat Rovira i Virgili - Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2019), 79; Andreu Muñoz Melgar, *Sant Fructuós de Tarragona. Aspectes històrics i arqueològics del seu culte, des de l'Antiguitat fins a l'actualitat* (Ateneu Universitari Sant Pacià [AUSP] - Facultat Antoni Gaudi d'Historia, Arqueologia i Arts Cristianes [FHEAG] - Facultat de Teologia de Catalunya [FTC] i Institut Catala d'Arqueologia Classica [ICAC], 2022), 141.

Figure 5. Plan of the excavation by Joan Serra i Vilaró, with numbered burials (Tarragona, Spain)



Joan Serra i Vilaró, *Excavaciones en la necrópolis romano-cristiana de Tarragona*, Junta Superior de Excavaciones y Antigüedades 133 (Madrid, 1935), 234.

One of the key reasons for this dating is the layout of the tombs. In his work on the Francolí necropolis, Jordi López identified it as predominantly Christian due to the unusually high concentration of burials over a short period of time. He attributes this growth to presence of the relics of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius in the area.[351] Most of the graves which have been dated to the fourth century, corresponding to the

[351] Jordi López Vilar et al., "El cementiri i la basílica de Tarragona," in *L'Arquitectura Cristiana Preromànica a Catalunya*, ed. J. Puig i Cadafalch et al. (Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2016), 433.

necropolis's most active period, are all clustered around what has been thought to have been the martyrs' burial place—a subject to which I will return later. López proposed that the most plausible explanation for this phenomenon is the practice of burial *ad sanctos*, and that the basilica's construction reflects a deliberate effort to monumentalize the burial site of the martyrs and distinguish their remains from the increasingly crowded surroundings.[352]

The southern area of the Francolí necropolis, where this basilica of Fructuosus was located, offers further evidence in support of this hypothesis. In a study of the burials conducted between 1979 and 1999, María Dolores del Amo documented a remarkable density of tombs, many of them superimposed directly over one another. Considering the vast overall extension of the necropolis, the repeated superposition of graves in the zone immediately surrounding what would later become the basilica's central space is a striking anomaly.[353]

Moreover, this phenomenon is not observed in any other necropolis or burial zone within the city of *Tarraco*. Del Amo argues that this high density can only be explained

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[352] Jordi López Vilar, *Les basíliques paleocristianes del suburbi occidental de Tarraco*, vol. 1, 243. It is important to note, however, that scholars such as Nicola Denzey Lewis have expressed a critical stance regarding the actual existence of burial *ad sanctos* in Late Antiquity, especially when the primary evidence comes from archaeology: "It is easy to misperceive a grave or a series of graves as ad sanctos, particularly if one has an investment in the founding principles of 'sacred archaeology.'" (Nicola Denzey Lewis, *The Early Modern Invention of Late Antique Rome*, 297-342, at 301).

[353] María Dolores del Amo, *Estudio crítico de la necrópolis paleocristiana de Tarragona*, vol. 1 (Instituto de Estudios Tarraconenses Ramón Berenguer IV, 1979), 242.

as a response to the lack of space in the immediate vicinity of the martyrs' tomb, providing a plausible reason for the high concentration of burials in that specific area.[354]

This hypothesis gains further credibility with the discovery, in 1994, of a second basilica located about 130 meters north of the one excavated by Joan Serra i Vilaró, dated with more certainty to the first half of the fifth century based on the study of the ceramics contained within the *opus signinum* pavement.[355] This second basilica contains around 200 burials, all located beneath the interior of the building, with no examples of superimposed graves (**Figure 6**).[356] The structure is interpreted as primarily funerary in function, with no evidence suggesting it held the remains of Fructuosus, Augurius, Eulogius, or any other martyr.[357] The notable contrast between the first basilica—with its densely superimposed burials—and this second one, which lacks them entirely, has led scholars to conclude that the construction of the Basilica of Fructuosus must have occurred close in time to the cluster of graves that surround it.[358]

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[354] María Dolores del Amo, *Estudio crítico de la necrópolis paleocristiana de Tarragona*, vol. 1, 243.

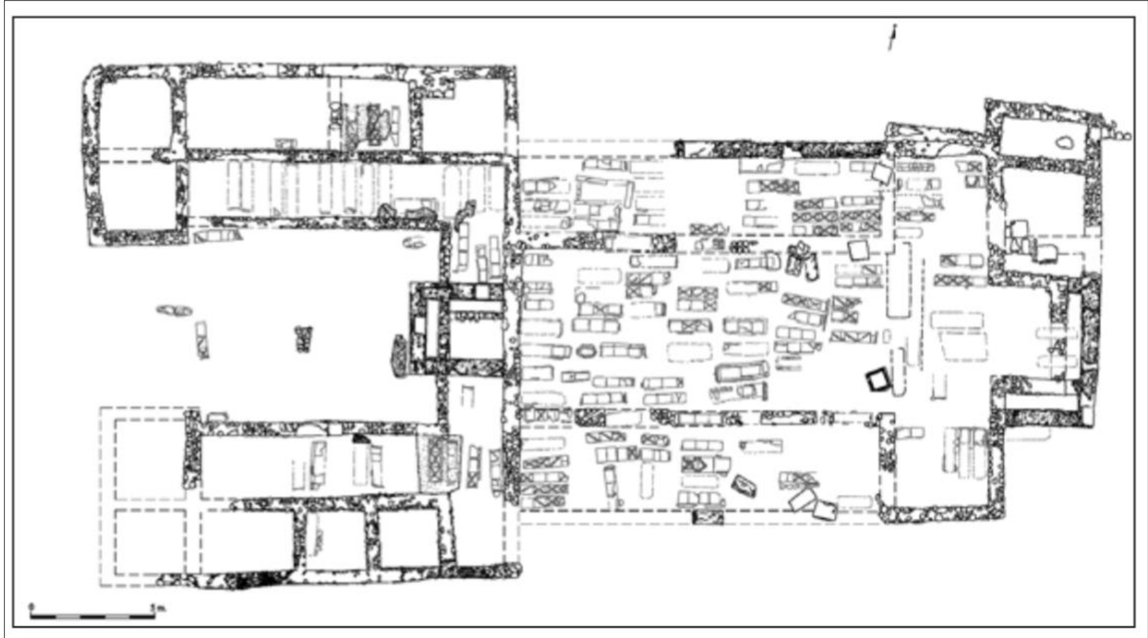
[355] Jordi López Vilar, "El santuario paleocristiano de los mártires Frutuoso, Augurio y Eulogio En El Suburbio de *Tarraco*," 347.

[356] Josep M. Puche Fontanilles and Jordi López Vilar, "Metrologia e proporzioni nelle basiliche paleocristiane di *Tarraco*: la basilica settentrionale del santuario surburbano di San Fruttuoso e la basilica dell'anfiteatro," in *Acta XV Congressvs Internationalis Archaeologiae Christianae*, ed. Olof Brandt et al., Pars I (Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2013)., 763-767.

[357] Jordi López Vilar et al., "El cementiri i la basílica de Tarragona," 433.

[358] In addition, two mosaic tombstones embedded at the level of the basilica pavement help confirm the basilica the chronology of the basilica of Fructuosus, since, as Jordi López notes, they demonstrate the basilica's function also as a funerary space. It is unlikely that these mosaic tomb covers were already in place in the open-air cemetery before the basilica's construction, as in that case they would not have been found at the same level and would likely have been removed to build the basilica's pavement. It is improbable that the basilica floor would have been laid while preserving the mosaic tombstones intact

Figure 6. Plan northern basilica (Tarragona, Spain)



Jordi López Vilar, "El santuario paleocristiano de los mártires Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio en el suburbio de *Tarraco*," 356.

The so-called basilica of Fructuosus, or "southern basilica," was constructed precisely at the center of the most densely occupied sector of the necropolis. Jordi López suggests that the basilica may have been built on top of a smaller pre-existing *martyrium* or commemorative shrine to the martyrs, although archaeological evidence has not confirmed this hypothesis.[359]

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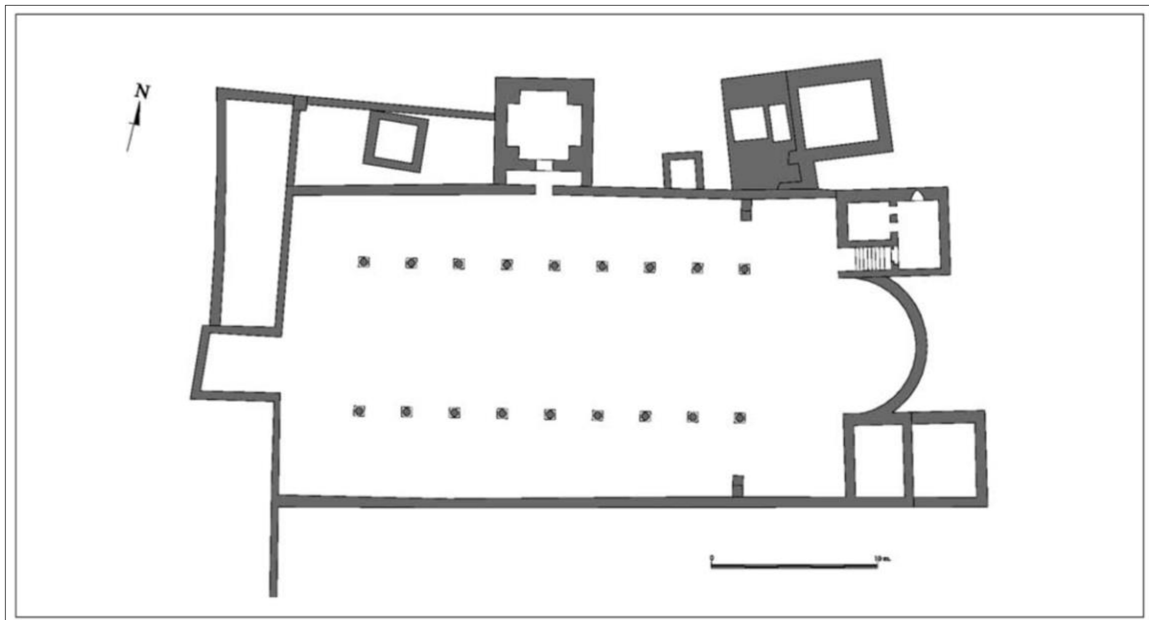
during its construction (Jordi López Vilar, *Les basíliques paleocristianes del suburbi occidental de Tarraco*, vol. 1, 215.

[359] Jordi López Vilar, "El santuari paleocristià del sants màrtirs Fructuós, Auguri i Eulogi en el suburbi de *Tarraco*," in *Pau, Fructuós i el cristianisme primitiu a Tarragona (Segles I-VIII)*, ed. Josep M. Gavaldà Ribot et al., Actes Del Congrés de Tarragona (19-21 de Juny de 2008) (Fundació Privada Liber - Instituto Superior de Ciencias Religiosas San Fructuoso (INSAF), 2010), 353.

Joan Serra i Vilaró's excavations, later corroborated by modern researchers, uncovered a three-aisled basilica with a semicircular apse oriented to the east (**Figure 7**), measuring approximately 39 meters in length and 18.50 meters in width.[360]

Figure 7. Schematic plan of the Basilica of Fructuosus (Tarragona, Spain)



Jordi López, *Les basíliques paleocristianes del suburbi occidental de Tarraco*, 208.

Beyond its commemorative function as a martyrial shrine, the basilica of Fructuosus has been described by scholars as a space with a predominantly burial function. This interpretation was already confirmed by the original excavation, which documented nearly 1,000 burials within the area delimited as the basilica's original walls

[360] Jordi López Vilar and Josep M. Puche Fontanilles, "Arquitectura paleocristiana de Tarragona (Segles IV-V)," in *Tarraco Christiana Ciuitas*, ed. Josep M. Macías and Andreu Muñoz Melgar (Institut Català d'Arqueologia Clàssica, 2013, 153.

and adjacent spaces. The complex included seven independent chambers attached along its northern wall and on either side of the apse, which have been interpreted as annexed mausolea.[361]

These chambers suggest several important aspects concerning both the use of the space and the burial practices associated with it. First, they confirm the basilica's function as a funerary space, with its primary phase of burial activity extending well into the fifth century.[362] This continuity reinforces the previously identified pattern of *ad sanctos* burial within the basilica itself. Second, the presence of these attached mausolea indicates that *ad sanctos* burial was not only a devotional practice but also increasingly shaped by social hierarchy. It is possible that such mausolea were commissioned by members of the Christian aristocracy of *Tarraco*—those wealthy enough to ensure a burial space adjacent to the walls of the basilica and, therefore, close to the tombs of the martyrs.[363]

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[361] There are seven mausolea physically attached to the nave and apse of the basilica. Of these, María Dolores del Amo dates three—specifically, three of the four annexed to the north wall—to a period contemporary with the basilica (second half of the fourth to first half of the fifth century). One appears to have been incorporated into the shrine's construction and is therefore dated earlier than the basilica itself, while the remaining three belong to a later phase, in the second half of the fifth century (María Dolores del Amo, *Estudio crítico de la necrópolis paleocristiana de Tarragona*, vol. 1, 221, 228-230). Un análisis más reciente de los mausoleos funerarios en la Hispania de la Antiguedad Tardía, incluyendo los de la basílica de Fructuoso con ejemplos comparativos lo encontramos en José M. Noguera Celdrán and Javier Arce, "Late Roman 'Mausolea' in Hispania," in *Burial And Memorial in Late Antiquity. Thematic Perspectives*, ed. Luke Lavan, vol. 1 (Brill, 2024) , 97-118.

[362] Jordi López Vilar, "El santuario paleocristiano de los mártires Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio en el suburbio de *Tarraco*," 351.

[363] This is the trend that, for example, Mark Johnson observes in his analysis of family *mausolea* in Rome in Late Antiquity: "While many Christians were content with a tomb under the floor of such a structure, wealthier families and even emperors constructed their own family mausolea attached to the walls of these buildings." (Mark J. Johnson, "Mausolea in Late Antique Italy," in *Burial and Memorial in Late Antiquity. Thematic Perspectives*, ed. Luke Lavan, vol. 1 [Brill, 2024], 169). This trend seems to be confirmed in the

Burials within the basilica's space were likely reserved for high-status individuals, such as prominent ecclesiastical figures or members of the city's wealthiest elite. The second basilica discovered to the north of the basilica of Fructuosus, appears to confirm this trend. The leading interpretation for its construction—so close in date to the original basilica—is that it was the result of a private donation by a wealthy citizen of *Tarraco*.[364] Although this second structure is not explicitly dedicated to Fructuosus, Augurius, or Eulogius, its proximity strongly suggests a desire to establish a secondary covered burial space, near the martyrs' resting place and the principal *locus* of their memory.

The area where this second basilica was erected had previously been used primarily for agricultural exploitation, prior to the development of the martyrial complex at Francolí.[365] The building itself includes features interpreted as supports for agricultural

basilica of Fructuosus with examples such as the so-called crypt of "Los Arcos," located to the north of the apse, dated by María Dolores del Amo and Jordi López to the second half of the fifth century. This is the only mausoleum that had an underground structure with direct connection to the basilica. The crypt also contained five tombs, two of which were covered with mosaic tombstones, heavily damaged (María Dolores del Amo, *Estudio crítico de la necrópolis paleocristiana de Tarragona*, vol. 1, 113; Jordi López Vilar, *Les Basíliques Paleocristianes Del Suburbi Occidental de Tarraco*, vol. 1, 211-212; Jordi López Vilar, "El santuario paleocristiano de los mártires Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio en el suburbio de *Tarraco*," 344-345).

[364] "It is possible that the younger complex was an essentially private foundation by the owner of the *villa* that lays across the road from the basilica. The identity of that owner, and indeed of the church's dedicatee, is unknown." (Michael Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities* [The John Hopkins University Press], 2004), 223). See also Alejandra Chavarría, "Suburbio, iglesias y obispos. Sobre la errónea ubicación de algunos complejos episcopales en la Hispania Tardoantigua," in *Las áreas suburbanas en la ciudad histórica. Topografía, usos, función*, ed. Desiderio Vaquerizo Gil, Monografías de Arqueología Cordobesa 18 (Universidad de Córdoba, 2010), 435-454.

[365] According to the excavation conducted by Jordi López, the second basilica was built right next to a road leading from the necropolis of Fructuosus and continuing toward the river. The road bordered agricultural plots, and directly across from the second basilica were found the remains of a residential *domus*, dated to the second half of the fourth century. It is not possible to determine whether the construction of the second basilica had any connection with the owner of this *domus* (Jordi López Vilar, "Un nuevo conjunto

activity, leading the excavators to conclude that it may have been part of a *fundus* whose income helped finance and sustain the complex.[366] This interpretation—the most plausible—points to a dynamic of private patronage, whether ecclesiastical or lay (the exact nature remains unknown), by a prominent individual who ensured the site's longevity through the agricultural use of surrounding lands. Unfortunately, the epigraphic evidence does not allow us to confirm this hypothetical reconstruction, nor to attribute the basilica's construction to any specific family or individual.[367]

Considering the development of Mérida in the Visigothic period as one of the most important episcopal sees in Hispania, the donation by a private Christian aristocrat seems the most plausible, since there is no reference to this basilica being sponsored by

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paleocristiano a las afueras de *Tarraco*," *Revista de Arqueología* 197 [1997]: 58–64). See also Pere Gebellí Borràs, "Una nova visió de l'anomenada *domus suburbana* de la necròpolis paleocristiana del Francolí," *Revista d'Arqueologia de Ponent* 32 (2022): 45-60.

[366] Two rural-type buildings were identified adjacent to the basilica. The first was a quadrangular structure with six rooms and a rustic pebble-paved floor, interpreted as some sort of storage facility likely associated with agricultural activity. The second building contained three distinct features that clearly confirm the agrarian function of the space: a large cistern reinforced with buttresses, still preserving its *opus signinum* floor (a type of waterproof pavement commonly used in pools and aqueducts); a water-extraction well; and two presses, likely used for the production of oil or wine (Ricardo Mar et al., "El conjunto paleocristiano del Francolí en Tarragona. Nuevas aportaciones," 321-323).

[367] Few epigraphic remains were found in the second basilica, but among them stands out an inscription discovered inside the central nave dedicated to a certain Thecla, a blessed woman from Egypt who, according to her epitaph, was buried in the northern basilica of the Francolí necropolis. Jordi López's reading of the inscription is as follows: *Haec hic beata Thecla virgo Χρι(στου) ei patria Aegypt(us) vixit ann(is) LXXVII ut meruit in pace requievit D(omi)ni* (Jordi López Vilar, *Les basíliques paleocristianes del suburbi occidental de Tarraco,* 145; *Hispania Epigraphica*, no. 17481, HEpOL database record 17481). The discovery of Thecla's inscription has led scholars such as Diana Gorostidi to propose that the second basilica may have functioned as some sort of women's monastic community, although this theory cannot be confirmed from the archaeological remains (Diana Gorostidi, "Prácticas y rituales en las áreas Funerarias del suburbio oriental de *Tarraco*," in *Mors Omnibus Instat: Aspectos arqueológicos, epigráficos y rituales de la muerte en el occidente romano. Colección estudios*, ed. Javier Andreu et al. [Ediciones Liceus, 2011], 542).

the episcopate of Mérida (or any mention at all) in the seventh century *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers*, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

1.1.2 Mosaic Inscriptions and Epigraphy at the Necropolis of Francolí

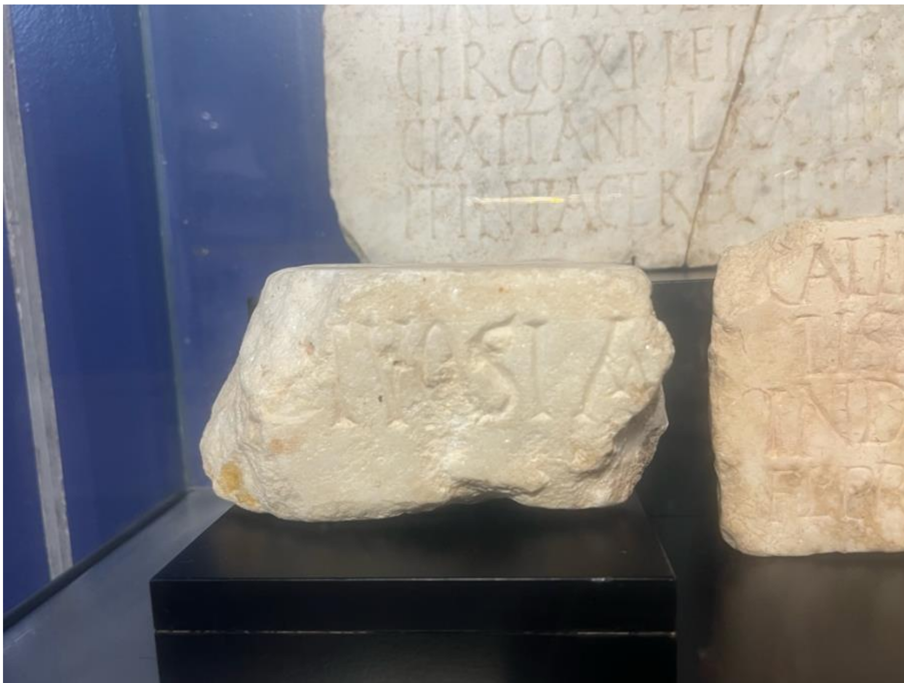
As previously noted, the basilica of Fructuosus was not only a funerary space but also served a commemorative function, continuing the legacy and memory of the martyrs in the city of *Tarraco*. In this case, we possess explicit evidence confirming the basilica's dedication to the martyrs Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius—an inscription that clearly identifies the building as consecrated to the local saints (**Figure 8**). Though the inscription survives only in fragmentary form, it preserves the partial text [–TVOSI A–**]**, which José Vives reconstructs as "*Memoria(?) Fru]ctvosi Au[gurii et Eulogii*", or a similar formula.[368] This inscription is interpreted as part of an altar table, likely associated with Eucharistic rites, which—as will be discussed in more detail below—would have been positioned directly above the tomb housing the martyrs' remains.[369]

[368] CIL II^2/14, 2093 = RIT 942 = ICERV 321 (José Vives, *Inscripciones Cristianas de la España Romana y Visigoda* [Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1942], 109).

[369] The inscription forms an angle at its upper edge with a rounded molded face, bearing signs of friction wear that suggest it may indeed have been part of an altar fragment (Andreu Muñoz Melgar, *Sant Fructuós de Tarragona*, 146). Yvette Duval supports and follows Vives' interpretation that the inscription is not an epitaph for the martyrs, but rather part of an altar or memorial dedicated to them. She also notes that the genitive visible in the preserved portion - [Fruc]tvosi – supports Vives' reading. (Yvett Duval, "Projet d'enquête sur l'épigraphie martyriale en Espagne Romaine, Visigothique (et Byzantine)," *Antiquité Tardive. Revue Internationale d'histoire et d'archéologie* 1 (1993): 175).

Figure 8. Inscription of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius. Basilica of Fructuosus, Necropolis of Francolí (Tarragona, Spain)

Andreu Muñoz Melgar, *Sant Fructuós de Tarragona. Aspectes Històrics i Arqueològics del seu culte, des de l'Antiguitat fins a l'actualitat*, 2022), 146.



Own work, Francolí Necropolis Museum (Tarragona, Spain), 2023

José Vives proposes a fifth-century date for the inscription,[370] while others, such as Andreu Muñoz Melgar, suggest a broader range between the fifth and sixth centuries.[371] Regardless of its precise chronology, the inscription clearly confirms the basilica's dedication to the martyrs of *Tarraco*; it is difficult to imagine that the fragment could refer to anyone other than Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius. Additional inscriptions recovered from the site also reference the presence of the martyrs and characterize the space as a *locus sanctus* (**Figure 9**).[372] The most important one is the mosaic sepulchral *lauda* of Optimus—a mosaic tombstone found intertwined with the pavement of the basilica. The first reading of the inscription, proposed by José Vives, is as follows: "*Optime, magnarum [Dominus] cui maxima reru[m] [cura], diuinas caeli quas promis[erat] arces, ecce dedit: sancta Crhisti in sede quiescis*" (ICERV, 294).[373] The Optimus mosaic is dated to the late fourth or early fifth century, roughly contemporary with the generally accepted date for the construction of the basilica.[374]

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[370] Yvett Duval also accepts this date (Yvett Duval, "Projet d'enquête sur l'épigraphie martyriale en espagne Romaine, Visigothique (et Byzantine)," 175, n. 16.

[371] Andreu Muñoz Melgar, *Sant Fructuós de Tarragona*, 146.

[372] For example: "*pro uitae meritis santum sortita sepulcrum* (chrismo) *misceris animis dic*" (ICERV, 298). The inscription is dated between the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century and was found inside the basilica, near the bottom of the left nave (José Vives, *Inscripciones Cristianas de La España Romana y Visigoda*, 94).

[373] José Vives, *Inscripciones Cristianas de la España Romana y Visigoda*, 93. More recent readings replace the word [Dominus] with [antistes] (*Hispania Epigraphica,* no. 19818; HEpOL database record 19818), since, due to its location—almost at the center of the basilica, in a direct line from the apse—and the quality of the mosaic, this mosaic tombstone may be attributed to a high-ranking ecclesiastical figure (Isabel Sánchez Ramos, "Elite Burials on the Iberian Peninsula in the 4th to 7th Centuries AD," *Medieval Archaeology* 63, no. 2 [2019], 244).

[374] See Alejandra Chavarría, "Mosaics funeraris," in *Del Romà al Romànic, Història, Art i Cultura de La Tarraconense Mediterrània Entre Els Segles IV i X*, ed. Maria-Lluïsa Ramos i Martínez and Carles Puigferrat

Figure 9. Mosaic tombstone of Optimus, Basilica of Fructuosus (Tarragona, Spain)

Andreu Muñoz Melgar, *La Tarraco de los primeros cristianos* (Associació Cultural Fructuós, 2018), 52.

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i Oliva (Enciclopedia Catalana, 1999), 301-304; and Joan Gómez Pallarès, *Poesia Epigràfica Llatina Als Països Catalans: Edició i Comentari* (Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, 2002), 110.

1.1.3 The tomb of Fructuosus, Augurius and Eulogius

The most important element underscoring the basilica's commemorative role—and the focal point of the entire complex, developing the surrounding necropolis—is the tomb of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius. In his original excavation, Joan Serra i Vilaró identified tomb no. 24 as the place where the martyrs' remains were first buried (see figure 5). His primary rationale was the tomb's location: it lies in a central position directly in front of the apse, aligned with what appears to be the basilica's central axis.

In 2014, a new archaeological intervention was carried out by the modern excavators of the necropolis to reassess whether the structure identified by Joan Serra i Vilaró indeed corresponded to the martyrs' burial site.[375] Thanks to the detailed plans drawn in the 1930s, the excavators uncovered the remains of the basilica's semicircular apse foundation, beneath which lay tomb 24. The tomb measures 2.75 meters in width and 9.95 meters in length, with a preserved depth of approximately 80 centimeters (though the original depth may have been greater). The structure is built from lime mortar mixed with irregular stones and fragments of fired clay (*opus caementicium*) and it had traces of what was likely a marble lining inside (**Figure 10**).[376]

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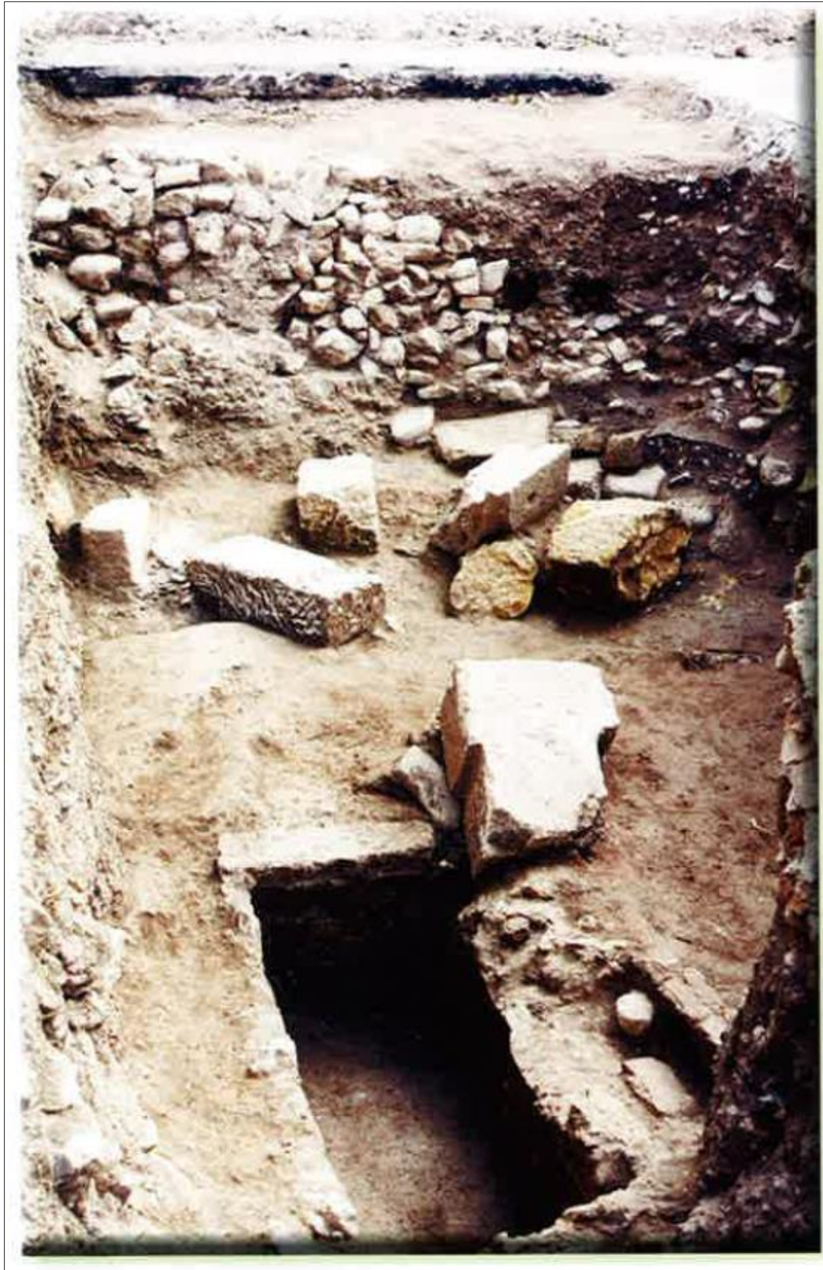
[375] The intervention was carried out by Josep María Macías Solé (Catalan Institute of Classical Archaeology, ICAC), Andreu Muñoz Melgar (Archbishopric of Tarragona/ICAC), and Imma Teixell Navarro (Tarragona City Council). The results were published in *Adiós Cultural* magazine, as well as in press articles ("Hallan en Tarragona la tumba del mártir San Fructuoso," *La Vanguardia* [Barcelona], October 20, 2014, https://www.lavanguardia.com/local/tarragona/20141020/54418090691/tarragona-tumba-fructuoso.html, [last accessed 08/14/2025]).

[376] The excavation recovered fragments of white marble—likely imported from Italy—along with *Africano Verde* (from Teos, Turkey) and *Verde Antico* (from Thessaly, Greece); (Josep M. Macías et al., "La tumba de los santos Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio," *Adiós Cultural* 112 (2015): 15). On the spoliation and abandonment of the forum, see Raúl Aranda González and Julio C. Ruiz, "El fenómeno de la reutilización en la necrópolis paleocristiana de Tarragona: Algunos casos concretos y primeras reflexiones," in *4t*

Figure 10. Excavation of the tomb of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius (2014). Necropolis of Francolí (Tarragona, Spain)



Josep M. Macías et al., "La tumba de los santos Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio," 14.

Congrés Internacional d'Arqueologia i Món Antic - VII Reunió d'Arqueologia Cristiana Hispànica. El Cristianisme En l'Antiguitat Tardana: Noves Perspectives (21-24 Noviembre, 2018), ed. Jordi López Vilar (Universitat Rovira i Virgili - Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2019), 91-98.

As Joan Serra i Vilaró's plan shows, tomb no. 24 is not isolated but flanked by two adjacent tombs, nos. 22 and 23. Nevertheless, the archaeological evidence supporting tomb no. 24 as the resting place of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius is strong and compelling, lending weight to Serra i Vilaró's original hypothesis that this was, in fact, the tomb of the martyrs of *Tarraco*.

The main archaeological arguments supporting the identification of tomb no. 24 as the burial site of the martyrs have been summarized by one of the site's excavators, Andreu Muñoz Melgar.[377] First, although two other tombs are located adjacent to it, tomb 24 is the only one perfectly aligned with the apse—tombs 22 and 23 are slightly offset to the right. Tomb 24 is also aligned with the remains of a pre-existing road that once connected to the port of *Tarraco* (**Figure 11, road no. 7**).[378] This road was rerouted to accommodate the construction of the basilica, a change interpreted by the excavators as an intentional effort to position the apse directly above the martyrs' burial. The location of the tomb is lower depth than the pavement of the apse of the basilica, further suggesting that the tomb predates its construction.[379]

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[377] Andreu Muñoz Melgar, *Sant Fructuós de Tarragona*, 141-142.

[378] Judit Ciurana and Josep M. Macías, "La ciudad extensa: Usos y paisajes suburbanos de *Tarraco*," 312; Ada Lasheras González, "El suburbio portuario de *Tarraco* en la Antigüedad Tardía: Modelos de ocupación y evolución urbana entre los siglos III y VIII," in *Oppidum - Civitas - Urbs. Städteforschung Auf Der Iberischen Halbinsel Zwischen Rom Und al-Andalus*, ed. Sabine Panzram (LIT, 2017), 787-810, at 800.

[379] Josep M. Macías et al., "La tumba de los santos Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio," *Adiós Cultural* 112 (2015): 15.

Figure 11. Map of Roman roads in *Tarraco*

1. Camí de la Cuixa road; 2. eastern branch of the *Via Augusta*; 3. coastal branch of the *Via Augusta*; 4. western branch of the Via *Augusta*; 5. Camí de la Fonteta road; 6. maritime route; 7. Francolí River route.

Judit Ciurana and Josep M. Macías, "La ciudad extensa: Usos y paisajes suburbanos de *Tarraco*," 312.

Additionally, although only fragments of the marble cladding were recovered during both Joan Serra i Vilaró's original excavation and the more recent 2014 intervention, it was determined that the material had likely been looted from the former colonial forum (*Foro de la Colonia*) and reutilized to decorate the tomb. The reuse of materials from the forum appears to have begun gradually in the early third century. The

last epigraphic evidence attesting to public activity in the colonial forum is an inscription dedicated to the Tetrarchy (293–305 CE, *CIL* II²/14, 868).[380] This timeline aligns plausibly with the existence of the tomb prior to the basilica's construction and supports the notion that the marble decorations were added to the structure around the same period as the likely deposition of the martyrs' remains in the Francolí necropolis.

1.1.4 The End of the Necropolis Francolí and the Basilica of the Amphitheater in the Visigothic Period

As expected, the martyrs' tomb was found empty. This finding is consistent with the broader evolution in the use of the basilica of Fructuosus and the Francolí necropolis as a whole. According to the archaeological reconstruction, the area experienced its highest concentration of funerary activity between the mid-fourth and the first half of the fifth century. From the mid-fifth century onwards, the use of the Francolí area for burial purposes began to decline, partly due to the urban revitalization of the port district during

[380] Joaquín Ruiz de Arbulo, "El foro de *Tarraco*," *Cypsela* 8 (1990): 134. *Tarraco* had two forums: the local forum or Forum of the Colony (Foro de la Colonia), and the provincial forum, located in the highest part of the city and housing the temple of imperial cult. The final abandonment of the local forum is dated to the mid-fourth century (Ricardo Mar, "La basílica de la colonia *Tarraco*: Una nueva interpretación del llamado Foro Bajo de Tarragona," in *Los Foros Romanos En Las Provincias Occidentales* [Valencia, 1987], 3). As demonstrated by the work of Raúl Aranda González and Julio C. Ruiz on the reuse of civic materials in *Tarraco*, various elements from the Forum of the Colony—such as column pedestals, statues, and inscriptions—were repurposed as funerary tombstones in the Francolí necropolis (Raúl Aranda González and Julio C. Ruiz, "La reutilización de elementos arquitectónicos en contextos funerario-martiriales: El caso del complejo paleocristiano de Tarragona," in *Exemplum et spolia. La reutilización arquitectónica en la transformación del paisaje urbano de las ciudades históricas*, 2020th ed., ed. Pedro Mateos Cruz and Carlos Jesús Morán Sánchez, vol. 1, MYTRA 7 [Instituto de Arqueología de Mérida, 2020],105-114).

this period.[381] Burials began to shift to other locations, such as the necropolis of Mas Rimbau, situated north of the city walls facing *Tarrac*o's acropolis.[382]

The second basilica in the northern sector of the Francolí necropolis contains no remains that postdate this transition, indicating that by the later fifth century, funerary activity had largely retreated to the southern sector. The basilica of Fructuosus, however, continued to function as a funerary and commemorative space at least until the late fifth or early sixth century.[383] This period also coincides with the construction of a new basilica within *Tarraco*'s amphitheater (**Figure 12**)—site of the martyrs' execution—which likely shifted the cultic and commemorative focus of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius to that location, contributing to the eventual decline of the Francolí site.[384]

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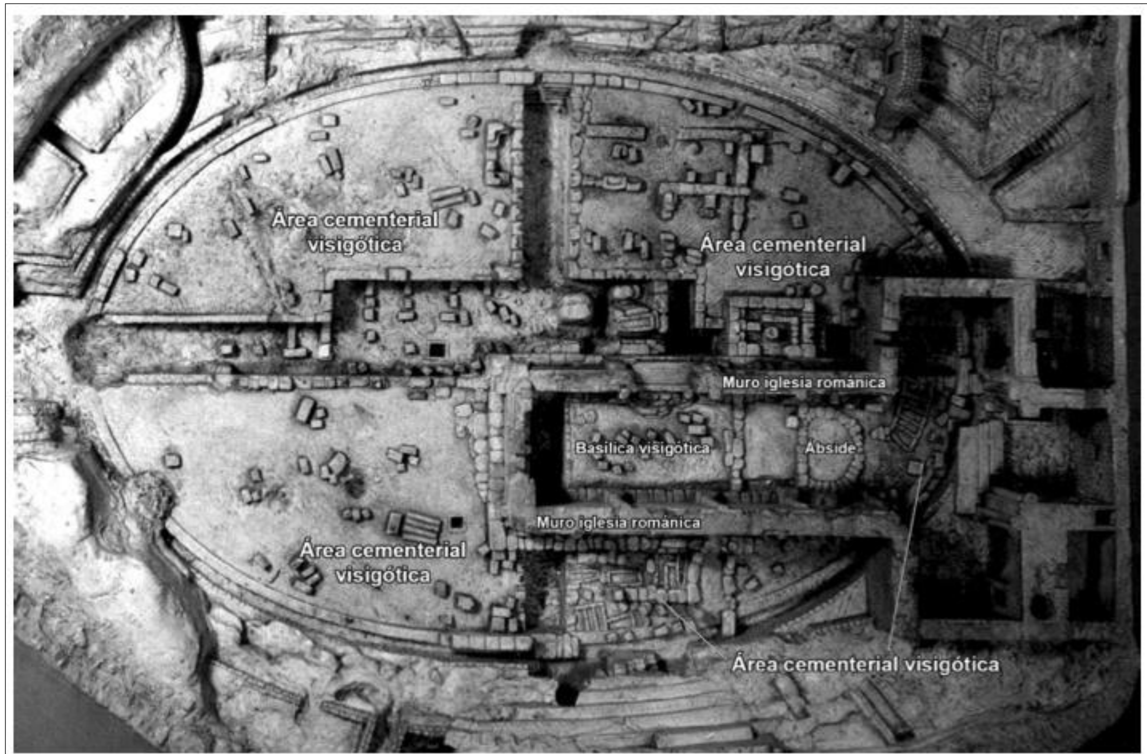
[381] A maritime district was established between the port's coastline and the mouth of the Francolí river—an area of only 750 meters to 1 kilometer—which likely prompted the relocation of burial sites to other areas of the city (Josep M. Macías and Josep A. Remolà Vallverdú, "Topografía y evolución urbana," in *Las capitales provinciales de Hispania. Tarragona: Colonia Iulia Urbs Triumphalis Tarraco*, ed. Xavier Dupré i Raventós ["L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2004], 38).

[382] Joan Menchon Bes, "Necròpolis de l'Antiguitat Tardana i Alta Edat Mitjana a les comarques Del Camp de Tarragona, Conca de Barberà i Priorat," in *Arqueología Funerària al Nord-Est Peninsular (Segles VI-XII)*, ed. N. Molist and G. Ripoll (MAC, 2012), 131.

[383] Some Visigothic decorative elements and bronze items for liturgical use have been found in the southern area of the necropolis, allowing the use of the basilica to be dated at least until the sixth century (Jordi López Vilar, "El santuario paleocristiano de los mártires Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio en el suburbio de *Tarraco*," 351).

[384] Andreu Muñoz Melgar, "La basílica visigótica del anfiteatro de Tarragona: Definición, técnicas constructivas y simbología de un templo martirial," *Quarhis* 12 (2016): 107. See also Cristina Godoy Fernández, "La memoria de Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio en la arena del anfiteatro de Tarragona," *Butlletí Arqueològic* 16 (1994): 181–210; José J. Guidi-Sánchez, "*Spolia et varietas*. La construcción de los complejos cristianos de *Tarraco*. El caso de la basílica del anfiteatro," *Butlletí Arqueològic* 32 (2009): 757–93; Cristina Godoy Fernández and Andreu Muñoz Melgar, "La basílica del anfiteatro, el Oracional de Verona y el culto a los mártires Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio en ea Tarragona del siglo VII," in *4t Congrés Internacional d'Arqueologia i Món Antic - VII Reunió d'Arqueologia Cristiana Hispànica. El Cristianisme En l'Antiguitat Tardana: Noves Perspectives (21-24 Noviembre, 2018)*, ed. Jordi López Vilar (Universitat Rovira i Virgili - Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2019), 65-74.

Figure 12. Roman amphitheater with Visigothic basilica of Fructuosus ("Basílica visigótica" and "ábside"). Tarragona, Spain



Andreu Muñoz Melgar, "La basílica visigótica del anfiteatro de Tarragona," 112.

The construction of the basilica in the amphitheater underscores the long-standing devotion to the martyrs of *Tarraco*, a cult that may have extended from the late third or early fourth century—if we consider the composition date of the *Passio Fructuosi*—well into the Visigothic period. The cult of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius thus provides one of the clearest examples of continuity and longevity among the martyr cults praised by Prudentius in the *Peristephanon*, alongside that of the martyr Eulalia of Mérida, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

As mentioned in the archaeological overview, only one tomb has been identified as the likely burial place of the martyrs. Why a single tomb, and not three? In the next section, I will examine the textual evidence from the *Passio Fructuosi* and Prudentius' Hymn 6 to assess whether tomb no. 24 could plausibly have contained the remains of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius. In doing so, I will compare the material evidence with the insights provided by these texts regarding the cult of the martyrs in *Tarraco*.

1.2 Text and Archaeology: Interpreting Fructuosus' cult at the necropolis of Francolí

The material evidence for the cult of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius points to a period of heightened activity between the second half of the fourth century and the mid-fifth century. While the dating of archaeological remains is often controversial and sometimes imprecise, there is broad consensus among scholars that the area of Francolí was monumentalized between the late fourth and early fifth centuries. This monumentalization appears to have been intended to solidify the memory and cult of the martyrs in the southwestern sector of the city, between the river *Tulcis* and the port. From this point onward, many of the hypotheses drawn from the material record are plausible—yet they raise more questions than they answer. Could the remains of the martyrs have been transferred to Francolí immediately after their execution? And if so, should we understand the evolution of the necropolis as a direct response to a phenomenon of *burial ad sanctos*? Here, the textual evidence of the *Passio Fructuosi* and Hymn 6 of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* can help refine these hypotheses and provide tentative answers to these questions.

As argued in Chapter 2, the very existence of the *Passio Fructuosi* constitutes strong evidence that a cult or at least a memory of the martyrs Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius was already present within the Christian community of *Tarraco*. As discussed earlier, the *Passio* was likely composed in the late third century and later revised by a second hagiographer in the early fourth century, possibly in connection with the liturgical celebration of the martyrs' *dies natalis*.[385] Accepting the dating of the *Passio Fructuosi* proposed by Franchi the Cavalieri and others discussed in chapter 2, the text itself is evidence that suggests that the martyrs were remembered and venerated in *Tarraco*—at least within ecclesiastical circles—well before Prudentius composed his hymn.

The fact that Prudentius knew and drew directly from the *Passio Fructuosi*, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, offers further evidence that knowledge and veneration of these martyrs extended beyond *Tarraco* to other regions of Hispania.[386] Nonetheless, a more detailed comparison between the material record and both the *Passio Fructuosi* and Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon* reveals several striking parallels that strengthen the hypothesis that the Francolí necropolis was indeed the original site of the martyrs'

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[385] See Chapter 2, pp. 86-92 for a discussion on the authorship of the *Passio Fructuosi*.

[386] It is worth recalling that Prudentius was likely a native of the Spanish city of *Calagurris*, also located in the province of *Tarraconensis* but far from *Tarraco*. There is no definitive evidence in his limited biographical record that he ever visited *Tarraco*, although it is plausible—based on the information he provides about his life—that he served as a provincial governor on more than one occasion (*Praefatio*, 8-10). This would reasonably explain how he might have known and visited two administratively important cities in Hispania, such as *Tarraco* and *Emerita Augusta.* Regardless of whether he ever visited *Tarraco*, Prudentius' knowledge of its martyrs demonstrates that the Christian community in the city preserved and cultivated the memory of the martyrs throughout the fourth century, making it possible for that memory to reach Prudentius himself.

depositio, and that a cultic presence—at least around their tomb—was already active by the time Prudentius wrote his hymn.

Chapter Six of the *Passio Fructuosi* contains a number relevant details that can be correlated with the archaeological remains at Francolí. This chapter narrates the second miracle following the execution of the martyrs, in which Fructuosus appears in a vision to the *fratres*, instructing them to return the portions of his remains that each had taken.

The account begins with the grieving Christians hastening at nightfall to the amphitheater, where they were martyred, bringing wine to pour over the still-smoldering bodies of the martyrs — "[they, supply] hastened to the amphitheater with wine in order to quench the smoldering bodies."[387] Motivated by the desire to carry out proper funerary rites, the *fratres* approach the site at nightfall, likely to avoid public detection. This detail aligns closely with the urban geography of the city of *Tarraco*. As noted earlier, the amphitheater was located on the city's southeastern edge, directly along the coastline. One road linked the amphitheater to the port on the southwestern side of the city; another connected the port to the mouth of the Francolí river and extended toward the necropolis.[388] All these areas were located outside the city walls. Following the coastal path, the distance between the amphitheater and the Francolí necropolis is approximately three kilometers, being the nearest burial place to the amphitheater. It is therefore plausible that, after completing the ritual of pouring wine over the bodies and

[387] "*superveniente nocte ad amphitheatrum cum uino festinauerunt ut semiusta corpora exstinguerent*." (*Passio Fructuosi* 6.1, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 182-183).

[388] Judit Ciurana and Josep M. Macías, "La ciudad extensa: Usos y paisajes suburbanos de *Tarraco*," 312.

experiencing Fructuosus' visionary appearance, the Christians transferred the remains to the Francolí area for burial.

The location of the necropolis itself also supports the hypothesis that it served as the original burial place of the martyrs. As previously noted, burials in this area began to be concentrated at a certain distance from the western city wall of *Tarraco*, which until the third century had been occupied by suburban *domus*, modest domestic dwellings, and facilities used for production and port-related storage. These structures were gradually abandoned during the third century, leaving the area isolated enough—yet still close to the amphitheater—to make it a plausible site for the *fratres* of *Tarraco* to transport and bury the martyrs' remains.

Chapter Six of the *Passio Fructuosi* continues by stating that each of the Christians present "collected the ashes of the martyrs… and claimed them for his own."[389] Fructuosus then appears to these people and instructs them that "what each had taken of his ashes out of love for him should be restored without delay."[390] The *Passio Fructuosi* does not elaborate further on the nature of this restitution. However, in Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius modifies the scene and adds significant new elements. As analyzed in Chapter 2, it is not only Fructuosus but all three martyrs who appear to the

[389] "*quo facto cineres eorum collectos prout quisque potuit sibi uindicauit*." (*Passio Fructuosi* 6.2, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 182-183).

[390] "*igitur post passionem apparuit [Fructuosus] fratribus et monuit ut quod unusquisque per caritatem de cineribus usurpauerat, restituerent sine mora*." (*Passio Fructuosi* 6.3, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 182-183).

Christian brethren and command them to return the relics. Prudentius gives the martyrs the following words:

> But lest remains which must one day be raised up again and then be together with the Lord should be sundered in separate burial places at different spots, the three appeared, clad in snow-white robes, and enjoined that the hallowed dust be given back and enclosed together in a marble chamber.[391]

This passage emphasizes two key ideas. First, the martyrs explicitly reject the possibility of resting in separate burial sites; second, they insist that all their remains be deposited together in a single, shared location.

Let us now compare this textual detail to the archaeological findings of the 2014 intervention at tomb no. 24 in the necropolis of Francolí. One central question has been why there is only one tomb rather than three, one for each martyr. If we consider the descriptions in both the *Passio Fructuosi* and Prudentius' hymn, the likely condition of the martyrs' bodies after their execution was that of ashes and burned fragments—certainly not intact corpses. Both texts refer consistently to the remains using terms such as *cineres* (ashes), *pulvis* (dust), *favillae* (glowing ashes), and *semiusta corpora* (half-burned bodies), indicating that the corpses were heavily charred or reduced to ash by fire.

The tomb no. 24, identified by Juan Serra i Vilaró as the likely burial site of the martyrs, is appropriately sized to accommodate their remains: it measures 2.75 meters in width by 9.95 meters in length, with a preserved depth of approximately 80

[391] "*sed ne reliquias resuscitandas et mox cum domino simul futuras discretis loca dividant sepulcris, cernuntur niveis stolis amicti, mandant restitui cavoque claudi mixtim marmore pulverem sacrandum*." (*Peristephanon* 6.136-141, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213).

centimeters.[392] The sources' emphasis on ashes and indistinguishable remains supports the plausibility of a single tomb. It would have been virtually impossible to separate and attribute the remains to each individual martyr. Thus, a collective burial was not only practical but necessary.

This archaeological and textual convergence reinforces Prudentius' insistence that the martyrs' relics should not be separated. By the time he was writing, the tomb must have already existed and had been established by the Christian community of *Tarraco* as the central site for commemorating the martyrdom of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius altogether.

These considerations also help explain the small but significant modifications introduced by Prudentius to the original narrative found in the *Passio Fructuosi*. While the *Passio* simply states that the portion of the martyrs' remains taken by the *fratres* should be returned without delay—before quickly moving on to the next episode—Prudentius expands the scene with details that align closely with the archaeological evidence: the insistence that the martyrs must not rest in separate tombs, that their relics should be buried together, and that all three martyrs—not only Fructuosus—appear to the Christian brethren of *Tarraco* to issue this command.

However, Prudentius adds yet another detail absent from the *Passio* that proves highly relevant. In Hymn 6 of the *Peristephanon*, the martyrs not only instruct the Christians to return and jointly bury their relics, but also to ensure that the remains are

[392] Josep M. Macías et al., "La tumba de los santos Fructuoso, Augurio y Eulogio," *Adiós Cultural* 112 (2015): 14.

"consecrated by means of marble" (*claudi mixtim marmore pulverem sacrandum*).[393] As mentioned previously, both the early excavation by Joan Serra i Vilaró and the later intervention of 2014 uncovered remnants of various marble linings inside the tomb—an observation consistent with Prudentius' literary addition.

The absence of this detail in the *Passio Fructuosi* may be explained, first, by the stylistic sobriety typical of this martyrdom account, which tends to avoid decorative or embellishing detail. Second, it is plausible that at the time of the *Passio*'s final composition, the tomb had not yet received its marble revetment. The reuse of construction materials from the colonial forum (*Foro de la Colonia*), which likely provided the marble, is dated between the mid-third and mid-fourth centuries—precisely the period when the forum was gradually abandoned. Prudentius' specific reference to marble enclosing the martyrs' remains is thus consistent with a chronology in which the tomb was embellished, at the latest, by the second half of the fourth century. This would explain why he includes such a detail: for Prudentius, writing in the final decades of the fourth century, the marble-lined tomb would have been a visible, well-known feature of the site.

Taken together, these elements support the interpretation—already suggested by the archaeological evidence—that by the time Prudentius composed the *Peristephanon*, the tomb of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius in the Francolí necropolis had already become a recognized site of memory and veneration. What remains more difficult to

[393] *Peristephanon* 6.140-141, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213.

determine, however, is whether the basilica itself was already standing by the time of Prudentius' visit or writing. The available evidence offers no definitive answer.

One possible clue, however, lies in both the *Passio Fructuosi* and the *Peristephanon*'s shared emphasis on the liturgical practice of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays. This theme is particularly emphasized in relation to Fructuosus' spiritual discipline while imprisoned and on his way to execution. The *Passio* refers to his observance of *statio*—a term denoting fixed days of liturgical discipline—on Wednesday and Friday, even while in custody.[394] Prudentius echoes this scene in his hymn, though he uses the broader term *ieiunium* (fast) instead of *statio*.[395]

As earlier Christian authors such as Tertullian show, the *statio* fast was intimately tied to Eucharistic practice. Christians were expected to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays and, on those days, also to prepare for the reception of communion—alongside the more celebratory observance of Sunday, the first day of the week.[396] Prudentius' decision to highlight this practice, and its role in the martyr's final witness, subtly evokes the liturgical rhythms associated with a cult site that included not only memory but also Eucharistic celebration—raising the possibility that some form of structured

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[394] *Passio Fructuosi* 3.2, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs,* 178-179.

[395] *Peristephanon* 6.54-57, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 206-207.

[396] "*Similiter et stationum diebus non putant plerique sacrificiorum orationibus interueniendum, quod statio soluenda sit accepto corpore Domini …* - Similarly, too, touching the days of Stations, most think that they must not be present at the sacrificial prayers, on the ground that the Station must be dissolved by reception of the Lord's Body …" (Tertullian, *De Oratione*, XIX.1, Tertullian, *Complete Works of Tertullian*, trans. Sydney Thelwall, [Delphi Classics 89, 2018], 75). See also Paul F. Bradshaw, "The Reception of Communion in Early Christianity," *Studia Liturgica* 37, no. 2 (2007): 164–80; and Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts, and Seasons in Early Christianity*, Alcuin Club Collections 86 (A Pueblo Book, Liturgical Press, 2011), 42-46.

commemoration, and perhaps even a formal cultic ritual and space, was already in place by the time he wrote.

In light of the textual evidence discussed above, it is plausible the interpretation given by the excavators of the fragmentary inscription dedicated to Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius as belonging to an altar, perhaps used for Eucharistic celebration is plausible. Given the broad and imprecise chronological range attributed to the inscription, both structures could well have been built after Prudentius wrote his hymn.

The absence of any explicit mention of a basilica or an altar in the *Peristephanon*—despite Prudentius' clear reference to the marble tomb—further supports the hypothesis that the basilica had not yet been constructed at the time of writing. At most, its construction may have been roughly contemporary with the composition of the text but either Prudentius had no knowledge about it or it was used for another purpose.

What can be confidently asserted, however, is that the practice of *statio* remained strongly linked to the memory of the martyrs of *Tarraco* from the time of the *Passio Fructuosi* onward. Prudentius, in his poetic retelling, demonstrates a clear intention to continue this early Christian liturgical observance as part of the veneration of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius. In doing so, he reinforces the image of bishop Fructuosus as an ascetic leader devoted to established Christian tradition.

It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the basilica, once constructed, included a Eucharistic altar bearing the dedicatory inscription to the three martyrs, which would align with the liturgical function of the space and the cultic traditions already associated

with their commemoration. Within this context, the Eucharistic rites performed at the basilica—especially those conducted on Wednesdays and Fridays—may have reflected the continuation of the *statio* practice. In this way, the celebration of the martyrs' memory would have been intimately tied to a living liturgical tradition, ensuring the integration of their cult into the devotional rhythms of the local Christian community.

In sum, while the presence of an altar inscription and the likely inclusion of Eucharistic practices such as the *statio* add weight to the existence of a ritual and commemorative space by the time of the *Peristephanon*, the absence of any explicit reference to a basilica in Prudentius' hymn leaves its existence at that point uncertain. Nevertheless, what can be suggested is that by Prudentius' time, the cult of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius was already a well-established form of public Christian devotion in *Tarraco*, materially rooted in their tomb and ritually reinforced through weekly liturgical observances.

Having traced the archaeological and textual evidence for this cult, we now turn to a second case study: the cult of Saint Eulalia of Mérida (*Emerita Augusta*). Although its textual origins are more elusive, this tradition—memorialized in *Peristephanon* 3—offers valuable insight into the formation of local martyr cults in Late Antique Hispania and the ways in which Prudentius engaged with, and possibly helped shape, their memory.

2. St. Eulalia of Mérida: Textual Memory and Archaeological Presence

This second part of the chapter turns to the case of Eulalia of Mérida, the only Spanish female martyr featured in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*. As with Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, Prudentius devotes an entire hymn—*Peristephanon* 3—to celebrating her martyrdom and spiritual legacy. Yet unlike the martyrs of *Tarraco*, whose cult is attested in earlier textual and material sources, the evidence for Eulalia's veneration prior to Prudentius is more fragmentary and debated. In what follows, I examine how *Peristephanon* 3 constructs Eulalia's identity and cult, beginning with the literary and hagiographic traditions that may have informed the hymn. I then turn to the archaeological record of Mérida to assess the extent to which a local cult may have existed by the fourth and early fifth century, and how memory and place were shaped in parallel to the poetic narrative.

2.1 Eulalia in Hymn 3 of the *Peristephanon*: Martyrdom and Early Reception

2.1.1 Brief background (likely date of martyrdom, legendary vs. historical layers)

Unlike the case of Fructuosus, for whom we have a preserved and datable text (*Passio Fructuosi*) written prior to the *Peristephanon*, there is no securely dated written source concerning Eulalia that predates Prudentius' hymn. Scholars have long debated the possibility that an earlier *passio* of Eulalia, composed in the early fourth century and possibly known to both Prudentius and Augustine, may have existed and been substantially incorporated into the eighth-century *Passio Eulaliae* that survives today.[397]

[397] Pedro Castillo Maldonado, *Los mártires hispanorromanos*, 100. See also Anne-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 239-241, at 240; and Pilar Riesco Chueca, *Pasionario Hispánico*, xii. As

However, no hypothesis to this effect has been definitively proven, and no written fragment or manuscript has come down to us that would confirm such a text. As such, I proceed from the assumption that *Peristephanon* 3 constitutes the earliest extant written reference to Eulalia of Mérida.

Prudentius' hymn follows the classical narrative structure of a *passio*. The first part of the hymn, (vv. 1–65), offers contextual information about the martyr. It opens with a eulogy of the city of Mérida as Eulalia's birthplace, situating it geographically in the western part of Spain and the empire and describing it as a wealthy, powerful and populated city.[398] After these introductory verses, Prudentius introduces Eulalia herself, a twelve-year-old girl described as a *sacra virgo*—a sacred virgin who had only just reached the minimum legal age for marriage.[399] She is portrayed as a *puella senilis*, an "old girl," a literary type embodying wisdom and maturity beyond her years.[400] Eulalia

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pointed out in chapter one, Antonio Mateos Martín Rodrigo has even proposed that Eulalia may have already had a *passio* of Donatist origin in the early fourth century—unknown to Prudentius—that was reintroduced into Hispania during the Byzantine domination of North Africa. While intriguing, this hypothesis is not very plausible (Antonio Mateos Martín Rodrigo, *Las pasiones de Santa Eulalia de Mérida o África e Hispania*, 153-168).

[398] "*proximus occiduo locus est, qui tulit hoc decus egregium, urbe potens, populis locuples, sed mage sanguine martyrii virgineoque potens titulo*." *Peristephanon* 3.6-10. Thomson's translation of this verses is: "Far in the west lies the place that has won this signal honor; as a city, martyrdom and a maiden's tombstone." (Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 144-145).

[399] Which would have been twelve years for girls (Suzanne Dixon, "From Ceremonial to Sexualities: A Survey of Scholarship on Roman Marriage," in *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Beryl Rawson [John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2010], 247).

[400] John Petruccione, "The Portrait of St. Eulalia of Mérida in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 3," *Analecta Bollandiana* 108 (1990): 81–104, 88.89 and n. 20.

rejects earthly vanities such as luxury, jewelry, and even childhood toys,[401] dedicating her life to God from an early age: "her body was not destined for marriage."[402]

This introduction contains no datable elements that would allow us to pinpoint the time of her martyrdom with any certainty, unlike the *Passio Fructuosi*, which emulates the structure of judicial proceedings. The only chronological clue comes later during Eulalia's interrogation, where the reigning emperor is identified as Maximian. This reference suggests that her martyrdom occurred during Diocletian's persecutions.[403]

The introduction concludes with a narrative episode in which Eulalia's mother, concerned about her daughter's determination to defy Roman authority, takes her to the outskirts of the city to prevent her from seeking martyrdom.[404] Eulalia, however, escapes during the night and heads to the city to confront the judge. This nocturnal journey is steeped in metaphor, filled with images of the young girl crossing wild and dark terrain—a spiritual exodus I will analyze in detail later in the chapter.[405]

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[401] "*ipsa crepundia reppulerat, ludere nescia pusiola*; *spernere sucina, flare rosas, fulva monilia respuere, ore severa, modesta gradu, moribus et nimium teneris canitiem meditata senum*. - She would scorn amber beads, scout roses, spurn golden necklaces; she was grave of face, sober in her gait, and in the ways of her tenderest years practiced the manner of hoary age." (*Peristephanon* 3.19-25, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 145).

[402] "*iam dederat prius indicium, tendere se Patris ad solium, nec sua membra dicata toro* … - Already she had given a sign that her face was set towards the Father's throne and her body not destined for marriage …" (*Peristephanon* 3.16-18, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 145).

[403] Likely 304-305 CE. See Issac Sastre de Diego, "El *exemplum* de Eulalia en la cristianización de la aristocracia romana hispana," 229.

[404] "But her mother's loving care sought to keep the high-spirited damsel at home out of notice, buried in the country at a distance from the town, lest the self-willed girl rush to expend her blood from the love of death." (*Peristephanon* 3. 36-40, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 146-147).

[405] *Peristephanon* 3.41-65.

The second part of the hymn (lines 66–185) recounts the events of the trial, the martyrdom, and the miracles following Eulalia's death. In this section, Eulalia appears before the unnamed judge and engages in a verbal confrontation.[406] She shames the magistrate for compelling Christians to offer sacrifices to the gods and mocks the Roman authorities, including the emperor.[407] The judge, irritated by her insolence and adopting a lascivious and paternalistic tone, attempts to persuade her to save herself by offering a small token of incense to the gods, appealing to the promise of a happy marriage and future life.[408]

Eulalia reacts with impulsive violence, spitting in the judge's face to reject his offer. From this point on, Prudentius describes in detail the tortures inflicted on her. As I will argue later, these tortures are symbolically designed to violate her virginity through

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[406] We may assume that, as in the case of *Tarraco*, the judge in charge of Eulalia's trial would have been the governor of the province of Lusitania, of which *Emerita* was the capital. There is an ongoing scholarly debate regarding the identity of this judge, since Prudentius appears to omit his name and instead refers to the emperor Maximian as the highest authority. Scholars such as Antonio Mateos Martín Rodrigo argue that this omission may be intentional and related to the intended audience of the hymn, which was likely not limited to the inhabitants of Mérida. For this broader audience, the name of the judge might have lacked relevance or familiarity (Antonio Mateos Martín Rodrigo, *Las Pasiones de Santa Eulalia de Mérida o África e Hispania*, 47). Martín Rodrigo suggests that the judge's name was Calpurnianus—a figure mentioned in the Visigothic-era *Passio Eulaliae*. He further argues that Prudentius likely knew and based parts of his account on a now-lost fourth-century *passio* (see n. 397). In support of this hypothesis, Martín Rodrigo cites the discovery of a statue base near the colonial forum of *Emerita Augusta*, bearing a fragmentary inscription that reads "co](n)s(uli) / [proc]onsuli / [Ca]lpurnianus / [- - - d(evotus) n(umini)] m(aiestati)q(ue) e(ius)" (*Hispania Epigraphica,* no. 23358, HEpOL database record 23358). This has been interpreted as part of the cognomen Calpurnianus, possibly identifying the individual "as a provincial governor or another high-ranking imperial official" (José Luis Saquete Chamizo and Juana Márquez Pérez, "Un fragmento de pedestal descubierto en Mérida. A propósito del foro y de la colonia *Augusta Emerita* en los siglos III-IV," *Mérida. Ciudad y Patrimonio: Revista de Arqueología, Arte y Urbanismo* 1 [1997]: 45–54, at 45). The omission remains of the name of Calpurnianus is puzzling, especially when contrasted with the case of Fructuosus, where Prudentius does name the Roman official, even though the intended audience of that hymn was likely not limited to *Tarraco* either.

[407] *Peristephanon* 3.66-95.

[408] *Peristephanon* 3.96-125.

the exposure of her body. Yet Eulalia, following the example of fortitude and resistance set by earlier martyrs, not only endures the tortures with composure but embraces them with joy.[409]

Miracles begin to manifest at the very moment of Eulalia's death. She is burned on her sides and abdomen with torches, and, desiring a quicker end, inhales the flames through her mouth. When the fire reaches her head, the young girl dies. At that instant, a white dove—symbolizing both her virginity and her spirit ascending to God—emerges from her mouth and flies to the heavens. As in the account of Fructuosus, this miracle is witnessed by her executor and one of the lictors present, both of whom flee in terror. Immediately after, another miracle takes place: snow begins to fall, covering the naked body of Eulalia and thus preserving her modesty and purity.[410]

Following this episode, the narrative enters its final structural section: a *laudatio* of the city of *Emerita Augusta*. Now celebrated not only as the birthplace of the martyr but also as the guardian of her relics, the city is praised for its role in housing Eulalia's tomb. Prudentius offers a detailed description of her burial place, which I will later compare with the available archaeological evidence. The hymn closes with a depiction of the festival held in Eulalia's honor—much like the final verses of *Peristephanon* 6, which celebrate the feast day of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius in *Tarraco*.[411]

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[409] *Peristephanon* 3.126-150.

[410] *Peristephanon* 3.151-185.

[411] *Peristephanon* 3.186-215.

I now turn to a more detailed analysis of how Prudentius constructs Eulalia's martyrdom and the literary and theological dimensions that shape her portrayal. In particular, I will examine how her characterization as a female martyr draws on established tropes of virginity, resistance, and miraculous purity, and how this vision compares to the idealized archetype that Prudentius constructed of Fructuosus in the *Peristephanon*.

2.1.2 A female martyr in the *Peristephanon*: Prudentius' ideal construction of Eulalia

As analyzed in Chapter Two, one of the most significant changes observable in Prudentius' reformulation of the *Passio Fructuosi* lies in his rhetorical approach: Prudentius' version is far more embellished with rhetorical descriptions, so quite different from the stark prose of the original *passio*. In the case of Eulalia's martyrdom, we lack a surviving text that predates *Peristephanon* 3, but it is reasonable to assume that, had one existed, we would see a similar transformation in tone and style—particularly given Prudentius' choice of poetic form. His hymn to Eulalia is filled with rhetorical flourishes, allegorical interpretation, and poetic embellishment, all of which raise important questions about which narrative elements might reflect a historical reality, such as the possible existence of a cult devoted to Eulalia at the time of writing.

For this reason, I propose to analyze *Peristephanon* 3 on two interrelated levels. First, I examine the vision of Eulalia that Prudentius constructs for his audience, focusing on her representation as a female martyr and the ideological framework surrounding her sanctity. Second, I consider the historically plausible elements embedded in the hymn and

assess how they might align with material evidence to support the claim that Eulalia's cult was already established in Mérida by the early fifth century.

In *Peristephanon* 3, Prudentius offers a rich portrayal of Eulalia. Through a sophisticated layering of biblical allusion, gendered sanctity, and civic pride, Prudentius crafts an image of the martyr that both fits within and expands the traditional typology of martyrdom. She is not only depicted as a sacred virgin, but also as a militant agent of her own martyrdom, a protector of her city, and an archetype of Christian female resistance. In this way, Prudentius constructs a poetic memorial that elevates Eulalia to a cosmic and heavenly scale while simultaneously rooting her sanctity in the urban geography of Late Antique Hispania.

As outlined in the summary above, Prudentius emphasizes Eulalia's noble birth and the nobility of her death from the very first lines: "A holy virgin, noble born… ." Her martyrdom is not portrayed as passive suffering, as we saw in the case of Fructuosus and his deacons—who, while courageous, are arrested in their homes and do not actively seek death. Eulalia's death, by contrast, is heroic, defiant, and deliberate: she chooses suffering over safety, fleeing from her mother at night and journeying alone through a thorny wilderness. This journey is elevated through an explicit biblical allusion to the Exodus. Just as the Israelites fled Egypt guided by divine light, Eulalia is accompanied on her path by a troop of angels and illuminated by a supernatural radiance: "With torn feet she passes over a rough waste overgrown with briers, but she is accompanied by a troop

of angels, and for all the gruesome silence of the night she still has light to guide her."[412] Her nocturnal escape becomes a spiritual liberation, reimagined in Christian poetic language as triumph over pagan darkness.

Prudentius introduces here a symbolic parallel between Egypt (named Canopus in the poem)[413] and Roman paganism: Eulalia's flight is thus cast as a metaphor for the Christian soul fleeing idolatry and the spiritual and bodily slavery imposed by imperial demands for sacrifice. However, Prudentius' poetic style—marked by fusion of biblical and classical references—ensures that this wilderness journey does not allude solely to Scripture. Instead, it draws heavily on Latin literary vocabulary, echoing the language and landscape motifs of Roman epic. For instance, the phrase *per loca senta situ* (*Peristephanon* 3.47) is a direct citation from Virgil's *Aeneid*: "*sed me iussa deum quae nunc has ire per umbras, per loca senta situ…*"[414] Through this allusion, Prudentius inscribes Eulalia's flight within a long-standing Roman tradition of depicting haunted or

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[412] "*Ingreditur pedibus laceris per loca senta situ et uepribus angelico comitata choro et, licet horrida nox sileat, lucis habet tamen illa ducem*." (*Peristephanon* 3.46-50, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 146-147). Both the wilderness setting and the light that shines on Eulalia in the darkness evoke the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt—ancestors who, in Prudentius' depiction, symbolically accompany the martyr on her own flight: "*Sic habuit generosa patrum, turba columniferum radium, scindere qui tenebrosa potens, nocte uiam face perspicua, praestitit intereunte chao*. - So it was that the noble company of the patriarchs had a beam in the shape of a pillar which, being able to pierce the gloom, showed them the way by night with its bright flame and the darkness was done away." (*Peristephanon* 3.51-55, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 146-147). *Cf*. Exodus, 13: 21, "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night."

[413] "*nec tenebris adoperta fuit, regna Canopica cum fugeret* …" (*Peristephanon* 3.58-59, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 146).

[414] "But the gods' decrees, which now constrain me to pass through these shades, through lands squalid and forsaken …" (Vergil, *Aeneid*, V.462; in *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, Revised Edition with new Introduction, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 63 [Harvard University Press, 1999], 564-565).

desolate landscapes, thus connecting her journey to that of legendary epic heroes such as Aeneas and Dido.[415]

Rather than rejecting these classical models, Prudentius adapts them to articulate a new form of Christian heroism. The wilderness Eulalia traverses is not only physically hostile but spiritually charged—a testing ground for her faith, much like the trials faced by heroes in epic literature.[416]

This rhetorical framing situates Eulalia within a broader tradition, aligning the fourth-century martyr with both Hebrew and Greco-Roman legacies and creating a continuum of Christian identity rooted in resistance. Her death is portrayed as a meaningful act of witness that affirms her faith; even her wounds are described as marks that reflect the triumph of Christ.[417] In mixing physical suffering with spiritual symbolism, Prudentius shapes a model of sanctity that draws from diverse cultural traditions. His scriptural and epic allusions demonstrate how he constructs a multidimensional image of martyrdom, one that both venerates Eulalia and promotes a distinctly Christian reinterpretation of literary and moral heroism.

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[415] Cillian O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 41-48.

[416] Anne-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 160-162.

[417] John Petruccione, "The Portrait of St. Eulalia of Mérida in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 3," *Analecta Bollandiana* 108 (1990): 98.

Virginity, Gender and Agency

Although Prudentius draws upon established *topoi* of female martyrdom, he intensifies Eulalia's agency and autonomy in ways that make her fit with archetypal figures such as Thecla and Perpetua—known for their resistance and boldness—while simultaneously constructing their identity around the topos of the virgin martyr. In this sense, Eulalia is also assimilated to the only other female martyr praised by Prudentius in the *Peristephanon*, the roman martyr Agnes.[418]

Eulalia is only twelve years old at the time of her martyrdom, but Prudentius describes her as having long rejected the pleasures of childhood and the social expectation of marriage.[419] Her virginity is not merely a spiritual or moral state; it is portrayed as a deliberate decision and a radical stance of self-determination. Prudentius does not depict her as a cloistered girl but as a bold, impulsive, and defiant girl—one who refuses her mother's attempts to protect her, rejects cowardice, and willingly embraces

[418] John Petruccione, "The Portrait of St. Eulalia of Mérida in Prudentius' *Peristephanon* 3," 84-85. Another female saint, Encratis of *Caesaraugusta*, is mentioned in Hymn 4 of the *Peristephanon*, which is a list of martyrs from different parts of Spain. The reference, however, is short and Prudentius did not deem important to provide a whole hymn to her. The only information about Encratis that is worth noting is that she did not die during her torturing – therefore, she did not die as a martyr – but later in prison as a result of her injuries. However, Prudentius still places Encratis among the list of martyrs, despite remaining alive after torture: "*hic et, Encrati … violenta virgo … martyrum nulli remanente vita contigit terris habitare nostris sola tu morti propriae superstes vivis in orbe* - Here too, Encratis … a forceful maiden … To none of the martyrs was it given to live on and dwell in our land ; thou art the only one to survive thy death and live in the world." (*Peristephanon* 4.109-116; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 162-163). On martyrs surviving martyrdom see Diane Shane Fruchtman, *Living Martyrs in Late Antiquity and Beyond. Surviving Martyrdom* (Routledge, 2023), esp. 38-40 for a specific discussion on Encratis in *Peristephanon* 4.

[419] "*iam dederat prius indicium tendere se Patris ad solium nec sua membra dicata tore ipsa crepundia reppulerat, ludere nescia pusiola*. - Already she had given a sign that her face was set towards the Father's throne and her body not destined for marriage for even as a little girl she had put toys from her and was a stranger to fun." (*Peristephanon* 3.16-20; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 144-145).

martyrdom as both a reaffirmation of faith and a means to preserve her chastity in the face of the threat posed by marriage.[420]

Upon arriving in the city, Prudentius portrays Eulalia confronting the Roman authorities with remarkable courage—a sharp contrast to the composed and solemn behavior shown by bishop Fructuosus in his interrogation before the governor of *Tarraco*.[421] This contrast may reflect not only differences in gender but also in age and rhetorical framing.

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[420] "*sed pia cura parentis agit virgo animosa domi ut lateat abdita rure et ab urbe procul, ne fera sanguinis in pretium mortis amore puella ruat*. - But her mother's loving care sought to keep the high-spirited damsel at home out of notice, buried in the country at a distance from the town, lest the self-willed girl rush to expend her blood from the love of death." (*Peristephanon* 3.36-40; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 144-145). As Martha Malamud observes, Eulalia's rejection of her mother's protective care, along with her refusal of the conventional elements of childhood and adolescence (such as toys or jewelry), places her outside the normative social categories available for women—daughter, wife, mother—and "triggers a collapse of categories in the text" (Martha Malamud, "Making A Virtue of Perversity: The Poetry of Prudentius," *Ramus* 19, no. 1 [1990]: 74).

[421] Note how Prudentius presents the fear of Eulalia's mother that her daughter might confront the Roman authorities as a "love of death," making her the only Spanish martyr that may be specifically framed as a voluntary martyr—that is, one who actively seeks death rather than undergoing it as the consequence of arrest, as in the case of Fructuosus. The term "voluntary martyrdom" has been treated with some reticence in scholarship, since the notion of freely choosing to die is already implicit in the very category of martyrdom and in the designation of a person as a martyr. See, for example, Daniel Boyarin, who prefers to describe the phenomenon as "provoked martyrdom" (Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* [Stanford University Press, 1999], 121). Yet, as Candida Moss points out, voluntary martyrdom appears in the discursive production of ancient Christian authors with distinctive characteristics that justify considering it "a category distinct from 'true' or 'normative' martyrdom" (Candida Moss, "The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern," *Church History* 81, no. 3 [2012]: 531–551, at 530). In his typology of voluntary martyrdom, G. E. M. de Ste. Croix places Eulalia—"a young fanatic of Augusta Emerita," in his words—within categories (a) and (b): those martyrs who demanded the privilege of martyrdom, and those who put themselves forward on their own terms and made a public confession of Christianity, fully aware that it would mean instant execution (G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter [Oxford University Press, 2006], 153 and 174) Nevertheless, as Ste. Croix emphasizes, ancient Christian authors were careful to draw a clear line between martyrdom and "reckless suicide," which was neither honored nor encouraged (summarized by Ste. Croix at 157–161). Eulalia's martyrdom can therefore be framed not so much as "voluntary" in the sense of an irrational suicide—Prudentius, after all, depicts her as wise and clear-minded in the hymn—but rather as a quasi-political act of protest, offered in solidarity with Christians who faced persecution and arrest under the imperial edicts (Alan Vincelette, "On the Frequency of Voluntary Martyrdom in the Patristic Era," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 70, no. Pt. 2 [2019]: 666-667).

In Eulalia’s case, there is no formal interrogation—she is never arrested—but instead she disrupts into the public sphere with a bold declaration before the governor. Her speech, crafted by Prudentius as a bitter anti-pagan polemic, directly attacks both Roman religion and the imperial power that derives its legitimacy from the state gods:

> I trample idols under foot, and with heart and lips I confess God. Isis, Apollo, Venus—they are naught; Maximian himself too is naught; they because they are works of men's hands, he because he worships the works of men’s hands, both worthless, both naught.[422]

Eulalia’s critique of Roman religion is based on the materiality and emptiness of its idols—mere polished statues unworthy of reverence. Not only she accuses the emperor of idolatry in front of the judge, but she also mocks him for bowing before lifeless images, portraying him as vile and dishonorable for directing his cruelty against Christians: “Though Maximian, lord of power and yet himself in vassalage to figures of stone, prostitute himself to his gods and make himself over to them, why does he persecute noble hearts?”[423] This critique aligns with a broader Christian vision of martyr cults, which did not value the worship of stone statues but rather venerated the buried bodies of saints. Martyr cults offered a tangible, embodied connection to the sacred. Human remains were defined as sites of memory and holiness—contrasted against the cold absurdity of sacrificing to abstract and lifeless divinities.[424] In this light, Eulalia’s

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[422] “*idola protero sub pedibus, pectore et ore deum fateor. Isis Apollo Venus nihil est, Maximianus et ipse nihil; illa nihil quia facta manu, hic manuum quia facta colit; friuola utraque et utraque nihil.*” (*Peristephanon* 3.74-80; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 147-149).

[423] “*Maximianus, opum dominus et tamen ipse cliens lapidum prostituat uoueatque suis numinibus caput ipse suum, pectora cur generosa quatit?*” (*Peristephanon* 3.81-85; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 148-149).

[424] Prudentius’ depiction of Eulalia contrasting the stone idols of paganism with the living human saints venerated by Christianity also serves to shield the cult of the martyrs from charges of idolatry. He

anti-pagan argument is not only theological; it is also gendered and political. A twelve-year-old girl publicly shames the most powerful male authorities of the empire, stripping them of their dignity through speech and symbolic action.

The entire hymn is filled with an eroticized tone regarding the martyr's body and experience, but this component is most clearly expressed in the scene of Eulalia's confrontation and torture. The dramatic climax of the episode comes when she refuses even a single grain of incense to save her life. At this point, the judge attempts to dissuade her by invoking marriage and its pleasures—arguments that carry a strong erotic subtext. Prudentius projects lust and moral corruption onto the judge, who tries first to persuade Eulalia by extolling the joys that marriage could bring. Implicit in this is not only the social honor of a noble girl fulfilling her expected role, but also the sensual

underscores the difference between pagan idolatry—which worships stone images as gods and even compels the worship of the emperor as a divinity—and Christian veneration of martyrs, who are honored but never considered divine. A similar concern is found in the *Passio Fructuosi*, where the governor Aemilianus asks Eulogius during interrogation whether he worships Fructuosus (the future martyr), to which Eulogius replies that he does not worship Fructuosus, but rather worships the one whom Fructuosus himself worships, namely God (*Passio Fructuosi*, 2.7-8). This exchange is cited verbatim by Augustine in Sermon 273, delivered for the *dies natalis* of the martyrs of *Tarraco* (see Chapter 2, n. 264). Augustine likewise emphasizes the distinction between veneration and idolatry in *City of God* VIII.17: "*Nec tamen nos eisdem martyribus templa, sacerdotia, sacra et sacrificia constituimus, quoniam non ipsi, sed Deus eorum nobis est Deus* - But in fact we do not set up for these same martyrs temples, priesthoods, rites and sacrifices, for they themselves are not gods, but their God is our God" (Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans. Books VIII-XI*, trans. David S. Wiesen [Harvard University Press, 1968], 138-139). The theological dispute between Jerome and Vigilantius of *Calagurris*, in which Vigilantius interpreted devotion to the bones and ashes of the martyrs as idolatry, further demonstrates that anxieties and precautions regarding this issue were present within the Christian community itself. On Jerome and Vigilantius, see David G. Hunter, "Vigilantius of Calagurris and Victricius of Rouen: Ascetics, Relics, and Clerics in Late Roman Gaul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 7, no. 3 (1999): 401–30; and Rebecca J. Keller, "Jerome, Vigilantius, and the Cults of the Saints," *Theological Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (2021): 283–92.

pleasures of conjugal life: "Think of the great joys you are cutting off, which the honorable state of marriage offers you."[425]

The judge also attempts to persuade Eulalia by appealing to the pain her death would cause her family, linking this argument with the dishonor that would come from failing to fulfill her expected social and gender role—namely, securing a "rich and splendid marriage."[426] From the magistrate's perspective, Eulalia's defiance challenges not only the religious foundations of the state but also the established customs and gender norms rooted in the most basic social unit: the family.[427] This expectation is even more

[425] "*respice gaudia quanta metas, quae tibi fert genialis honor*" (*Peristephanon* 3.104-105; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 148-149).

[426] "*ingemit anxia nobilitas, flore quod occidis in tenero, proxima dotibus et thalamis. non movet aurea pompa tori, non pietas veneranda senum, quos temeraria debilitas?*" (*Peristephanon* 3.108-113; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 150-151).

[427] As John Petruccione has noted, Eulalia's virginity and her rejection of the institution of marriage are used by Prudentius to develop an ascetic subtext. The praetor's speech about the joys of marriage is directly contrasted with the martyr's radical self-renunciation, for whom "any preference for secular, over spiritual, pleasures constituted the sin of idolatry." Her refusal of earthly marriage is thus transformed into a spiritual marriage with God, "vowing herself to Christ in perpetual virginity" (John Petruccione, "The Portrait of St. Eulalia of Mérida in Prudentius' Peristephanon 3," 94-96). Although Eulalia is presented as a female figure who appears to challenge traditional gender roles, Prudentius ultimately reinscribes a conventional framework: he closes the circle by reasserting the central role of woman in marriage, although with a different spouse—God rather than man. Beyond the symbolic significance of marriage in *Peristephanon* 3 and the juxtaposition of pagan and Christian ideas about it in this passage, it is noteworthy that around the time of Eulalia's martyrdom (ca. 303–305), nearly one-third of the canons of the Council of Elvira (35 out of 81) dealt with marriage, women's behavior, or sexuality. The unusually high number suggests a pronounced concern among the Spanish ecclesiastical hierarchy to regulate the conduct of young Christian women, perhaps in response to—or through—the model offered by figures such as Eulalia. Among its rulings, the council forbade giving Christian virgins in marriage to pagans (Canon XV), and imposed a three-year ban from communion on parents who broke an already established betrothal, thereby recognizing the continuing authority of parents in arranging marriages ("*Si qui parentes fidem fregerint sponsaliorum, triennii tempore abstineantunr*," Canon LIV; in J. Vives, *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos: Ed. Preparada Por José Vives Con La Colaboración de Tomás Marín Martínez y Gonzalo Martínez Díez*, ed. T.M. Martínez and G.M. Díez, España Cristiana. Textos, v. 1 [Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1963], 4 and 11). See also Judith Evans Grubbs, "'Pagan' and 'Christian' Marriage: The State of the Question," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 4 (1994): 361–412. It is important to note, however, that the attribution of all 81 canons to a single council has been challenged by Josep Vilella—although is not a general consensus in scholarship—who argues that the so-called canons of Elvira represent instead a sixth-century compilation of canons from several councils

pronounced given Eulalia's noble background, which should, in theory, bind her more closely to imperial authority and traditional Roman values.

To these appeals, the judge adds what he likely believes to be his most compelling argument: the threat of violent torture. His threats involve brutal physical exposure, and in them, we see the *topos* of the eroticization of the martyr's body represented through the gaze and voice of the magistrate: "You will be beheaded with the sword, or your limbs will be torn by wild beasts, or you will be delivered to the smoking brands to be destroyed and reduced to ashes, for your friends to mourn you with weeping and cries of woe."[428]

These threats—decapitation, dismemberment by wild animals, and destruction by fire—reflect a broader repertoire of punishments commonly associated with female martyrdom in hagiographic literature. Such forms of violence often dramatize the martyr's defiance and spiritual integrity. For instance, in the *Passio Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, Perpetua is exposed to wild beasts in the amphitheater and ultimately beheaded, while her companion Felicitas is trampled by a wild cow—both scenes emphasizing the spectacle of the female body under trial.[429] Similarly, Agnes of Rome—

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held throughout the fourth century (Josep Vilella Masana, "The Pseudo-Iliberritan Canon Texts," *Zeitschrift Für Antikes Christentum* 18 [2014]: 210–59).

[428] *aut gladio feriere caput, aut laniabere membra feris, aut facibus data fumificis flebiliterque ululanda tuis in cineres resoluta flues*." (*Peristephanon* 3.116-120; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 150-151).

[429] "*Puellis autem ferocissimam uaccam ideoque praeter consuetudinem conparatam diabolns praeparauit, sexui earum etiam de bestia aemulatus* … [Perpetua] *inter ossa conpuncta exululauit, et errantem dexteram tirunculi gladiatoris ipsa in iugulum suum transtulit* - For the young women, however, the Devil had prepared a mad heifer. This was an unusual animal, but it was chosen that their sex might be matched with that of die beast. … She [Perpetua] screamed as she was struck on the bone; then she took the trembling hand of the young gladiator and guided it to her throat" (*Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, 20.1 and 21.9; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 128-131).

whom Prudentius celebrates in *Peristephanon* 14 and who shares many narrative elements with Eulalia—is executed by the sword after refusing to surrender her virginity and her faith.[430] The story that arguably sets the archetype for female martyrdom, though legendary, is that of Thecla, who, while not ultimately martyred, faces a series of ordeals including and wild beasts, from which she is miraculously spared.[431]

At the height of the judicial encounter, after the judge has exhausted his efforts—alternating between promises of a joyful life, appeals to familial duty, and the threat of brutal punishments—Prudentius introduces a sudden and shocking reversal. The young martyr does not respond with speech this time, but with a provocative and decisive act: "The martyr answers never a word; howbeit with a loud cry she spits into the tyrant's eyes and then scatters the images and with her foot kicks over the meal laid on the censers."[432]

This climactic gesture condenses Eulalia's resistance into a single explosive act of sacrilegious rebellion. Her preceding silence is strategic—a calculated refusal to dignify

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[430] "*supplex adorat, vulnus ut inminens cervix subiret prona paratius. ast ille tantam spem peragit manu, uno sub ictu nam caput amputate sensum doloris mors cita praevenit* - …and the executioner's hand fulfilled her great hope, for at one stroke he cut off her head and swift death forestalled the sense of pain." (*Peristephanon* 14.86-90; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 342-343).

[431] "But at the time when the animals were being paraded out in a procession, they bound her to a fierce lioness, and Queen Tryphaena was following after her. But the lioness, whom Thecla was sitting upon, was licking her feet, and all the crowd was amazed. - *Ηνίκα δὲ τὰ θηρία ἐπὸμπενεν, προσέδησαν αὐτὴω λεαίνῃ πικρᾳ, καὶ ἡ βασίλισσα Τρύφαινα ἐπηκολούθει αὐτῃ. ἡ δὲ λέαινα ἐπάνω καθεζομένης Φέκλης περιέλειχεν αὐτῆς τοὺς πόδας, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὂχλος ἐξίστατο*." (*The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, 4.3, trans. Jeremy W. Barrier, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament · 2. Reihe, [Mohr Siebeck, 2009] 146).

[432] "*martyr ad ista nihil; sed enim infremit inque tyranni oculos sputa iacit, simulacra dehinc dissipat inpositamque molam turibulis pede prosubigit*" (*Peristephanon* 3.126-130; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 150-151).

the judge's threats—and is followed by a total rupture of decorum and the gender expectations of a girl of her age and social standing in a public setting. By spitting, a gesture of extreme disdain, Eulalia publicly humiliates the male authority figure while disrupting the formal structure of a legal procedure. By scattering the idols and physically profaning the imperial cult, Eulalia enacts a rejection that is both political and religious, placing herself beyond the limits of civic identity as defined by the Roman state.

Comparable scenes appear in other accounts of female martyrdom. Saints like Agnes, who refuses to worship false gods even under threat of execution and public humiliation,[433] or Perpetua, who repeatedly disrupts efforts to humiliate, silence, or kill her[434]—often through divine intervention—similarly embody defiant sanctity. In each

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[433] The judge who condemns Eulalia to martyrdom first humiliates her by exposing her publicly—probably, as Thomson suggests, in the arcades of the Stadium of Domitian in the Campus Martius, which at the time were occupied by brothels: "*at pudor carus dicatae virginitatis est. hanc in lupanar trudere publicum certum est, ad aram ni caput applicat ac de Minerva iam veniam rogat, quam virgo pergit temnere virginem*. - still the purity of her dedicated maiden- hood is dear to her. I am resolved to thrust her into a public brothel unless she lays her head on the altar and now asks pardon of Minerva, the virgin whom she, a virgin too, persists in slighting." (*Peristephanon* 14.23-28; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 338-339). Despite the public humiliation, Agnes remains steadfast with *feroci robore* in her decision to die for the faith: "*stabat feroci robore pertinax corpusque duris excruciatibus ultro offerebat non renuens mori* - She stood firm with strength indomitable, and even offered her body for the sore torment, not refusing to die" (*Peristephanon* 14.23-28).

[434] For example, Perpetua confronts directly the military tribune in charge of her arrest and, through her leadership, secures better treatment for herself and her companions in prison: "*cum tribunus castigatius eos castigaret ... in faciem ei Perpetua respondit: Quid utique non permittis nobis refrigerare noxiis nobilissimis, Caesaris scilicet, et natali eiusdem pugnaturis? aut non tua gloria est, si pinguiores illo producamur? horruit et erubuit tribunus; et ita iussit illos humanius haberi* … - The military tribune had treated them with extraordinary severity … Perpetua spoke to him directly. 'Why can you not even allow us to refresh ourselves properly? … seeing that we belong to the emperor; we are to fight on his very birthday. Would it not be to your credit if we were brought forth on the day in a healthier condition?' The officer became disturbed and grew red. So it was that he gave the order that they were to be more humanely treated … " (*Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 16.2-3; Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 124-125).

case, the martyr's resistance to violence and the impulsive courage of her actions become central to her holiness.

Eulalia's refusal to surrender, even in the face of torture, firmly places her within this tradition of female sanctity. Yet her example may not be limited to women alone. While her virginity and youthful defiance certainly speak to ideals of feminine piety, her boldness, rhetorical force, and resistance to imperial authority construct her as a spiritual model that transcends gender—an embodiment of Christian resistance for all the faithful.[435]

What makes Prudentius' portrait of the martyr truly distinctive is how thoroughly he links Eulalia's act of spitting and rejecting the idols with a form of Christian iconoclasm and a gendered inversion of power. Eulalia's youth and gender—traits that in Roman discourse would typically mark her as passive and subordinate—are precisely what establish her as a model and example to follow. Her agency is presented not merely as a

[435] As Stephanie Cobb observes, the attitudes of defiance and bravery found in female martyrdom accounts often reflect the authors' desire to "masculinize" their heroines by assimilating such traits to masculine behavior and constructing the archetype of the *femina virilis* (see e.g. John Petruccione: "Eulalia, like many a female martyr and the ascetical ladies of the fourth-century, has the strength of character to face challenges that would daunt all but the bravest and strongest of men;" John Petruccione, "The Portrait of St. Eulalia of Mérida in Prudentius' Peristephanon 3," 88). However, as Cobb points out: "Scholars who favor this position propose that masculinization signals the woman's rejection of traditional gender roles … These theories, however, do not account for the feminization of the female martyr; the indicators of femininity are, in fact, largely ignored." (L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men. Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* [Columbia University Press, 2008], 94). In her analysis of Perpetua, for example, Cobb highlights the narrative emphasis on the martyr's female body. While this emphasis can also be read as a reflection of masculinization or of a "male gaze," Cobb rightly stresses that "The narrative insistence on the fundamental relationship between women and the body, or 'enfleshment,' is a tool of feminization because it reminds the audience of the essential materiality of femininity." (L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 110). Similarly, in *Peristephanon* 3, Prudence presents Eulalia with the "masculine" qualities of courage, endurance, and public defiance, yet her *enfleshment*, in Cobb's sense, simultaneously functions as a reminder to the audience of the distinctive traits of her femininity.

refusal to sacrifice to the gods but as a dramatic confrontation, a literal performance of defiance against the imperial order.[436]

The eroticized spectacle of her torture—her naked body covered only by her long hair, her flesh burned until her soul escapes from her mouth in the form of a white dove—mirrors the hagiographic tension between bodily exposure and spiritual elevation that characterizes female sanctity in Late Antiquity.[437] As Brent Shaw observes, "the whole of the story of the young Spanish girl Eulalia, as re-created by Prudentius, is embedded in explicit erotic contexts."[438] Yet the poet resists framing her suffering through a voyeuristic lens. Instead, Eulalia's body becomes a battlefield between two competing forces: the Roman imperial desire to shame and destroy the young girl's flesh, and the Christian reimagining of her body as a site of divine witness.

[436] Eulalia's violent confrontation with imperial authorities reflects what Virginia Burrus calls the "gendered tension within late ancient Christian discourse." In martyr accounts where a female victim faces a male executioner, the exemplum offered by the martyr is more complex: the male reader is drawn to identify both with the martyr and with the executioner, whose authority is at stake. As Burrus notes: "If the executioner's gender is relatively secure, his availability as a Christian role model is clearly compromised by his opposition to the heroic martyr. Compromised, but not completely ruled out, for the swordsman remains ambiguously identified with the phallic Christ, and the virgin martyr is inscribed not only as bride." (Virginia Burrus, "Reading Agnes: The Rhetoric of Gender in Ambrose and Prudentius," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, no. 1 [1995]: 44-45). Thus, the performance of the virgin martyr defying imperial authority is doubly inscribed—as bride of Christ, situating her within normative gender roles, and as challenger of male power—allowing male readers to identify with her witness without forfeiting masculine authority.

[437] As Lynda Coon notes "Holy women are both masculine (spirit) and feminine (flesh), and their sacred biographies both empower and restrain their spiritual activities" (Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions. Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* [University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997], xviii-xix). See also Maria Dell'Isola, "Women Facing Martyrdom: The Interplay Between Temporality and Social and Gender Roles in Early Christianity, " in Female Authority and Holiness in Early and Medieval Christianity, ed. Maria Dell'Isola (De Gruyter, 2025), 43-58.

[438] Brent D. Shaw, "Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 3 (1996): 306.

Prudentius describes the torture vividly and violently:

> In a moment two executioners are tearing her slim breast, the claw striking her two girlish sides and cutting to the bone … Then comes the final torture, not the rending of wounds, not the ploughing up of the skin down to the ribs, but a fire from flambeaux set all round and raging against her sides and front.[439]

Despite this brutality, Eulalia remains composed, in contrast to the earlier scene of confrontation, even joyfully "counting the marks" left on her body by the claws and reading them as letters that spell out Christ's victory: "See, Lord, she says, thy name is being written on me. How I love to read these letters, for they record thy victories, O Christ, and the very scarlet of the blood that is drawn speaks the holy name."[440] Prudentius thus frames Eulalia's blood and wounds as marks of spiritual victory rather than defeat.

The eroticism here is complex. While Prudentius does depict Eulalia's nakedness, pain, and wounds—especially in the bodily regions that define her femininity—he consistently does so through the filter of divine purpose.[441] Her long hair, falling over her body to preserve her modesty, serves both as a natural veil and as a symbol of divine

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[439] "*nec mora, carnifices gemini iuncea pectora dilacerant et latus ungula virgineum pulsat utrimque et ad ossa secat ... ultima carnificina dehinc, non laceratio vulnifica, crate tenus nee arata cutis, flamma sed undique lampadibus in latera stomachumque furit.*" (*Peristephanon* 3.131-134 and 146-150; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 150-153).

[440] "*scriberis ecce mihi, Domine. quam iuvat hos apices legere qui tua, Christe, tropaea notant nomen et ipsa sacrum loquitur purpura sanguinis eliciti*." (*Peristephanon* 3.136-140; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 150-153).

[441] Prudentius describes the scene of torture with extreme violence inflicted upon Eulalia's body, while the martyr herself becomes a witness in real time to her own suffering. As Jacqueline Clarke points out, in the verses where Eulalia interprets the torturers' claws as the sacred writing of God inscribed upon her flesh, "She appears to be dealing with the trauma by viewing her body as something apart from herself, an object rather than a person. … Thus, it seems that Eulalia here is employing language that ennobles the violence done to her body, by identifying it with Christ's" (Jacqueline Clarke, "Female Pain in Prudentius' *Peristephanon*," *The Classical Quarterly* 71, no. 1 [2021]: 392).

protection, much like the snowfall after her death, which covers her naked body "in place of a linen shroud" (*pallioli vice linteoli*, *Peristephanon* 3 , 180). Eulalia actively embraces death, taking the fire into her mouth, marking her martyrdom as both triumphant and voluntary. Her soul then ascends to heaven in the form of a white dove—a clear and visually powerful metaphor for how Prudentius wants his readers to understand her spirit: pure, virginal, white, and free.[442]

This transformation—from erotic spectacle to sacred ascension—recalls Elizabeth Castelli's analysis of martyrdom as a *gendered performance* of sanctity that challenges structures of power. As Castelli argues, "[Christians] also inverted the expected social, framework by embracing the characteristics of the sacrificial victim-willingness, passivity, and submission-and, indeed, using gender to inflect their appropriation of the sacrificial economy."[443] Such narratives do not merely depict suffering but actively subverts the dynamics of power and authority.

As we also saw in the hymn to Fructuosus and his deacons, Prudentius again frames the martyr in direct antagonism to the judge and imperial authorities, employing a binary structure of vice and virtue, of good and evil, that pedagogically contrasts the positive role model with the negative one. In his vision, the gaze of the judge and the

[442] "*virgo citum cupiens obitum appetit et bibit ore rogum. emicat inde columba repens martyris os nive candidior visa relinquere et astra sequi spiritus hic erat Eulaliae lacteolus, celer, innocuus.* - and the maid, desiring a speedy end, eagerly draws the fire in through her mouth. Thence all at once a dove whiter than snow springs forth; they see it leave the martyr's mouth and make for the stars. It was Eulalia's spirit, milk-white, swift, and sinless." (*Peristephanon* 3.159-167; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 152-153).

[443] Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory. Early Christian Culture Making* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 54-55.

hands of the executioners represent an imperial system of punishment designed to dominate and defile the female body. However, this narrative power is reversed: the executioner and a lictor witness the white dove emerging from Eulalia's body and flee in terror, defeated by the miracle they have just seen.[444]

Prudentius presents Eulalia's defiance, her preservation of chastity and faith, not simply as resistance to torture, but as a total inversion of imperial power into a redemptive spectacle and a vision of sanctity. As Joyce Salisbury has also observed, early Christian narratives of virgin martyrs often transform suffering and bodily control into a particularly efficacious sacrifice.[445] In *Peristephanon* 3, virginity does not symbolize a triumph over bodily passion in the manner of male ascetics, but rather the female agency to disrupt the public sphere and, through that disruption, to challenge imperial authority itself.[446]

As analyzed in the previous section, Prudentius presents Eulalia's path to martyrdom as marked by youthful impetuosity, divinely inspired courage, and active

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[444] "*vidit et ipse satelles avem feminae ab ore meare palam, obstupefactus et adtonitus prosilit et sua gesta fugit, lictor et ipse fugit pavidus*. - The executioner himself saw the bird pass plainly from the girl's mouth; amazed and confounded he broke away and fled from what his own hands had done, and the lictor too fled in terror." (*Peristephanon* 3.171-175; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 152-153).

[445] "Martyrs' accounts tell of many virgin saints during the persecutions; so many that in fact one wonders if only virgins held firm in their faith. More likely, in the telling, virginity was attributed to many female martyrs thus reinforcing the sacrificial virgin symbol that was so important. Eulalia was the archetype for these many virgin saints." (Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Blood of Martyrs. Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* [Routledge, 2004], 10).

[446] "As Gillian Clark notes "The female ascetic overcomes everything, physical and mental, that is female in her and is praised for becoming male: she is virilized. The male ascetic overcomes the physical workings of maleness: he is de-masculinized in that he renounces both sexual and social dominance" (Gillian Clark, *Body and Gender, Soul and Reason in Late Antiquity* [Routledge, 2016], 228).

profanation. Her agency is defined not merely by her refusal to sacrifice, but by a dramatic confrontation with Roman authorities. She is not arrested, but rather presents herself voluntarily before the magistrate, confronts him, spits in his eyes, and strikes—both rhetorically and physically—the idols representing the gods of Rome. These gestures subvert social expectations of female behavior, especially for a prepubescent girl, and transform the courtroom into a space of rebellion—almost a battlefield between Eulalia's Christian purity and the magistrate's pagan corruption. In Prudentius' imagination, the girl's body becomes an instrument of a higher purpose, simultaneously being a site of contest through torture and a pathway to salvation. The suffering and exposure of Eulalia's body are, in the narrative, the vehicle that show her superiority—both physical, as her spirit ascends to God, and theological, as her martyrdom manifests divine favor and sanctity.

In contrast, Fructuosus, bishop of *Tarraco*, offers a measured and pastoral response to persecution—an ethos that Prudentius preserves in his later poetic reformulation of the *Passio Fructuosi* in *Peristephanon* 6. Arrested alongside his deacons Augurius and Eulogius, Fructuosus prays silently, calmly blesses his people, and consoles them in the face of his own death, continuing his pastoral duties even while imprisoned.[447] Fructuosus never actively seeks death, unlike Eulalia; instead, he accepts it with solemn dignity and refuses to sacrifice to the Roman gods with the theological conviction associated to his episcopal office. When questioned during his interrogation about the emperor's orders and his loyalty to imperial authority, he responds: "I worship

[447] *Peristephanon* 6.28-30.

the everlasting sovereign of days, who is the creator and Lord of Gallienus, and Christ the son of the eternal Father, whose servant I am and the shepherd of his flock"[448]—a statement rooted in the clerical authority and doctrinal integrity that his role as bishop represents. His composure reflects his identity as a spiritual leader, and his martyrdom, in Prudentius' view, reenacts the Christ-like ideal of the good shepherd who lays down his life for his flock.[449]

While Eulalia seizes agency by breaking free from domestic confinement and publicly shaming imperial masculinity, Fructuosus embodies purposeful submission—his martyrdom is shown by Prudentius as a liturgical act, a continuation of his episcopal function. His passive resistance stands in stark contrast to Eulalia's provocative gestures, but both are framed as spiritually victorious. Prudentius presents these martyrs as complementary archetypes: Eulalia as the young virgin who purifies her city through defiance, and Fructuosus as the confessor-bishop who sanctifies *Tarraco* through his patient resignation and leadership.

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[448] "*aeternum colo principem dierum, factorem dominumque Gallieni, et Christum Patre prosatum perenni, cuius sum famulus gregisque pastor*" (*Peristephanon* 6.44-47; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 206-207).

[449] "*cur lamenta rigant genas madentes? cur vestri memor ut fiam rogatis? cunctis pro populis rogabo Christum*. - Why do lamentations wet your cheeks with streaming tears? Why do you ask me to remember you? I shall make request of Christ for all the world." (*Peristephanon* 6.82-84; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 208-209). As Claudia Rapp observes in her discussion of pastoral values reflected in the *Didascalia* (third century), the ideal bishop was expected to "exercise constant admonition and care for his flock so that they will abstain from sin and he will have to exercise his penitential authority only in exceptional circumstances. He can be effective in his admonition only if he himself leads an impeccable life. … In turn, it is the duty of the congregation to honor the bishop with the same respect that is due to a father" (Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* [University of California Press, 2005], 31).

Prudentius' Vision of Eulalia's cult: Urban Identity and Civic Protection

In *Peristephanon* 3, Prudentius does more than praise the virtues of Eulalia; he closely links her memory to the sacred identity and geography of *Emerita Augusta*. As noted earlier in the summary, this connection between the martyr and the sacred *locus* of *Emerita* occurs in two distinct moments: at the beginning of the hymn, where he praises the city for its noble and powerful origins—made even nobler by being the birthplace of the martyr—and at the end of the hymn, which closes with a more elaborate glorification of Mérida. From the beginning, the poem makes clear that Eulalia's body remains in *Emerita Augusta*, that her tomb adorns the city, and that her spirit protects it: "the holy maid Eulalia honors with her bones and tends with her love her own *Emerita*."[450] Eulalia is not merely a martyr, but a protective saint, whose physical presence consecrates the urban space and defines its Christian identity.

The importance of *locus* in Prudentius' construction is central. Emerita is not only where Eulalia died, but also where she was born, where she returned willingly to face martyrdom, and where her relics still reside. Prudentius does not situate her tomb in an abstract sacred space but provides his readers with a vivid image of its location, emphasizing the city's renown, historical legacy, and natural setting: "Now her tomb stands in *Emerita*, that famous town in Vettonia by which the notable river Ana passes,

[450] "*Emeritam sacra virgo suam, cuius ab ubere progenita est, ossibus ornat, amore colit*." (*Peristephanon* 3.3-5; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 142-143).

washing the handsome walls as it sweeps along with its green waters."[451] This precise geographical description mixes topography and sanctity, transforming *Emerita* into more than a site of martyrdom—it becomes a city blessed by the saint's enduring presence. The emphasis on the *Ana* river (modern Guadiana) adds further symbolic weight. In both classical and biblical traditions, rivers are frequently associated with purification, renewal, and divine favor.[452] Here, the river *Anas* washing the city's walls and flowing near Eulalia's relics portrays Mérida as ritually cleansed and continuously nourished by its proximity to the martyr.

As in the hymn to Fructuosus and the martyrs of *Tarraco*, Prudentius concludes with a poetically rendered vision of Eulalia's annual feast:

> Pluck ye purple violets, pick blood-red crocuses. Our genial winter has no lack of them the cold is tempered and loosens its grip on the land to load our baskets with flowers. Give her these gifts, you girls and boys, from the luxuriant leaves. But I in the midst of your company will bring garlands wreathed of dactylic measures, of little worth and faded but still joyous.[453]

These lines describe a communal celebration involving floral offerings, with the presence of "girls and boys" echoing the festive praise scene in the hymn to Fructuosus in *Tarraco*. Prudentius depicts himself as offering poetic garlands as a votive tribute. The

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[451] "*nunc locus Emerita est tumulo, clara colonia Vettoniae, quam memorabilis amnis Ana praeterit et viridante rapax gurgite moenia pulchra lavit*." (*Peristephanon* 3.186-190; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 154-155).

[452] See Peter-Ben Smit, "Precious, Powerful, and Pernicious. The Polyvalence of Water and Water Symbolism in Early Christianity," in *Ritual, Emotion, and Materiality in the Early Christian World*, ed. Soham Al-Suadi et al. (Routledge, 2021), 139-150.

[453] "*carpite purpureas violas, sanguineosque crocos metite. non caret his genialis hiems, laxat et arva tepens glacies, floribus ut cumulet calathos. ista comantibus e foliis munera, virgo puerque, date. ast ego serta choro in medio texta feram pede dactylico, vilia, marcida, festa tamen*." (*Peristephanon* 3.201-210; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 154-157).

mention of violets and crocuses is particularly meaningful, referencing a specific ritual practice associated with Eulalia's cult—one that will be revisited below in relation to the material evidence. However, at the heart of this devotional imagination is her tomb: "So will we venerate her bones and the altar placed over her bones …"[454] This scene mirrors fourth- and fifth-century cult practices, in which the relics of martyrs were typically buried within or beneath altars, around which structures such as basilicas often developed—just as in the case of Fructuosus.[455] In both instances, Prudentius envisions a form of cult that reflects a reconfiguration of civic identity around Christian values exemplified by the saints, communal participation in ritual memory, and the transformation of martyrial remembrance into an enduring practice of veneration.

As analyzed in Chapter Two, *Peristephanon* 6—dedicated to Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius—depicts them being celebrated as patrons of the people, protectors of the Pyrenean lands, and guardians of *Tarraco* itself. The faithful are summoned to commemorate the martyrs in a communal celebration of memory, with particular emphasis on balance and shared honor between the three martyrs ("Let's sing our praise to equals equally").[456] This portrayal reflects a cult centered on civic identity

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[454] "*sic ossa libet ossibus altar et inpositum …*" (*Peristephanon* 3.211-212; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 156-157).

[455] As Robin Jensen notes, the placement of martyrs' relics beneath the altar represents an evolution of the earlier custom of holding *refrigeria*—banquets at the tombs of the dead: "Meanwhile, as the saint's festival was moved inside of the church, the term *mensa* gradually came to refer to any eucharistic table or altar, but especially denoted an altar found at a major saint's shrine." (Robin M. Jensen, "Dining with the Dead: From the Mensa to the Altar in Christian Late Antiquity," in *Commemorating the Dead. Texts and Artifacts in Context. Studies of Roman, Jewish, and Christian Burials*, ed. Laurie Brink, O.P. and Deborah Green [Walter de Gruyter, 2008], 134).

[456] *Peristephanon* 6.153.

and collective liturgical remembrance, where the martyrs act as intercessors and symbols of local Christian unity. The tone of celebration in Hymn 6 is inclusive and liturgical, oriented toward public devotion.

By contrast, in Hymn 3, the depiction of Eulalia's cult carries a more intimate and affective tone, even as it remains embedded in the civic space of *Emerita*. Prudentius' reference to "girls and boys" gathered at Eulalia's tomb to offer floral gifts frames the celebration as more sensorial and youthful, shaped by the rhythms of the city and the seasonal blooming of flowers described by the poet. However, both hymns culminate in liturgical expressions of devotion in which the martyr's tomb becomes the sacred focal point. The acts of singing, offering, and remembering become the way to connect the earthly community with divine patronage. The coincidence of both cult scenes suggests a poetic vision in which martyrs in Hispania are remembered through urban and communal identity, while also showing that Prudentius adapts the form and tone of his hymns to the distinct character of each saint.

Prudentius' vivid references to Eulalia's tomb, the local topography, and the celebration of her feast day suggest that he engages with an existing cultic tradition. Yet, as the literary elements of the hymn often blur the line between theological imagination and historical reality, it becomes essential to complement this analysis with material and contextual evidence.

This next section turns to the historical and archaeological record to investigate what evidence exists for a cult to Eulalia of Mérida was already established by the time Prudentius composed his hymns in the early fifth century. The evidence is circumstantial, based in part on the Christian development of *Emerita Augusta* in the fourth and early fifth centuries, and on part of the extant material.

2.2 Eulalia, Patron of *Emerita Augusta*: Material Evidence for her Cult

2.2.1 The Christian Community of Mérida in the Fourth and early Fifth Centuries

Mérida, the capital of the Roman province of Lusitania, was one of the most important cities in the Iberian Peninsula, although it did not stand out in rank compared to other provincial capitals until the end of the third century. This primacy may have previously belonged to *Tarraco*, also a provincial capital, but with the added advantage of direct access to the Mediterranean, connecting it to other key centers in the western Roman Empire. However, this dynamic began to shift at the beginning of the fourth century with Diocletian's administrative reforms. With the creation of dioceses as new administrative units, Mérida became the capital of the new *diocesis Hispaniarum*, which included the entire Iberian Peninsula and the North African province of *Mauretania Tingitana*.[457]

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[457] The precise reasons for the choice of Mérida as the provincial capital remain uncertain, but its location in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula was likely decisive, despite being an inland city. Javier Arce suggests that its strategic position, with good communications to *Baetica*, *Tarraconensis*, and *Carthaginensis*, shifted the political center to a relatively peaceful region of Hispania, less vulnerable to attacks or usurpations than other cities such as *Tarraco* (Javier Arce Martínez, "Introducción Histórica," in *Las Capitales Provinciales de Hispania: Mérida : Colonia Augusta Emerita*, ed. Xavier Dupré i Raventós ["L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 2004], 12).

From this point on, *Emerita Augusta* became the administrative center of the entire territory of Hispania and, as a result, one of the few cities in the Iberian Peninsula that did not experience a decline in urban infrastructure or public building maintenance during the fourth century. On the contrary, especially under Constantine's reign, the early fourth century marked a period of urban development. Mérida's elites—now hosting new imperial officials such as the *vicarius* of the diocese—continued to invest in the expansion and monumentalization of both public and private spaces.[458] The city's new administrative status is particularly evident in its continued public evergetism, such as the restoration and renovation of the theater and circus during the transition between the reigns of Constantine and his son Constantine II.[459]

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[458] During the first half of the fourth century, several residential *domus* within the city walls were expanded and remodeled, while the main public and entertainment buildings remained in use at least until the second half of the fifth century (Pedro Mateos Cruz and Luis Caballero Zoreda, "El paisaje urbano de *Augusta Emerita* en época tardoantigua (siglos IV-VII)," in *Actas Congreso Internacional 1910-2010: El Yacimiento Emeritense*, ed. José María Álvarez Martínez and Pedro Mateos Cruz [Ayuntamiento de Mérida, 2011], 506 and 509).

[459] The renovation of the circus and the theater took place between 333 and 337 CE. An honorific plaque commemorates the works on the circus under the provincial governor of Lusitania, Iulius Saturninus, and the *comes* Tiberius Flavius Laetus (Jose Luis Ramírez Sádaba, *Catálogo de Las Inscripciones Imperiales de Augusta Emerita*, Cuadernos Emeritenses 21 (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 2003), no. 63; *Hispania Epigraphica,* no. 20026; HEpOL database record 20026). Archaeological work in the circus area has documented the renovation of its columns, water conduits, and decorative elements (Eulalia Gijón Gabriel, "El Circo Romano de Mérida. Nueva Intervención Arqueológica Desarrollada Dentro Del Proyecto Vía de La Plata-Extremadura," *Memoria* 7 (2004): 73–125). The restoration of the theater is likewise attested both by an inscription and by several archaeological interventions, which document the mid-fourth-century renewal of the scaenae frons (Pedro Mateos Cruz, "De capital de la *diocesis Hispaniarum* a sede temporal de la monarquía sueva. La transformación del urbanismo en *Augusta Emerita* durante los siglos IV y V," in *Territorio, topografía y arquitectura de poder durante la Antigüedad Tardía*, ed. Isabel Sánchez Ramos and Pedro Mateos Cruz [Instituto de Arqueología de Mérida, 2018], 131). See also Pedro Mateos Cruz and Juana Márquez Pérez, "Nuevas estructuras urbanas relacionadas con el teatro romano de Mérida. El pórtico de acceso," *Mérida, Excavaciones Arqueológicas* 3 (1997): 301–20; Trinidad Nogales Basarrate, *Espectáculos En "Augusta Emerita" (Espacios, imágenes y protagonistas del ocio y espectáculo en la sociedad romana emeritense)* (Fundación de Estudios Romanos, 2000).

The presence and evolution of Christianity in Mérida during the fourth century is more difficult to trace. Still, several events from this period suggest that a Christian community already held a degree of importance in the city. As discussed in Chapter Two, the episcopal presence in Mérida is documented as early as the mid-third century through Cyprian's Letter 67, addressed to the Church of Hispania regarding the apostate bishop Marcial and his successor in Mérida, bishop Felix.[460] Records from several fourth-century councils attest to at least five episcopal sees in Lusitania during that period, with most known bishops being from Mérida (**Figure 13**).[461] At the beginning of the fourth century, three bishops from Lusitania are recorded as attending the Council of Elvira: a certain Liberius of Mérida, Quintianus of Elbora (modern Évora), and Vicentius of Ossonoba (modern Faro).[462]

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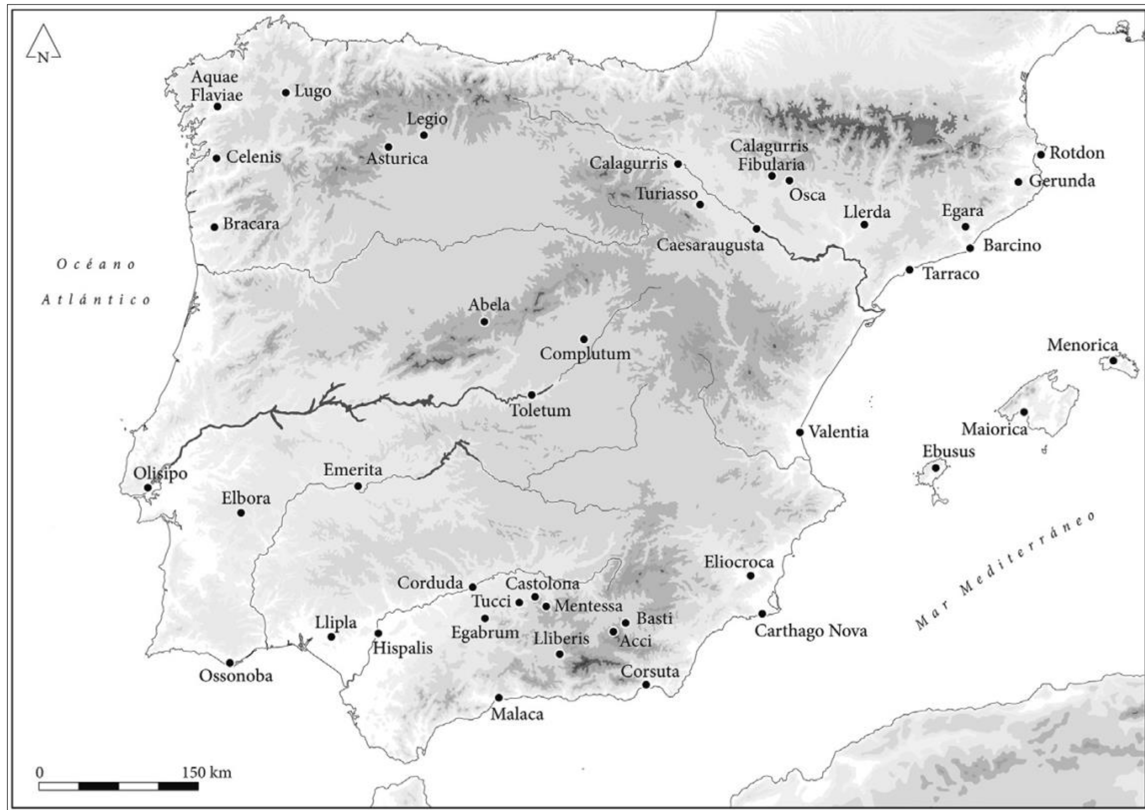
[460] See Chapter 2, pp. 77-85.

[461] Isaac Sastre de Diego, *Mérida capital cristiana de Roma a Al-Andalus* (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 2015), 47.

[462] Purificación Ubric Rabaneda, "La organización de la Iglesia hispana en los siglos IV y V," 51-51.

Figure 13. Episcopal sees documented in Spain for the 4th and 5th centuries



Purificación Ubric Rabaneda, "La organización de la Iglesia hispana en los siglos IV-V," 48.

One of the most significant developments related to Christianity in Mérida during the fourth century was the rise of the so-called Priscillianist heresy. In 381 CE, Priscillian was elected bishop of Abela (modern Ávila), located in Lusitania,[463] and once again, a bishop of Mérida—Idacius (or Hydatius)—played a key role in the events that followed. According to Sulpicius Severus' *Chronicle*, Idacius was the bishop warned by Hyginus of

[463] Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila. The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Clarendon Press, 1976), 33.

Córdoba about the allegedly heretical practices of the Priscillianist group.[464] He became one of the main instigators of their condemnation, participating in a council in *Caesaraugusta* around 380 CE aimed at dismantling episcopal support for Priscillian and formally condemning certain practices associated with the movement.[465] Bishop Idacius of Mérida also wrote directly to the imperial court in Milan, successfully obtaining a rescript from emperor Gratian excommunicating Priscillian and his followers, which led to their eventual execution.[466]

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[464] Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic. Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (University of California Press, 1995), 27.

[465] Two bishops are mentioned by Sulpicius Severus in his *Chronicle* as followers of Priscillian—Instantius and Salvianus—the very figures who facilitated his episcopal ordination. Their sees are unknown, but it is possible they also belonged to Lusitanian dioceses, since Priscillian's main opponent was Hydatius, bishop of Mérida, the most important see of the province (Francisco Díez de Velasco, "Prisciliano ¿Santo o Diablo?," in *Autoridad y Autoridades de La Iglesia Antigua. Homenaje al Profesor José Fernández Ubiña*, ed. Francisco Salvador Ventura et al. [Universidad de Granada, 2017], 227). As Martin Horst points out, the council did not officially condemn Priscillianism as a heresy, although its canons addressed issues closely related to it, such as the rejection of certain ascetic practices—fasting on Sundays (Canon II), absence from church during Lent or in the days before Christmas (Canons III and IV)—as well as matters of female spirituality (see n. 427). In particular, Canon I prohibited women from gathering with men who were not their husbands for gatherings of study or reading of the Scripture: *Ut mulieres orones ecclesiae catholicae et fideles a virorum alienorum lectione et coetibus separentur, vel ad ipsas legentes aliae studio vel docendi vel discendi conveniant, quoniam hoc Apostolus iubet*"). All of these canons directly touch on practices associated with Priscillianism and its tensions with the "orthodox" church, suggesting that the conciliar measures were indeed aimed at delimiting and restricting the innovations proposed by Priscillian (Martin Horst, "Bishops between Reform and Heresy: Priscillian, Martin of Tours and Magnus Maximus," in *Bishops under Threat: Contexts and Episcopal Strategies in the Late Antique and Early Medieval West*, ed. Sabine Panzram and Pablo Poveda Arias [Walter de Gruyter, 2023], 270-271).

[466] As Virginia Burrus points out: "…it is possible that the bishop of Milan (Ambrose) also played a role earlier in helping Hydatius obtain from Gratian either an order for the Spanish enforcement of standing laws against heretics or Manichaeans or, as both Priscillian and Sulpicius Severus seem to suggest, a new rescript specially tailored to the Spanish situation." (Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, 54). However, the involvement of Emperor Maximus in the matter, and Priscillian's condemnation by secular rather than ecclesiastical authority, elicited criticism from prominent representatives of the Church, including Ambrose himself (Alberto Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae. The Correspondence of the Bishops of Hispania with the Bishops of Rome (Third through Seventh Centuries)* [Brill, 2020], 50).

While episcopal involvement in the Priscillianist controversy does not in itself prove the existence of a large Christian population in Mérida, it does suggest the presence of a relatively established ecclesiastical hierarchy and a community of some significance by the fourth century. The events surrounding Priscillian also illustrate the connections between Mérida's episcopate and other Iberian sees, with Christian leaders from Mérida playing a central enough role to prompt imperial action and involvement from bishops of Rome as Damasus and Siricius.[467]

As in the case in *Tarraco*, this evidence is not definitive but supports the broader assumption that provincial capitals were among the most likely locations to host any type of Christian communities, given their concentration of secular and ecclesiastical elites and the frequency of information exchange and political influence. The imperial patronage that Mérida enjoyed—particularly from the time of Constantine onward—further suggests that the city was fertile ground for the growth of its Christian presence.

The consolidation of Mérida's episcopal hierarchy and increasing imperial favor, also created the conditions for the development and institutionalization of local cults. Within this context, the figure of Eulalia of Mérida appears not only as a poetic ideal in Prudentius' hymn but also as a cultic possibility tied to a specific sacred geography. To understand the historical plausibility of such a cult at the time of Prudentius' writing, I turn now to the material and archaeological record. The most significant piece of

[467] The measures undertaken by Hydatius of Mérida against Priscillianism also drew in other church leaders from Hispania, such as Himerius of Tarragona, who in 384 CE addressed a letter on this issue to Pope Damasus. Since Damasus died that same year, the reply came instead from his successor (Alberto Ferreiro, *Epistolae Plenae The Correspondence of the Bishops of Hispania with the Bishops of Rome*, 45).

evidence in this regard is the tomb attributed to Eulalia, which played a central role in shaping the devotional space of her cult in late antique *Emerita Augusta*.

2.2.2 The tomb of Eulalia in Mérida

The material evidence surrounding the remains of Eulalia in *Emerita* reveals a development broadly comparable to that of the martyrial complex associated with Fructuosus in Tarragona. However, unlike the area of Fructuosus' cult, the necropolis where Eulalia's veneration became centered was not originally part of Mérida's established burial zones. Until the fourth century, most burials in the city occurred in two main extramural cemeteries: the necropolis of "El Disco" at the east of the city and the necropolis of Columbarios to the south.[468] The area where the cult of Eulalia eventually developed is located to the northeast area of the city, near the eastern gate, in a zone previously occupied by a suburban *domus*.[469] This residence underwent several construction phases before being definitively abandoned in the late third century. Over the remains of this structure, a mausoleum was erected, which excavators have identified as the tomb of Eulalia.[470]

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[468] Isaac Sastre de Diego, "El *exemplum* de Eulalia en la cristianización de la aristocracia romana Hispana. Arqueología, hagiografía y epigrafía," 232.

[469] Luis Caballero Zoreda and Pedro Mateos Cruz, *Excavaciones arqueológicas en la basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida* (Universidad de Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 1995), 299.

[470] Excavations carried out in the area by Luis Caballero Zoreda and Pedro Mateos Cruz proposed two hypotheses for the remains predating the mausoleum of Eulalia and the necropolis that developed around it: either the site originally consisted of a single *domus* with four successive phases of construction or remodeling, or it contained four different *domus* that were destroyed and rebuilt on the same spot between the early first century and the late third century. Based on the stratigraphic evidence, which dates the destruction of the first *domus* to the second half of the first century, the latter hypothesis appears more plausible (Luis Caballero Zoreda, *Santa Eulalia de Mérida : Excavación arqueológica y centro de*

The use of a mausoleum to house Eulalia's remains is not unusual in terms of late antique funerary customs. Similar funerary buildings are attested in Mérida's known cemeteries, and inhumation was commonly practiced alongside cremation, without necessarily indicating any particular religious affiliation.[471] It cannot be confirmed whether Eulalia's family commissioned the construction of the mausoleum after her death, though it is plausible, given that such structures were typically reserved for those with substantial financial resources. If we accept Prudentius' claims about the young martyr's background, her family appears to have owned a rural property outside the city, to which her mother took her in an attempt to prevent her from seeking martyrdom.[472] Such landholding in the *ager* around Mérida would further support the idea that Eulalia's family enjoyed a privileged social status.

Given that Mérida had been the capital of the province of Lusitania and one of the most prominent cities in Roman Hispania, the presence of elite families in the city at the beginning of the fourth century is entirely plausible. Up to this point, however, there is little to distinguish Eulalia's mausoleum from any other funerary monument built for a

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interpretación, Guías Arqueológicas, Junta de Extremadura 3 [Editorial Regional de Extremadura, 1993], 13-14).

[471] Isaac Sastre de Diego, *Mérida capital cristiana de Roma a Al-Andalus*, 49.

[472] The seventh-century *Passio Eulaliae* describes this property as a *villa* named Pontiano, located outside Mérida ("*miliario tricésimo fere et octavo ultra Emeritam villa est nomine Promtiano in finibus provincia Betice*," *Passio Eulalie Emeritensis*, 4) According to the text, Eulalia was invited there by a sister (*soror*) "because of admiration for her holiness," which may suggest that by this time the *villa* housed a small religious community of women (Pilar Riesco Chueca, *Pasionario Hispánico. Introducción, edición crítica y traducción* [Universidad de Sevilla, 1995], 52). Nevertheless, as Isaac Sastre de Diego notes, this does not rule out the possibility that the property originally belonged to the young martyr's family (Isaac Sastre de Diego, "El *exemplum* de Eulalia en la cristianización de la aristocracia romana Hispana. Arqueología, hagiografía y epigrafía," 234).

member of the local nobility. What makes the structure associated with Eulalia distinctive—and what lends credibility to the hypothesis that it was indeed her burial place—is its location. Unlike the traditional cemeteries of the city, the northeastern area where the mausoleum stands does not appear to have been used for burial prior to the fourth century. Excavations have revealed no evidence of earlier pagan funerary activity in this zone.[473]

Pedro Mateos Cruz, the archaeologist who directed the excavations at the site, has argued that the surrounding necropolis developed either as a result of or contemporaneously with the construction of Eulalia's mausoleum. As with the case of Fructuosus in *Tarraco*, this suggests that burial *ad sanctos* prompted the creation *ex novo* of a Christian cemetery in the area.[474]

[473] Pedro Mateos Cruz acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing between Christian and pagan character in a necropolis, since features such as the practice of inhumation or cremation, or even the east–west orientation of graves, cannot serve as definitive indicators of religious identity. This stems from the fact that Christians and pagans cannot be conceived of as two wholly distinct and separate cultural communities (Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y urbanismo* [Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1999], 138; see also Mattias Brand, "Identifying Christian Burials," in *Perspectives on Lived Religion: Practices Transmission Landscape*, ed. Nico Staring et al. [Sidestone Press, 2019], 85-95, esp. 86-87). However, as Mateos Cruz notes, the only finds from the excavation of the necropolis that can plausibly be ascribed to a pagan context are a small funerary altar—later reused in one of the northern walls of the modern church of St. Eulalia—a fragment of a pre-Constantinian sarcophagus, possibly depicting scenes of a funerary banquet, and several inscription fragments too incomplete to allow any reading (Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y urbanismo*, 113).

[474] Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y urbanismo*, 19.

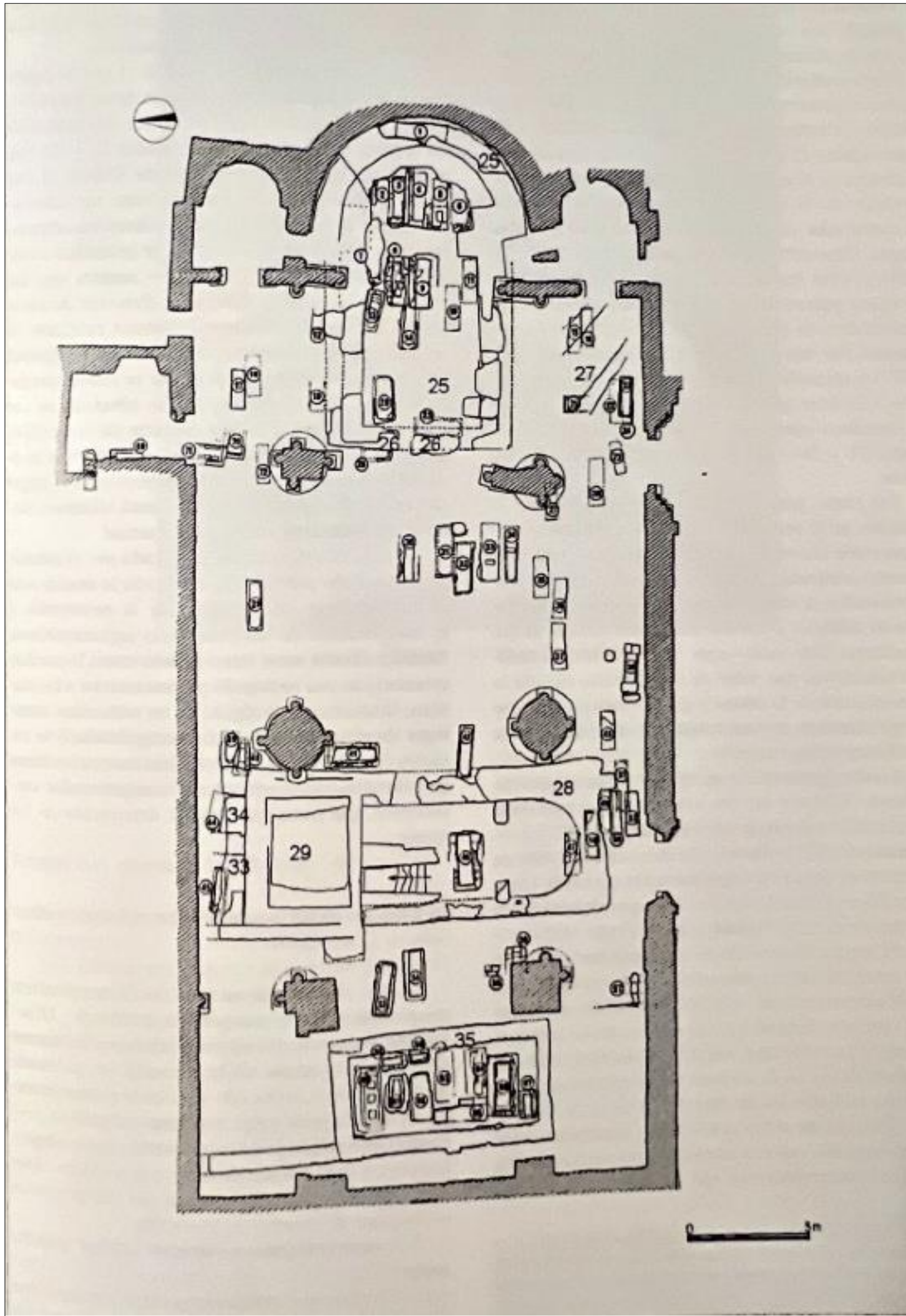
The detailed excavation and stratigraphic analysis carried out by Pedro Mateos Cruz in the 1990s identified mausoleum no. 25 as the possible *tumulus* of Eulalia mentioned by Prudentius in *Peristephanon* 3 (**Figure 14**).[475] This structure, measuring 13 meters in length and 7 meters in width, has a rectangular plan with a single nave and no underground crypt. It is terminated on the eastern end by a semicircular apse, both internally and externally, and is oriented along an east–west axis.[476] While acknowledging the inherent limitations of archaeology in determining the original function of the building, Mateos Cruz refrains from making definitive claims as to whether the mausoleum served as a *martyrium* (being the actual burial place of the martyr) or as a *cella memoriae*, housing some of her relics.[477]

[475] "*nunc locus Emerita est tumulo clara colonia Vettoniae*… - Now her tomb stands in Emerita, that famous town in Vettonia …" (*Peristephanon* 3.186-190; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 154-155).

[476] Pedro Mateos Cruz, "El complejo cultual cristiano de santa Eulalia de Mérida," in *In tempore Sueborum: El tiempo de los suevos en la Gallaecia (411-585), El primer reino medieval de Occidente*, ed. Jorge López Quiroga (Diputación Provincial de Ourense, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2018), 399.

[477] Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La Basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y Urbanismo*, 119.

Figure 14. Reconstruction of the floor plan of the Basilica of Eulalia with numbered mausoleums and burial sites



Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La Basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y Urbanismo*, 51.

The date of construction for the *tumulus*[478] identified with the martyr is placed in the first half of the fourth century, based on the typology of the tombs located inside the structure and the stratigraphic analysis situating the mausoleum at the earliest phase of use of the surrounding necropolis.[479] In addition to burials in sarcophagi and tombs with marble plaques—most dated to the late fourth or early fifth centuries, and thus predating the construction of the later basilica—two other mausolea from the same period have been documented at the site. The first, mausoleum no. 28, is dated by Mateos Cruz to the mid-fourth century and is contemporaneous with the use of the funerary area.[480] It also has a rectangular plan and features an apse on its southern wall, preceded by a triumphal arch and a subterranean burial crypt accessible via stairs. The second, slightly later in date (mausoleum no. 33 and 34, late fourth to early fifth century), is attached to the north wall of mausoleum 28 (**Figure 14**). One of its burials is topped by a rectangular *opus signinum* platform in the form of a *lectus triclinaris*. Another burial in this mausoleum contains a plain marble sarcophagus, covered by a mosaic tombstone, of which only a

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[478] I refer to the structure as a *tumulus* for convenience, since the specific character of the building has not been firmly established by archaeology.

[479] The parallel with other mausolea of rectangular plan with an apse, found in southern Portugal (the former province of Lusitania) has also allowed scholars to hypothesize the chronology of Eulalia's mausoleum. Examples include the mausolea of the villae at Milreu (Faro, Algarve), São Cucufate (Frades, Alentejo), and Quinta de Marim (Olhão, Algarve), all dated between the late third and the fourth century (José M. Noguera Celdrán and Javier Arce, "Late Roman 'Mausolea' in Hispania," in *Burial Annd Memorial in Late Antiquity. Thematic Perspectives*, ed. Luke Lavan, vol. 1 [Brill, 2024], 113).

[480] The northeast corner of the building rests upon a preexisting grave, suggesting that the mausoleum was constructed after the necropolis had already come into use (Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La Basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y Urbanismo*, 127-131).

quarter survives. The preserved section seems to depict the deceased flanked by a two-panel curtain, opened and tied in the back.[481]

While both mausoleums 25 and 28 date to the fourth century and could be considered candidates for Eulalia's *tumulus*, the strongest argument in favor of mausoleum 25 is the construction of a basilica dedicated to Eulalia in the second half of the fifth century. Mausoleum 35 and the adjacent structure attached to its northern wall were demolished sometime in the first half of the fifth century. Only the underground crypt of mausoleum 28 was preserved and remained in use after the basilica was built. A small chamber was added in front of the staircase, and in the year 492, an unknown *Vir Inlustris* was buried there, as recorded in a surviving inscription.[482]

The demolition of both mausolea to make way for the construction of the basilica strongly suggests that neither was considered important enough to preserve—thus ruling them out as the burial site of the martyr. Instead, they have been interpreted as elite funerary monuments, which nevertheless reinforce the likelihood that the necropolis emerged due to the prestige of burial *ad sanctos* in proximity to the martyr's tomb.[483]

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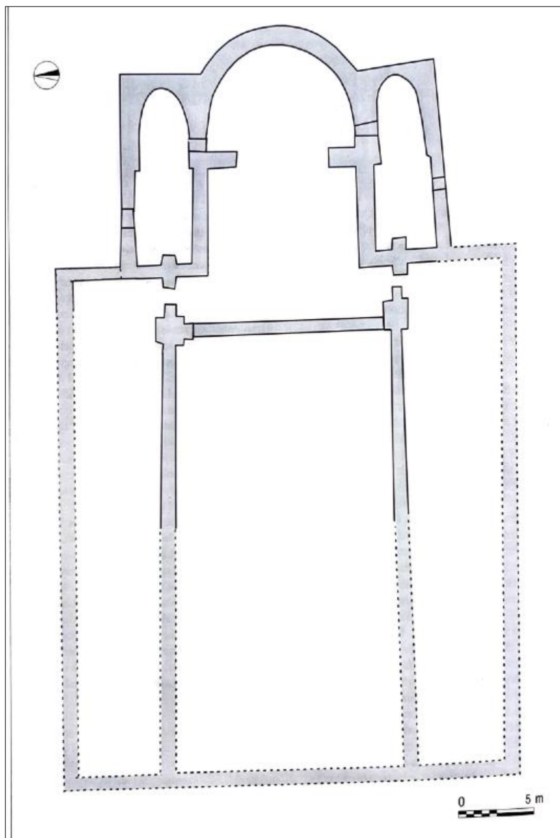
[481] Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y urbanismo*, 127-128.

[482] The text of the inscription reads: "GREGORIUS VIR INLUSTRIS FAM(ulus) DEI VIXIT ANNIS LVI MEN(ses) V REQ(u)I(evit) IN P(ace) D(ie) XVI KAL(enda) NOB(embre) ERA DXXX" (Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y urbanismo*, 142; also reproduced in José Luis Ramírez Sádaba and Pedro Mateos Cruz, *Catálogo de las Inscripciones Cristianas de Mérida*, vol. 16, Cuadernos Emeritenses [Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 2000], no. 37).

[483] This is also the interpretation of Michael Kulikowski: "This second absidal mausoleum [mausoleum 28], clearly the tomb of a local dignitary, suggests that the practice of burial *ad sanctos* was already popular at Mérida during the middle or late fourth century." (*Late Roman Spain and Its Cities*, 236).

By contrast, mausoleum 25 was not only preserved but became the central architectural focus of the new basilica constructed in the second half of the fifth century.[484] Pedro Mateos Cruz's excavations demonstrated that the basilica's plan was entirely shaped around the pre-existing *martyrium* or *memoria* of Eulalia. The building had a tripartite structure, with three semicircular apses in the interior and the central also showing in the exterior (**Figure 15**).

Figure 15. Original floor plan of the Basilica of Santa Eulalia (5th century)



Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La Basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y Urbanismo*, 146.

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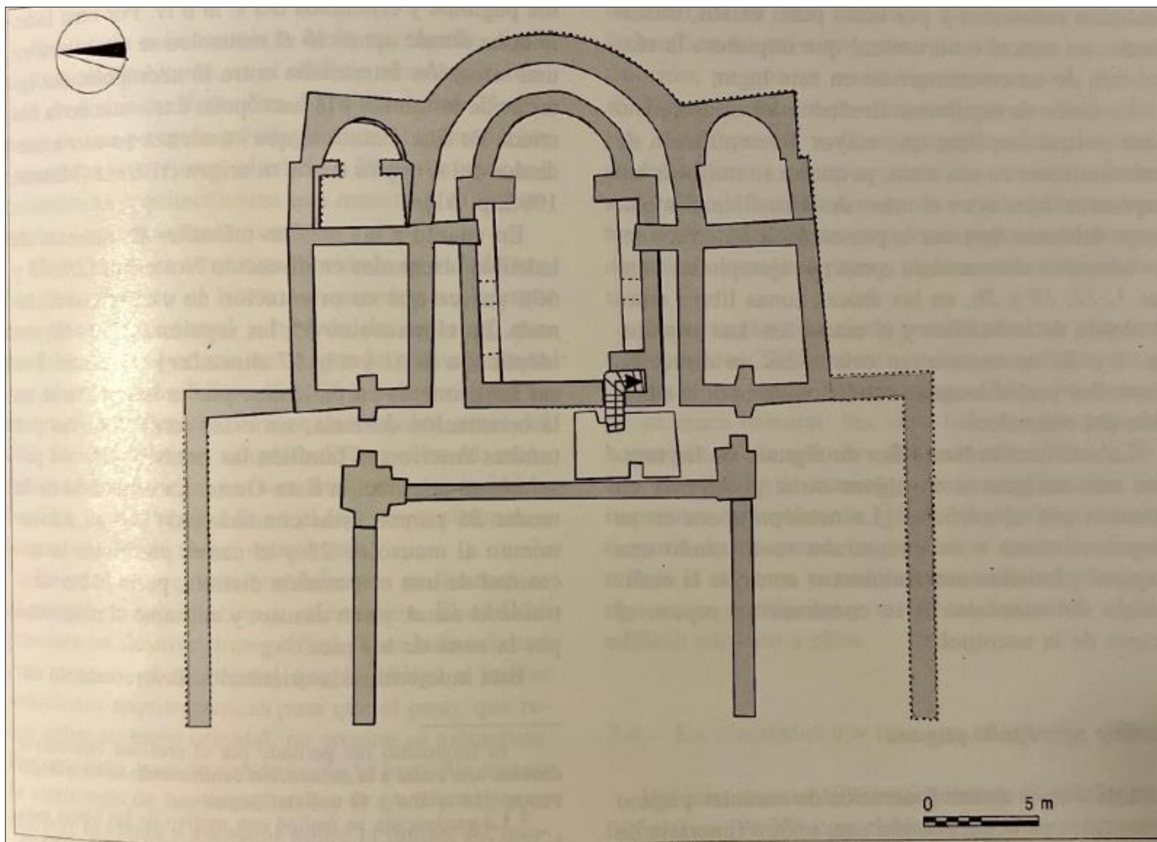
[484] The stratigraphic reading of the complex indicates that the basilica was built around the second half of the fifth century, although it is difficult to determine a more precise date (Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La bbasílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y urbanismo*, 159).

Its estimated dimensions are 30 meters in width, with approximately 15 meters assigned to the central nave.[485] The basilica's apse was designed to perfectly coincide with the earlier apse of mausoleum 25, integrating the *martyrium* directly beneath the liturgical focal point of the new church (**Figure 16**).

Figure 16. Floor plan of the Basilica of Santa Eulalia with the imbricated mausoleum of Eulalia



Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La Basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y Urbanismo*, 69.

[485] Pedro Mateos Cruz, "El complejo cultual cristiano de Santa Eulalia de Mérida," 399-400.

This architectural continuity was maintained even in the construction of the current basilica of Santa Eulalia, built around 1230 (**Figure 16b**). The medieval basilica stands on the remains of the fifth century building and reproduces almost exactly its floor plan and dimensions, with the central apse of the current church continuing to shelter the remains of Eulalia's *tumulus*.[486]

Figure 16b. Remains of the foundation of the apse of the 5th-century Basilica of Eulalia (left image) and the mausoleum/*tumulus* of Eulalia (right image), both preserved beneath the apse of the current Basilica of Santa Eulalia (Mérida, Spain)

Own work, Basilica of Eulalia (Mérida, Spain), 2023

[486] The remains of Eulalia remained in the basilica until sometime between the ninth and tenth centuries, when they were transferred to Oviedo. The exact timing and the reasons for the translation of the relics remain a matter of scholarly debate. See Álvaro Solano Fernández Sordo, "*Extra Archam*: Saint Eulalia in Oviedo. Relic Travels, *Thesaurum* and Power Legitimation," *Anuario de Historia de La Iglesia* 29 (2020): 311–46.

Later textual sources also appear to corroborate that the original *tumulus* of Eulalia was indeed located beneath the altar of the basilica in Mérida. The *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeritensium*, a hagiographic text composed in the seventh century, recounts the lives of three bishops of Mérida—Paul, Fidel, and Masona (active between 530 and 605 CE). This period is considered a golden age for the episcopate in the city, and the lives of these three prelates, who are portrayed as saints, also offer valuable insight into the political and ecclesiastical history of sixth-century Mérida, highlighting the city's importance within the Visigothic kingdom.[487]

The *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers* describes how, during the religious persecution initiated by the Visigothic king Leovigild against Nicene Christians around 580 CE, Bishop Masona—recently converted from Arianism to Catholicism—entered the basilica of Saint Eulalia. There, Masona "fasted and wept before the altar beneath which the venerable body of the martyr lay, prostrating himself on the flags."[488] This seventh-century testimony, though relatively late, coincides closely with the archaeological evidence discussed earlier. It attests to the long-standing memory of Eulalia's burial beneath the altar and reinforces the interpretation by excavators that the *tumulus* of the martyr corresponds to the mausoleum located directly beneath the central apse of the first

[487] Isabel Velázquez, trans., *Vidas de Los Santos Padres de Mérida. Introducción, Traducción y Notas de Isabel Velázquez* (Trotta, 2008), 9-11.

[488] "The Life and Virtues of the Holy Bishop Masona," V.5.10, in A. T. Fear, *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers*, 80-81. The Latin reads: "… *ilico basilicam sancte uirginis Eolalie praeproperus petiit tribusque diebus tothidemque noctibus parsimoniis et fletibus perseuerans ante altare, sub quo uenerabile corpusculum sacre martiris situm est, pauimento prostratus incubuit*." ("*Vita vel virtvtibvs Sancti Masone Episcopi*," V.5.51-54, in A. Maya Sánchez, *Vitas Sanctorum Patrum Emeretensium*, CCSL 96, 59).

basilica, where the altar would have been positioned. Since there are no records of renovations or significant structural changes to the basilica after its original construction—apart from a modest elevation of the central apse (**Figure 17**)[489]—it is plausible that the memory of the martyr's tomb beneath the altar dates back to the basilica's initial design and was preserved through ritual, festival celebrations, and oral tradition.

The results and dating from Pedro Mateos Cruz's excavation of the necropolis of Eulalia in Mérida are widely regarded as methodologically rigorous by both Spanish and Anglophone scholars.[490] These excavations also benefit from having been carried out more recently than those in the necropolis of *Tarraco*, thus making use of more advanced dating methods and archaeological techniques. However, as Paula Hershkowitz notes in her study of *Peristephanon* and the cult of saints in Hispania, this material evidence, while compelling, does not definitively prove the existence of an established martyr cult dedicated to Eulalia as early as the fourth century. Nor can we assume that Prudentius' hymn provides a precise or empirically accurate description of the martyr's burial location.[491]

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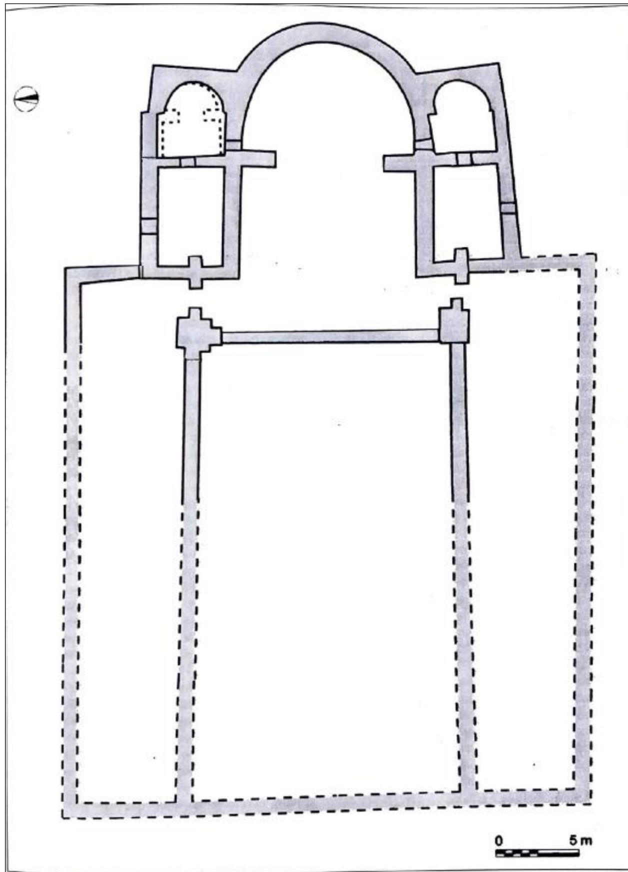
[489] Pedro Mateos Cruz, "El complejo cultual cristiano de santa Eulalia de Mérida," 400.

[490] For example, Michael Kulikowski: "The argument for regarding this mausoleum as Eulalia's *martyrium* is very strong, inasmuch as the archaeology shows it to have been the most prestigious structure on the site, while its architectural details match those described in the seventh century lives of the bishops of Mérida," (Kulikowski, *Late Roman Spain and Its Cities*, 235).

[491] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 113.

Figure 17. Plan of the Basilica of Santa Eulalia after the renovation (late 5th century)



Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La Basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y Urbanismo*, 147.

Paula Hershkowitz highlights, for example, the lack of epigraphic evidence explicitly linking the site to Eulalia or designating it as a *locus sacer*—a significant difference from the *Tarraco* necropolis, where inscriptions referencing Fructuosus and his companions and the place as a sacred *locus* are well-attested. This absence is acknowledged by the excavators themselves as a limitation of the archaeological

record.[492] Nonetheless, the stratigraphic reading of the site and the sequence of superimposed structures provide strong evidence for the chronological development and functional transformation of the funerary complex. What remains lacking is epigraphic confirmation definitively associating the site with Eulalia, a gap that invites caution in interpretation.

Still, I would argue that the complex was not dedicated to any other martyr or holy figure, considering that even nowadays, Mérida does not have any other relevant patron saints.[493] The addition of these later figures to the Christian landscape of the city came well after Eulalia had already been established as its primary saint and patron. This historical primacy, combined with the continuity of memory evidenced in literary and material sources, strongly supports the identification of the complex as the center of veneration of the martyr Eulalia.

As Paula Hershkowitz also notes, "it seems unlikely that Prudentius' account of Eulalia's burial place was an invention, in spite of his possible exaggeration."[494] While the material evidence supports the existence of a well-established cult venerating the saint

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[492] Of the twenty-eight inscriptions found in the complex, only two contain the name of Eulalia, both dated to between the sixth and seventh centuries, by which time Mérida had already established itself as one of the most important episcopal sees of Hispania under Visigothic rule (José Luis Ramírez Sádaba and Pedro Mateos Cruz, *Catálogo de las Inscripciones Cristianas de Mérida*, vol. 16, 27-29 and 31-35, nos. 3 y 5). Most of the inscriptions—apart from the one already mentioned of Gregorius (see n. 484), and that of Heleuterius, archdeacon of the church of Mérida during the episcopate of Masona, who was buried in the basilica of Eulalia (Pedro Mateos Cruz, *La basílica de Santa Eulalia de Mérida. Arqueología y urbanismo*, 142) —are highly fragmentary and their texts barely legible.

[493] The other patron saints of importance in the city are the bishops Paul, Fidel, and Masona, whose lives are narrated in the *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers* (cited above) and whose authority, prominence, and episcopates are also closely connected to the cult of Eulalia of Mérida.

[494] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 113.

of Mérida by the fifth century, it also raises questions about whether such veneration existed earlier. In the following section, I will compare the archaeological findings with *Peristephanon* 3 to argue that it is plausible—just as in the case of Fructuosus in *Tarraco*—that Eulalia was already known and venerated locally in fourth-century Mérida by its Christian community, which, though likely small, was nonetheless present according to the available sources.

2.3 Prudentius' Eulalia: Text and Material Evidence in Comparison

The depiction of Eulalia's tomb and her cult in *Peristephanon* 3 offers a poetic and idealized version of the martyr's veneration in Late Antique Mérida. Yet this literary construction can be meaningfully compared with the archaeological evidence uncovered in the area traditionally associated with her cult. By setting Prudentius' verses alongside the findings of Pedro Mateos Cruz's excavations in the 1990s, a more nuanced picture emerges—one that allows to support the existence of Eulalia's cult at the time Prudentius was writing.

Let's begin with Prudentius' opening description of Mérida in the hymn to Eulalia:

> Noble of stock, and nobler still in the quality of her death, the holy maid Eulalia honors with her bones and tends with her love her own Emerita, the town that gave her birth. Far in the west lies the place that has won this signal honors; as a city great and populous … (*Peristephanon* 3.1–8).[495]

[495] "*Germine nobilis Eulalia mortis et indole nobilior Emeritam sacra virgo suam, cuius ab ubere progenita est, ossibus ornat, amore colit. proximus occiduo locus est qui tulit hoc decus egregium, urbe potens, populis locuples …* " (*Peristephanon* 3.1-8; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 142-145).

Although brief, a close reading of Prudentius' references to the city shows them as accurate. Starting with its location—*proximus occiduo locus est*—Thompson translates this as "far in the west," although it could also be understood as "near the west." Either reading would be accurate from Prudentius' perspective. Based on scholarly works on the composition of the *Peristephanon* and the rest of his works, Prudentius likely wrote most of his hymns after retiring from public service, probably in a modest rural estate, perhaps near his native *Calagurris* (modern Calahorra).[496] While we cannot be certain about this, it is reasonable to assume that he retired somewhere within the province of *Tarraconensis*, to which *Calagurris* belonged. The city is located in the northern and slightly eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula, relatively close to the Pyrenees and *Caesaraugusta*. From this perspective, describing *Emerita Augusta* as "far" or "close" to the west is geographically coherent, since Mérida lies in the southwest of the Peninsula, approximately 300 kilometers from present-day Lisbon.

Two further details in the introduction also reflect the reality of Mérida in Prudentius' time. The Spanish poet describes the city as both "great" and "populous"—a portrayal consistent with what we know of *Emerita*'s development in the fourth century. By the time of the *Peristephanon*'s composition, Mérida had served as the capital of the *diocesis Hispaniarum* for nearly a century. This would help explain why Prudentius describes it as *populis locuples*—a label he does not apply to any other Iberian city in his hymns. Its political status also justifies his calling it *urbe potens*, or "powerful city," as the presence of imperial administration likely attracted aristocratic families linked to the

[496] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 20-22.

government and made the city the usual residence of the *vicarius Hispaniarum*.[497] This is supported by archaeological and epigraphic evidence of Mérida's flourishing in the mid-fourth-century, particularly visible in the renovations of the public entertainment structures of the city.[498]

Turning now to the hymn's closing verses, Prudentius provides further accurate references to Mérida's topography. He writes: "Now her tomb stands in Emerita, that famous town in Vettonia by which the notable river Ana passes, washing the handsome walls as it sweeps along with its green waters."[499]

Once again, the poet describes Mérida as *clara*— "renowned," though the term can also be rendered as "illustrious" or "honorable." This praise likely refers both to its administrative prominence and to the fame it received, or would receive, through the presence of Eulalia's body in the city. Prudentius also refers to Mérida as a city of the *Vettones* (*colonia Vettoniae*), invoking a designation used by Greek and Roman historians for the Celtic peoples inhabiting the lands surrounding the river *Anas* and *Emerita Augusta*.[500] Although Prudentius very likely learned of this through classical

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[497] Francisco José Gómez Fernández, "*Augusta Emerita* en el transcurso del siglo V. Morfología y vitalidad urbana," *Hispania Antiqva* XXVII (2003): 268. See also Javier Arce, *España Entre El Mundo Antiguo y El Mundo Medieval* (Taurus, 1988), 191-192.

[498] Epigraphic evidence attests, for example, that the circus remained in operation throughout the fifth century (Javier Arce, "Mérida tardorromana (284-409 d. C.)," in *Homenaje a Sáenz de Buruaga* (Institución Cultural Pedro de Valencia, 1982), 209.

[499] "*nunc locus Emerita est tumulo, clara colonia Vettoniae, quam memorabilis amnis Ana praeterit et viridante rapax gurgite moenia pulchra lavit*." (*Peristephanon* 3.186-190; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 154-155).

[500] Francisco J. Heras Mora, *El territorio de Augusta Emerita un siglo antes de su fundación* (Junta de Extremadura, 2020), 272-274.

sources such as Strabo or Pliny[501]—given his well-documented influences from classical literature—this reference may also suggest familiarity with the city itself and its cultural past.

The mention to the *Vettones* is followed by the statement that the *Anas* flows past and bathes the city walls. This is again consistent with what is known of Mérida's topography. Founded in 25 BCE on the right bank of the *Anas*,[502] *Emerita Augusta* was situated at a crossing point of the river that served as a natural defensive moat.[503] A bridge, connecting directly to the city walls, was constructed to cross the river from this side—a structure that still survives today.[504] Excavations conducted by Pedro Mateos Cruz in the Islamic Alcazaba of Mérida—built in the ninth century at the point where the Roman bridge meets the city—revealed a fifth-century reinforcement of the city wall

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[501] Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 4.22): "*Gentes Celtici, Turduli et circa Tagum Vettones; ab Ana ad Sacrum Lusitani. Universa provincia dividitur in conventus tres, Emeritensem, Pacensem, Scallabitanum* … - The peoples are the Celtici, the Turduli, and on the Tagus the Vettones; and between the Guadiana and Cape St. Vincent the Lusitanians …" (in *Natural History. Books 3-7*, trans. H. Rackham [Harvard University Press, 1942], 208-209). Strabo likewise describes the region (*Geography* 3.1–2). See also Gonzalo Ruiz Zapatero and Jesús R. Álvarez Sanchís, "Etnicidad y arqueología: tras la identidad de los Vettones," *SPAL* 11 (2002): 253–75.

[502] Cassius Dio (*Roman History,* LIII.26): "Upon the conclusion of this war [the Cantabrian Wars] Augustus discharged the more aged of his soldiers and allowed them to found a city in Lusitania, called *Augusta Emerita - Παυσαμένου δὲ τοῦ πολέμου τούτου ὁ Αὔγουστος τοὺς μὲν ἀφηλικεστέρους τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἀφῆκε, καὶ πόλιν αὐτοῖς ἐν Λυσιτανίᾳ τὴν Αὔγουσταν Ἠμέριταν καλουμένην κτίσαι ἔδωκε.*" (in *Roman History. Books LI-LV*, trans. Earnest Cary [Harvard University Press, 1917], 260-261).

[503] Miguel A. Alba Calzado et al., "Sobre la muralla augustea de *Emerita* (defendida por un foso)," in *Centro y periferia en el mundo clásico: Actas XVIII Congreso Internacional Arqueología Clásica (CIAC)* [Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 2013], ed. José M. Álvarez Martínez and Rafael Sabio, vol. 2 (Mérida, 2014), 1731-1732.

[504] Miguel A. Alba Calzado et al., "Sobre la muralla augustea de *Emerita,*" 1731.

with large stone blocks. This renovation, dated by Mateos Cruz to the fifth century,[505] confirms that the riverside wall existed in the fourth century, thus supporting Prudentius' poetic image of the river "washing the handsome walls" (*moenia pulchra lavit*) with its "green waters" (*viridante gurgite*), suggesting close proximity or even direct contact between the water and the city walls.

It is difficult to explain the precision of these details unless Prudentius had seen the city firsthand at some point. Moreover, none of the classical sources from which he may have drawn the reference to *Vettonia*—such as Pliny or Livy—contain detail descriptions of Mérida's urban landscape. This makes it all the more compelling to consider that he had visited the city himself.

This hypothesis is supported by information Prudentius provides in the *Praefatio* to his collected works, where he notes that he served as governor of two cities (*bis legum*

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[505] Pedro Mateos Cruz, *Arqueología de la Tardoantigüedad en Mérida: Estado de la cuestión*, Cuadernos Emeritenses 10 (Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, 1996), 138-139. Pedro Mateos Cruz interprets the reforms of the city wall as a consequence of the barbarian invasions, in particular the supposed incursion of the Suevic king Heremigarius in 429 CE, documented by Hydatius in his *Chronicle*: "*qui aud procul de Emerita, quam cum sanctae martyris Eulaliae iniuria spreuerat, maledictis per Gaisericum caesis ex his quos secum habebat, arrepto, ut putauit, euro uelocius fugae subsidio in flumine Ana diuino brachio precipitatus interiit*. - Not far from *Emerita*, which Heremigarius had scorned, thereby causing an affront to the holy martyr Eulalia, Gaiseric slaughtered the accursed soldiers who were with the Sueve, but Heremigarius, who thought that he had saved himself by turning to flight more swiftly than the wind, was cast headlong into the river Ana by the hand of God and died." (*Chronicle,* 80[90], in R. W. Burgess, trans., *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana*, 90-91). Fernández Ubiña, however, dates this reform to the late third or early fourth century (José Fernández Ubiña, *La crisis del siglo III y el fin del mundo antiguo* [Madrid, 1982], 119), although this dating has been contested. In any case, the evidence equally demonstrates the existence of the stretch of wall adjacent to the river in the fourth century (Miguel A. Alba Calzado, "Consideraciones arqueológicas en torno al siglo V en Mérida," *Mérida, Excavaciones Arqueológicas* 2 [1996]: 364).

moderamine frenos nobilium reximus urbium).[506] Given that Mérida was, at the time, the administrative and judicial capital of the *diocesis Hispaniarum*, it is highly plausible that Prudentius visited it in the course of his official duties.

This evidence suggests that Prudentius may have known Mérida at some point in his life. Similarly, the precision of his account of Eulalia'a tomb makes it plausible that, during his visit(s) to Mérida, the Spanish poet also saw the burial site of Eulalia—at the least, he may have been familiar with accounts of it. According to the archaeological data, the mausoleum identified as that of the martyr was already in existence by the second half of the fourth century—within Prudentius' lifetime.

With this in mind, let's now turn to a closer examination of the specific description Prudentius offers of Mérida as Eulalia's burial place:

> *nunc locus Emerita est* ***tumulo*** *… hic, ubi marmore perspicuo* ***atria*** *luminat* ***alma*** *nitor et peregrinus et indigena, relliquias cineresque sacros servat humus veneranda sinu. tecta corusca super rutilant de laquearibus aureolis saxaque caesa solum variant, floribus ut rosulenta putes prata rubescere multimodis*.

Now her tomb stands in *Emerita* … Here, where the lustre of shining marble, foreign and native, lights up the motherly church, the worshipful earth keeps her remains, her holy ashes, in its bosom. Overhead the gleaming roof flashes light from its gilded panels, and shaped stones diversify the floor so that it seems like a rose-covered meadow blushing with varied blooms.[507]

As seen in these verses, Prudentius' description of the space does not initially align with what archaeologists have identified as Eulalia's mausoleum, raising skepticism

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[506] "Twice with the law's controlling curb I governed famed cities" (*Praefatio* 16-18; Prudentius, *Preface. Daily Round. Divinity of Christ. Origin of Sin. Fight for Mansoul. Against Symmachus 1*, trans. Henry John Thomson, I, Loeb Classical Library 387 [Harvard University Press, 1949], 2-3).

[507] *Peristephanon* 3.191-200; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 154-155.

among scholars regarding the reliability of his account. As confirmed by the archaeological excavation, mausoleum 25—identified as Eulalia's *tumulus*—has left no traces of interior marble cladding, gilded ceiling panels, or mosaic decorations like those found in the necropolis of Fructuosus. However, it is important to note that this structure was later entirely encapsulated beneath the apse of the fifth-century basilica. It is therefore possible that the decorative elements described by Prudentius once existed but were not preserved.

Given the impossibility of confirming such a hypothesis archaeologically, we should consider alternative explanations. Paula Hershkowitz points to a key issue in evaluating Prudentius' description: the apparent discrepancy between the *alma atria* mentioned in his verses and the archaeological record. As she notes, "His imposing *alma atria* does not seem to coincide with the small structure—only 13 by 7 meters—which may have held Eulalia's remains."[508] Hershkowitz assumes that the references to shining marble, gilded panels, and shaped stones correspond to the supposed church (*atria*) mentioned in the verses. Yet such elements cannot be archaeologically associated with the *tumulus*. Stratigraphic analysis confirms that the basilica built right above mausoleum 25 dates to the mid-fifth century—postdating Prudentius' lifetime. Based on this chronology, scholars have rightly concluded that Prudentius could not have been referring to the later basilica.

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[508] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 113.

However, Prudentius draws a clear distinction in his verses between Eulalia's *tumulus* and the *alma atria* he subsequently describes—translated by H.J. Thomson as "motherly church." As Pedro Mateos Cruz has noted, Prudentius consistently refers to Eulalia's burial site as a *tumulus* and never uses the terms *basilica* or *ecclesia* to describe the building that housed her remains.[509] This distinction is crucial: the poet seems to differentiate between the martyr's tomb and another architectural element, which by necessity cannot be the later basilica.

We must therefore consider whether Prudentius' use of *atria* refers not to the *tumulus*—which he clearly names as such—but to some other space. In classical Latin, *atrium* typically referred to the central courtyard of a Roman *domus*. However, in Late Latin, the term could take on broader meanings, often describing transitional or exterior spaces in ecclesiastical buildings. Throughout the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius uses *atrium* and *atria* flexibly—most often not to refer specifically to churches, but rather to courts, halls, or even the entrance to a sacred place in general. Prudentius attributes multiple meanings to the notion of entrance, which may refer literally to the atrium preceding a

[509] Pedro Mateos Cruz, "*Augusta Emerita*, de capital de la *diocesis Hispaniarum* a sede temporal visigoda," *Memorias de La Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 25 (January 2000): 500.

church,[510] the entrance court to Heaven,[511] or even narrow corridors within a martyr's burial site—as in the hymn dedicated to Hippolytus, whose remains were buried in one of the catacombs beneath the *Via Tiburtina*.[512]

Prudentius also uses the term *atria* in a broader sense to refer to rooms or halls, as seen in *Carmen Contra Orationem Symmachi* II:

> *si potui miseras sertis redimire ruinas et male pendentes lauro praecingere turres, quo te suscipiam gremio, fortissime princeps? quos spargam flores? quibus insertabo coronis* ***atria****?*
>
> If I could wreathe my sad ruins with garlands and gird my listing towers with bay, with what feelings shall I take thee to my heart, most valorous emperor? What flowers shall I scatter, in what wreaths set my halls?[513]

In these verses, which are part of Prudentius' poetic praise of the Roman victory over Alaric at the Battle of Pollentia (402 CE), Henry J. Thomson translates *atria* as

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[510] For example, in *Peristephanon* 2, the martyr Lawrence ironically urges the prefect of Rome to enter and see the treasures that, according to him, are hidden in the corners of their churches. Here Prudentius uses *ingens atrium* in its literal sense to designate the large atrium preceding the building and serving as the church's entrance: "*tum martyr: 'adsistas velim coramque dispositas opes mirere, quas noster Deus praedives in Sanctis habet. videbis ingens atrium fulgere vasis aureis, et per patentes porticus structos talentis ordines*.' - Then said the martyr: 'Pray give us your presence, and marvel at the wealth set out before you, which our exceeding rich God has in his sanctuaries. You will see the great nave gleaming with vessels of gold, and along the open colonnades course on course of precious metal.'" (*Peristephanon* 2.169-176; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 118-119).

[511] "*ante coronati seandebant ardua testes atria, nunc lotae celsa petunt animae* … - Formerly crowned witnesses went up to the courts on high, now cleansed souls seek the heights …" (*Peristephanon* 8.9-10; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 220-221).

[512] "*quamlibet ancipites texant hinc inde recessus arta sub umbrosis atria porticibus* - However doubtful you may feel of this fabric of narrow halls running back on either hand in darksome galleries …" (*Peristephanon* 11.163-164; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 316-317). Here Prudentius offers a visual depiction of the descent into the catacombs, assimilating it to Aeneas' entry into the Underworld as narrated by Virgil (O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity*, 49-51). In this context, he refers to the *arta atria* ("narrow halls") encountered after descending the stairway that forms the entrance to the catacombs.

[513] *Contra Orationem Symmachi* 2.724-728, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 64-65.

“halls,” a broad term that can mean rooms, chambers, corridors, or even vestibules—although for the latter Prudentius generally prefers *vestibulum*.[514] In the context of this passage, *atria* is best understood as a generic reference to interior spaces or rooms, further illustrating Prudentius’ flexible and non-specific use of the term, which does not necessarily denote a church.

In the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius rarely uses *atrium* or *atria* to refer specifically to a church building.[515] When aiming to designate this type of structure, he typically employs the terms *ecclesia* or, less frequently, *templum*—and notably, never *basilica*.[516]

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[514] “*primas namque fores summo tenus intrat hiatus, inlustratque dies limina vestibuli*. - For the light of day enters the first approach as far as the top of the cleft and illumines the entrance.” (*Peristephanon* 11.157-158, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 314-315). This passage, from the hymn dedicated to the martyr Hippolytus of Rome, precedes the section cited in footnote 146. Just before describing the *arta atria*—the narrow corridors of the interior—Prudentius notes how daylight illuminates the entrance of the catacomb. By using *vestibulum* for the entryway and *atria* for the corridors, he clearly distinguishes between the outer access point and the inner passageways.

[515] The only instance in which *atria* may be taken to mean “church” occurs in the hymn to Lawrence: “*quidquid Quiritum sueverat, orare simpuvium Numae, Christi frequentans atria, hymnis resultat martyrem*. - All the Romans who used to reverence Numa’s libation-cup now crowd the churches of Christ and sound the martyr's name in hymns.” (*Peristephanon* 2.513-516, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 138-139). Yet, given Prudentius’ flexible use of the term, *atria* here might equally be rendered as “entrances” or “courts of Christ.” This is consistent with his use in *Peristephanon* 8, where he refers to the entrance to heaven as ardua atria (“the lofty courts or courts in the heights”).

[516] For *templum* understood as “church” we find an example again in *Peristephanon* 2: “*recenset exim singulos, scribens viritim nomina, longo et locates ordine adstare pro templo iubet*. - Then he reviews them one by one, writing down each man’s name, and makes them stand posted in a long line in the forefront of the church.” (*Peristephanon* 2.161-164, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 118-199). The term that Prudentius most frequently employs to designate a church, however, is *ecclesia*. For example: “*haec occuluntur abditis ecclesiarum in angulis*… - All this wealth is concealed in out-of-the-way corners of your churches…” (*Peristephanon* 2.81-82, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 112-113). In this scene, the prefect of Rome demands from Lawrence the supposed treasures of his church. This exchange immediately precedes the moment when Lawrence invites him to cross the *ingens atrium* (n. 510)—the great entrance—and behold the “true riches” of his church, revealed in the poor and needy whom he supports.

In other of Prudentius' works, the use of *atria* or atrium continues to be very widespread, referring indistinctly to different things, from corridors,[517] to houses.[518]

This linguistic nuance supports the interpretation that the *alma atria* mentioned in the hymn to Eulalia should not be equated with the fifth-century basilica, but rather with some type of entryway to Eulalia's mausoleum or another the fourth century buildings or structures surrounding it, all of them predating the basilica. Therefore, the lack of coincidence in Prudentius' description of the "motherly or nurturing church" with the small mausoleum of Eulalia is logical if we take into account that he may not be referring to a church as such, but to another thing.

From this hypothesis, several possibilities emerge. The first is that *atria* refers to the entrance of Eulalia's mausoleum—either in a general sense or as an *atrium* in the more literal sense of an open courtyard. While an *atrium* in the literal sense was a common feature of a basilica or a church, it was perhaps not typical for a mausoleum.[519] Since we have already ruled out the possibility that Prudentius is referring to the basilica when he speaks of *atria*, we can also discard the idea that he is describing the basilica's

[517] "*splendent ergo tuis rauneribus, Pater, flammis nobilibus scilicet atria* … - So our halls shine, Father, with Thy gifts of noble flames …" (*Cathamerinon* 5.25-26, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 40-41).

[518] "*iam purpura supplex sternitur Aeneadae rectoris ad atria Christi* … - Now the successor of Aeneas, in the imperial purple, prostrates himself in prayer at the house of Christ …" (*Apotheosis* 456-457, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 154-155).

[519] Although rare, as Christopher Sparey-Green points out, an atrium could also be part of a mausoleum or even the entrance to a family funerary chapel: "A rectangular room, with or without an atrium and apse could have served as a family funerary chapel and a space for private commemoration of those interred, in contrast with the communal funerary basilicae" (Christopher J. Sparey-Green, "Mausolea in North-West Europe: The Transition from the Roman to Late Antique Periods," in *Burial and Memorial in Late Antiquity: Thematic Perspectives*, ed. Luke Lavan, vol. 1 [Brill, 2024], 138).

atrium in a literal sense. Moreover, there is no archaeological record indicating that the mausoleum identified as the *tumulus* or *martyrium* of Eulalia included any structure that could be identified as an atrium.

Having ruled out these options, we return to the hypothesis that Prudentius is referring with the word *atria* more narrowly to the entrance of the mausoleum, without implying the existence of an atrium in the architectural sense. It is therefore plausible that *atria* in the text refers to the entrance of Eulalia's mausoleum. However, this does not fully account for the rest of the passage, which describes "shining marble, gilded panels, and shaped stones." As noted earlier with reference to Paula Hershkowitz (see p. 200), scholars have generally assumed that this description is associated with the *atria alma* mentioned in the text, since it immediately follows that reference in the passage.

If we accept that *atria* does not refer to a church or basilica but instead may allude to the entrance of Eulalia's tomb, we may interpret the rest of the description as depicting elements found within the tomb—marble, gilded ceilings, and "shaped stones" that make the ground resemble a rose-covered meadow. As we know, there is no archaeological evidence for any of these decorative features. This means either they once existed but were not preserved, or they never existed and represent a poetic embellishment by the author. However, upon a close reading of the passage, at no point does Prudentius explicitly state that these elements are located inside the tomb of Eulalia—only that her *tumulus* is located in *Emerita*.

This opens up two further possibilities. The first is that the description refers not to Eulalia's tomb itself, but to one of the adjacent mausolea—specifically mausolea 28 and 29, the latter being attached to the crypt of the former—which, together with mausoleum 25 (identified as Eulalia's), were part of Eulalia's funerary complex in the fourth century, prior to the construction of the basilica in the mid-fifth century. This hypothesis is plausible given that a mosaic tombstone was found in mausoleum 29, suggesting that Prudentius could be referring metaphorically to the *atria*—the "entrances"—of Eulalia's tomb and these nearby buildings, which might have appeared to metaphorically "illuminate" Eulalia's *tumulus* by their close proximity. We should recall that both mausolea 28 and 29 were demolished to make way for the basilica, and only the structure of mausoleum 25 and the burial crypt of mausoleum 28 were preserved.

There is also a third possibility, which I consider the most convincing: that the description of shining marble and mosaics associated with the *atria alma* refers not to Eulalia's tomb, nor to a church or any other mausoleum in the necropolis, but rather to the city of Mérida itself.

The entire passage in which Prudentius locates Eulalia's tomb in Mérida and makes reference to the shining marble, gilded roofs, and shaped stones reads as follows:

> *nunc locus Emerita est* ***tumulo****, clara colonia Vettoniae, quam memorabilis amnis Ana praeterit et viridante rapax gurgite moenia pulchra lavit. Hic, ubi marmore perspicuo* ***atria*** *luminat* ***alma*** *nitor et peregrinus et indigena, relliquias cineresque sacros servat humus veneranda sinu. tecta corusca super rutilant de* ***laquearibus aureolis*** *saxaque caesa solum variant, floribus ut rosulenta putes prata rubescere multimodis*.

Now her tomb stands in *Emerita*, that famous town in Vettonia by which the notable river Ana passes, washing the handsome walls as it sweeps along with its green waters. Here, where the lustre of shining marble, foreign and native, lights up the motherly church, the worshipful earth keeps her remains, her holy ashes, in its bosom. Overhead the gleaming roof flashes light from its gilded panels, and shaped stones diversify the floor so that it seems like a rose-covered meadow blushing with varied blooms.[520]

However, my reading of the passage is as follows: "Here, where through clear marble, nurturing brightness illuminates the halls (or entrances or chambers), foreign and native, the worshipping earth (Mérida's earth) preserves the relics (Eulalia's) and sacred ashes in her (Mérida's) bosom." We can continue associating *alma* with *atria*, as they agree in gender, number and case. Henry J. Thomson translates *alma* as modifying *atria*, in which case the difference in reading is minimal: "Here, where through clear marble, brightness illuminates the nurturing halls."

Interpreting this description as referring to the city of Mérida rather than to Eulalia's *tumulus* is consistent with the use of the adverb of place *hic*, which refers back to the antecedent *locus* in the first verse—not to *tumulus*. Prudentius specifies this *locus* as the city of Mérida. As discussed earlier, the passage begins by situating Eulalia's tomb in Mérida and providing references to the city's Vettonian past and the river in front of

[520] *Peristephanon* 3.191-200, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 154-155.

the city walls. Although the *tumulus* is mentioned in the opening verse, the following lines shift the focus away from the tomb and toward a broader description of the city. Immediately after mentioning the *tumulus*, Prudentius writes *hic*, meaning "here"—i.e., returning to *Emerita*, not to the tomb. It is thus reasonable to interpret the use of *hic* as a signal that the poet is continuing the *laudatio* of the city started in the preceding verses, instead of suddenly moving to a description of Eulalia's *tumulus*.

From this perspective and maintaining that *atria* does not refer to a church but rather to a broader notion such as entrances, corridors, courts or halls, the rest of the description falls into place. Prudentius is portraying *Emerita* as a city where clear marble brightens its halls, where its venerable earth holds the saint's relics, where gilded ceilings hang above people's heads, and where mosaics decorate the floors. While rhetorical, poetic, and—following Paula Hershkowitz—almost certainly exaggerated, this description nonetheless fits Mérida, a city that at the time of Prudentius featured buildings surely adorned with marble cladding or mosaic floors. In the fourth century, *Emerita* greatly benefited from its designation as the capital of the *diocesis Hispaniarum*, and as noted earlier, this led to several renovations of its public buildings as well as private *domus* within the city.

The reference to *tecta corusca* reinforces this hypothesis. Although Thomson translates it in the singular, it is actually plural, possibly referring to multiple roofs—that is, to several buildings, or to Mérida's architecture more generally. The mention of *laquearibus aureolis* ("gilded panels") does not imply solid gold, but rather decorated panels, which may have adorned the ceilings of public or private buildings in the city.

We find a remarkably similar reference in Book I of Vergil's *Aeneid*—a source of great poetic inspiration for Prudentius—specifically in the passage that describes the banquet held by Queen Dido to welcome Aeneas and his men upon their arrival in Carthage: "*fit strepitus teetis vocemque per ampla volutant* ***atria****; dependent lychni* ***laquearibus aureis*** *incensi et Doctem fiammis funalia vincunt* - A din arises in the palace and voices roll through the spacious halls; lighted lamps down from the fretted roof of and flaming torches drive out the night."[521]

It is worth noting the lexical echoes between Virgil's verses and Prudentius' description of the city of Mérida. In the *Aeneid* passage, *laquearibus aureis* is translated as "fretted roof of gold," likely referring to a wooden ceiling ornamented with gilded paint or decorative gold-leaf paneling. This is probably the image Prudentius had in mind when he refers to *laquearibus aureolis* in *Peristephanon* 3. Also notable is the mention of *atria* in Virgil, which is translated as "halls." If Prudentius drew inspiration from this passage, it is entirely plausible that he intended a similar meaning— "halls" or "chambers"—rather than "church."

[521] Vergil, *Aeneid*, 1.725-727, in Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6,* trans. Rushton Fairclough, 290-291.

Another reference to gilded roofs appears in *Peristephanon* 6, the hymn dedicated to the martyrs of *Tarraco*. There, too, it is found in the final lines praising the city for housing the martyrs: "*hinc* ***aurata*** *sonent in arce* ***tecta****, blandum litoris extet inde murmur, et carmen freta feriata pangant* - Here in the city let the gilded roofs re-echo, there a winning sound arises from the shore, and the seas keep holiday and make song."[522]

In these verses, the mention of gilded roofs clearly refers to the city of *Tarraco*, which Prudentius addresses directly, and not to the specific site of martyrial veneration, which he does not describe in the closing lines of the hymn. By analogy, we may understand the poetic description of gilded ceilings in Eulalia's hymn as directed toward the city of Mérida as a whole, just as we see in Fructuosus' hymn, rather than toward Eulalia's *tumulus* or her cult site.

While the comparison with Virgil's verses underscores—as Anne Marie Palmer and others have rightly noted[523]—the high degree of rhetorical and poetic embellishment in Prudentius' descriptions, as well as his clear tendency to emulate classical poetry, this does not mean that the information in his hymns should be entirely dismissed. If we interpret the heightened description of the closing verses of Hymn 3 as referring to the

[522] *Peristephanon* 6.154-156, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 212-213.

[523] Among others, Martha Malamud has devoted an entire monograph to the use of classical references in Prudentius' works (Martha Malamud, *A Poetics of Transformation: Prudentius and Classical Mythology* [Cornell University Press, 1989]; Anne-Marie Palmer offers sustained discussion in *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 98-204; Michael Roberts analyzes Eulalia's journey through the wilderness, noting that "the passage has attracted the attention of a number of scholars as an example of the use of Virgilian phrases to convey spiritual landscape in Prudentius" (Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 92); or Cillian O'Hogan focused study of Virgilian allusions in *Peristephanon* 3 (O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity*, 40-48).

city of Mérida rather than to Eulalia's tomb, it still remains plausible. The city was flourishing and growing in the fourth century and, as Prudentius' preface suggests, it is quite likely that he visited Mérida at some point during his administrative career. His rhetorical description, then, can reasonably be read as a poetic tribute to what he actually observed in the city—embellished, yes, and shaped by classical models, but nonetheless grounded in lived experience.

If the passage refers to the urban setting rather than the *tumulus*, the lack of correspondence with the material remains does not represent a problem. The mausoleum of Eulalia does not need to have featured any of the architectural elements described by Prudentius—a point that aligns with the current archaeological evidence. The material record attests to the existence of a site of memory—and likely also of cult—dedicated to Eulalia by Prudentius' time, that can plausibly be dated to at least the second half of the fourth century. Furthermore, Prudentius' description of the city of Mérida supports the possibility that he visited it during his lifetime, which in turn makes it plausible that he saw Eulalia's mausoleum in person. This would also explain his use of the term *tumulus* rather than *basilica* or *ecclesia*, implying that no church building stood over the site at that time. This is consistent with the excavated structure, which is indeed a mausoleum—that is, a tomb. His designation of the site as *tumulus* confirms its funerary function but also supports its role as a space of memory and veneration. This aligns with the broader hypothesis advanced in this chapter: that a cult of Eulalia was active in Mérida during Prudentius' lifetime.

Conclusion: Spatial Memory, Poetic Commemoration, and the Layered Construction of Martyr Cults

This chapter has examined how Prudentius engages with the cults of Fructuosus in *Tarraco* and Eulalia in *Emerita Augusta*, not as their founder, but as a poet who channels and embellishes existing devotional traditions rooted in local communities. Through an interdisciplinary dialogue between textual and archaeological evidence, I have argued that the *Peristephanon* does not invent these cults *ex nihilo* but participates in their further articulation by shaping a poetic memory that reaffirms their spatial and liturgical foundations.

The analysis of the cult of Fructuosus has shown that by the time Prudentius composed Hymn 6, a coherent memory of the martyr bishop was already established in *Tarraco*. The evidence of a late third-century *Passio Fructuosi*, the enduring veneration attested in inscriptions, and the funerary structures around the burial site of the martyrs—the necropolis of Francolí—indicate that a cultic tradition predated Prudentius' literary intervention. His hymn, while theologically and stylistically innovative, builds upon this tradition, reinforcing *Tarraco*'s identity as a *locus* of martyrial sanctity. His poetic imagination operates not as a substitute for historical memory but as a powerful vehicle through which local devotion is sacralized and made visible to a broader Christian audience.

Similarly, the case of Eulalia in Mérida, in my interpretation, can show that Prudentius' verses in Hymn 3 correspond to an already established cult that had begun to crystallize by the fourth century. While the literary evidence prior to Prudentius is

lacking, the archaeological remains associated with her mausoleum, and the later commemorative testimonies, such as the fifth century basilica, point to a cultic presence that was already physically rooted and likely maintained by the Christian community of *Emerita*. Prudentius' vivid language—invoking snow, doves, saffron, and violets—not only elevates Eulalia's martyrdom into a transcendental testimony of holiness but also responds to the spatial and social context in which her cult was venerated.

These hymns must therefore be read through two intertwined layers of interpretation. The first layer pertains to Prudentius' poetic imagination and his construction of idealized exemplars of sainthood. In Hymn 6, Fructuosus emerges as the archetypal pastoral bishop—the calm, protective, and Christ-like shepherd of his flock—who embodies a model of episcopal virtue rooted in scriptural and ecclesial authority. In Hymn 3, Eulalia becomes the virgin martyr par excellence—pure, chaste, modest, yet also bold, defiant, and willing to subvert gender expectations in her voluntary embrace of martyrdom. These rhetorical archetypes reflect Prudentius' personal engagement with these figures as Christian heroes, rendered with literary flourish to elevate them as moral and spiritual *exempla*.

The second interpretive layer concerns the liturgical realities to which Prudentius alludes. His poetry reflects not just idealized saints but also idealized landscapes of veneration—urban environments graced by the presence of relics, tombs, and basilicas, where divine patronage manifests through martyrial presence. His vision is one of civic elevation through proximity to sanctity. As Michael Roberts has analyzed in his work on the *Peristephanon*, the *laus urbis* of *Tarraco* and *Emerita* that Prudentius makes at the

end of his hymns is not based on their urban qualities, but on the spiritual prestige they acquire by housing the remains of saints.[524] Cillian O'Hogan interprets this tendency as a conscious and deliberate strategy by Prudentius to not represent real geographical landscapes but only imagined spaces of martyr devotion. Prudentius, in O'Hogan's view, "shies away from engagement with reality and retreats into descriptions of the world that owe more to biblical and classical precedents than to lived experience."[525] However, as I have argued in this chapter and unlike to Cillian O'Hogan's interpretation, Prudentius' rhetorical embellishment should not lead us to dismiss the historical plausibility of his descriptions.

On the contrary, the archaeological evidence in both *Tarraco* and *Emerita* is consistent with Prudentius' claims. In *Tarraco*, there are strong indicators of a longstanding memory of Fructuosus and his deacons, supported by the third-century *Passio* and the material evidence of the Francolí funerary area. In Mérida, the mausoleum identified with Eulalia's cult shows signs of Christian use and veneration by the mid-to-late fourth century, precisely Prudentius' lifetime. The absence of certain architectural features described in his verses—such as marble panels or gilded ceilings—can be attributed to poetic license or the loss of decorative elements over time, rather than evidence against the cult's historical existence.

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[524] "Rather than the tomb being outside the walls of the city and in some sense dependent on it, it is the city that is in a subordinate relationship to the shrine, the new source of power. Secular social institutions (*urbs*, *populi*) play a secondary role when compared with "the blood of a martyr and a virgin's tomb" (Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 27).

[525] O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity*, 2.

Therefore, the poetic representations of saints and cults in Hymns 6 and 3—though shaped by literary convention and rhetorical flourish—remain firmly anchored in the historical and archaeological realities of these two cities in late fourth-century Hispania. Prudentius' hymns reveal a dynamic interaction between poetic imagination and spatial memory, between rhetorical construction and material devotion. He articulates a vision in which the martyr's body sanctifies the city, and the city, in turn, venerates the martyr through liturgy, architecture, and public veneration.

These findings also set the ground for the final chapter of the dissertation, which will turn to Prudentius' native city of *Calagurris*. There, as I will argue, the dynamic shifts. In the hymns to Emeterius and Chelidonius (*Peristephanon* 1 and 8), Prudentius no longer participates in a preexisting cultic tradition but instead engages in what I term a "creative mode." Drawing inspiration from the well-established cults of *Tarraco* and *Emerita*, Prudentius repurposes familiar devotional tropes to construct a new narrative of martyr veneration for his hometown. His poetry becomes an act of local sacralization, aimed at inscribing *Calagurris* into the sacred geography of Christian Hispania.

By examining how Prudentius navigates memory, imagination, and civic identity, the next chapter will demonstrate how poetry functioned not only as a medium of reflection but as a tool of invention and promotion of new cults—bringing forth new saints, new spaces of devotion, and new communal identities through the act of verse. The hymns to Emeterius and Chelidonius, as we shall see, reveal a poet who is not only commemorating the past but actively shaping the spiritual future of his home city.

Chapter 4. Prudentius and the Martyrs of *Calagurris:* Literary Creation and Local Memory

Introduction

The previous chapter showed that Prudentius was not writing in a vacuum: his hymns to Spanish martyrs reveal the poet's engagement with well-established cults in Tarraco and Emerita. These case studies demonstrated how local traditions—both textual and archaeological—were reworked in Prudentius' poetic voice, creating a hybrid memorialization of martyrdom that fused inherited practices with rhetorical embellishment. Chapter 4 turns from these centers of long-standing devotion to a markedly different case: *Calagurris*, supposedly the poet's own birthplace and the cult of Emeterius and Chelidonius. Here, the evidence does not securely demonstrate an attested tradition but rather the possibility of a more fragile, perhaps orally transmitted memory of the martyrs. Into this uncertain landscape, Prudentius seems to enter with what may be called a "creative mode," elaborating upon scarce information and shaping for his hometown a cult modeled on patterns already familiar to him from other Hispano-Roman cities.

This chapter argues that Prudentius' hymns to Emeterius and Chelidonius (*Peristephanon* 1 and 8) serve as a vehicle for reinforcing and legitimizing a martyr cult in *Calagurris*, where literary evidence hints at early Christian presence but where the archaeological record is considerably more limited than in Tarragona and Mérida. In contrast to the poet's role as transmitter of established devotion in *Tarraco* and *Emerita*

Augusta, here Prudentius seems to be filling in narrative gaps. He develops the martyrs' identities and sketches the liturgical and civic framework of their veneration. In doing so, he provides not only a narrative of heroic martyrdom, but also includes what had become the template of cultic martyr worship—with relics and feast day observances or civic patronage—that anchored the Christian identity of *Calagurris* in parallel with other centers of martyr devotion in Hispania.

The first section of the chapter examines the hymns themselves, highlighting how Prudentius crafts the literary memory of Emeterius and Chelidonius. While his narrative this time has very little background information to draw from, as he himself notes,[526] he signals continuity with broader traditions of martyr literature by adopting recognizable tropes: soldiers executed for their faith and the triumph of the martyrs' relics over pagan authorities. At the same time, he introduces distinctive features that will later define the saints' iconography, thus rooting the cult in the cultural imagination of his own city.

The second section turns to the material evidence for Christianity in *Calagurris* in Late Antiquity. Archaeological excavations suggest the presence of a Christian community by the fourth and early fifth centuries, and *Peristephanon* 8 points to the development of a baptistery near the site associated with the martyrs' execution.

The third section situates Prudentius' artistic elaboration of the cult of *Calagurris* in a comparative framework. By reading Hymns 1 and 8 alongside his hymns to Vincent, Eulalia, and Fructuosus, the other Spanish saints in the *Peristephanon*, I show how Hym

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[526] "*Invidentur ista nobis fama et ipsa extinguitur*. - We are denied the facts about these matters, the very tradition is destroyed." (*Peristephanon* 1.74, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 104-105).

1 of the *Peristephanon* functioned as a programmatic guide for the rest of the work, outlining the elements that, according to Prudentius' view, should characterize martyr cults throughout Hispania. I will analyze what I call the desired "markers of cult" in Prudentius with reference to the entire collection of hymns of the *Peristephanon*.

This chapter suggests that Prudentius' hymns to Emeterius and Chelidonius illustrate the poet's desire to articulate a martyrial tradition for the city of Calahorra. He did not necessarily "invent" the cult *ex nihilo*. Rather, he gave it a form and rites to what may otherwise have been only a forgotten or poorly documented memory. The case of *Calagurris* reveals the dual nature of Prudentius' contribution to the cult of the saints in Hispania: he was both a mediator of tradition and a shaper of new sacred landscapes. By extending martyrial presence to his own city, Prudentius ensured that *Calagurris*, like *Tarraco* and *Emerita*, would be inscribed into the Christian geography of Late Antiquity.

1. Constructing the Martyrs: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity

Hymn 1 of Prudentius' *Peristephanon* stands out for its focus on the martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius, two soldier-saints from the small northern town of *Calagurris* (modern Calahorra). In contrast to the grand metropolitan Spanish settings of other hymns in the collection—such as *Tarraco*, *Emerita Augusta*, or *Caesaraugusta*—*Calagurris* occupied a much more modest position in the Roman urban hierarchy. It was neither a provincial capital, nor a major port or military base, nor a top-tier economic hub. Nevertheless, the city had a long history within Roman Hispania. Since the time of Augustus, it held the rank of *municipium* with full Roman *civitas*, and its origins predated Roman rule, belonging to territory originally inhabited by the Vascones and other

Celtiberian peoples.[527] Despite its limited political weight, *Calagurris* could be considered regionally significant due to its location in the Ebro Valley—northeastern Iberian Peninsula—and its proximity to *Caesaraugusta* (Zaragoza), the capital of the *conventus Caesaraugustanus*, though it was not central to provincial governance.

The story of Emeterius and Chelidonius relies almost entirely on Prudentius' account, as no written evidence of these martyrs survives from before his work. Unlike other cases—such as Eulalia—there is not speculation either about the existence of a prior *passio* or martyr acts. This does not, however, rule out the possibility that such documentation once existed but has been lost. Likewise, the possibility of a local memory or oral tradition in *Calagurris* cannot be excluded, though *Peristephanon* 1 itself provides few historical details about the circumstances or date of Emeterius and Chelidonius' martyrdom. If any remembrance did persist, Prudentius would have had to rely on oral transmission or fragmentary local knowledge in shaping his narrative of these martyrs.

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[527] *Calagurris* appears occasionally in Roman literary sources, most notably in connection with the Sertorian War (80–72 BCE), during which the city firmly aligned itself with Sertorius—a leader who had secured the loyalty of the native populations of Hispania—and remained faithful to him even after his death. As several classical sources report, the city was besieged in 74 BCE by the forces of Q. Caecilius Metellus and G. Pompeius Magnus (Livy, *Per*. 93; Appian, *B Civ*. 1.13.112), and again in 72 BCE after Sertorius' death. On this second occasion, Pompey destroyed the city, and the literary tradition thereafter attached to *Calagurris* a particularly grim stereotype: the *fames calagurritana* ("Calagurritan famine"). Authors such as Sallust (*Hist.* 3.60-61 [Loeb Classical Library 522, trans. John T. Ramsey, 2015], 280-283) and, later, Valerius Maximus (*Memorable Doings and Sayings*, 7.6.3) report that the *Calagurritani* stubbornly endured Pompey's siege despite starving, to the point of consuming human corpses—a heroic deed likened to other famous acts of resistance in Hispania, such as those of *Saguntum* against Hannibal (219 BCE) and *Numantia* against Scipio Aemilianus (134 BCE). Apart from this, *Calagurris* virtually disappears from the sources until Prudentius' hymns. The only notable information reported in the interim is that the famous rhetorician Quintilian was born in *Calagurris* (Suetonius, *Gram. et rhet*. 40; Ausonius, *Prof. Burd*. 5.1). See José Luis Cinca Martínez and Rosa González Sota, *Historia de Calahorra* (Amigos de la Historia de Calahorra, 2011), 73.

Despite the scarcity of information, in Prudentius' hands *Calagurris* and its martyrs emerge as unusually prominent among the Spanish hymns. Emeterius and Chelidonius are the only saints in the *Peristephanon* to receive not only a hymn but also an epigram commemorating a baptistery at the site of their execution, remembered in Hymn 8.[528] Their martyrdom occupies a significant place in the collection—Anne-Marie Palmer has described Hymn 1 as "programmatic" for the rest of the work—a centrality underscored by its position in the earliest surviving manuscripts of the *Peristephanon*.[529] Although the precise chronology of composition is difficult to determine, most scholars agree that the *Peristephanon* poems were written at different stages and were originally conceived to function independently, even if later transmitted as a single collection.[530] Notably, in the oldest extant manuscripts containing Prudentius' complete works—the *Puteanus* (early sixth century) and the *Ambrosianus* (early seventh century)—and in the manuscript families derived from them, the hymn to Emeterius and Chelidonius consistently appears first. This positioning suggests its preeminence may have been

[528] Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 106. See also Willy Shetter, "Prudentius, Peristephanon 8," *Hermes* 110 (1982): 110–17 (esp. 110-111), and Prudencio, *Obras. Introducción, Traducción y Notas de Luis Rivero García*, trans. Luis Rivero García, I (Gredos, 1997), 70-71.

[529] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 143, 152-153.

[530] Jean-Louis Charlet, "La poésie de Prudence dans l'esthétique de son temps," *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé (BAGB)* 45 (1986): 375; Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 88-89, 108; and Luis Rivero García, *La poesía de Prudencio* (Universidad de Huelva, 1996), 131. As discussed in Chapter 1, we do not know with certainty whether Prudentius intended to circulate the hymns to the martyrs as a complete manuscript or as part of a collected edition of his works. However, the fact that he composed both a preface and an epilogue for his works, and that in the list of his poems provided in the *Praefatio* he includes the hymns of the *Peristephanon*, suggests that he did have some form of collection in mind at the end of his life.

deliberate, perhaps reflecting Prudentius' own ordering, though the role of a later manuscript tradition cannot be entirely dismissed.[531]

Taken together, this evidence highlights the importance of Emeterius and Chelidonius within the collection and suggests a closer connection between the poet and these saints. While this cannot be demonstrated with certainty, the content of Hymn 1, along with Hymn 8's dedication to the *Calagurris* baptistery, has led most scholars to identify the city as Prudentius' birthplace.[532] These hymns, therefore, can be read not only in the broader context of his celebration of Spanish martyrs—and of foreign saints in the second part of the *Peristephanon*—but also from the more individual perspective of the poet himself. Emeterius and Chelidonius may well have been perceived by Prudentius as his personal patron saints, through whom he sought to grant his city an epic and heroic Christian past, comparable to that enjoyed by larger Spanish centers such as *Emerita* and *Tarraco*.

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[531] From the oldest manuscript, A, also known as the *Puteanus* (early sixth century), derives the αα family of manuscripts, which most closely approximate and likely determine the archetype of the present ordering of the hymns. In the *Puteanus*, the hymns are arranged in essentially the same way as in the modern tradition, with the sole exception of the hymn to Romanus—now designated as 10—which usually appears independently in all collections. From the other oldest manuscript, B or *Ambrosianus* (ca. 620-630 CE), descends the αβ family, whose arrangement differs considerably from the current archetype. The hymn to Romanus again appears independently, while the rest of the hymns follow a markedly different sequence from the traditional one: *Peristephanon* 1–3; 5; 4; 14; 6–7; 9; 8; 11–13. Later manuscripts descending from these families—the ninth century (βα) and the tenth century (ββ)—likewise display a very irregular and divergent arrangement of the hymns when compared with the current archetype, making it difficult to definitively extract any original ordering attributable to Prudentius. Nevertheless, in all these families of manuscripts, the hymn to Emeterius and Chelidonius consistently appears as Hymn 1 (Pierre-Yves Fux, *Prudence et les martyrs: Hymnes et tragédie*, 16; *cf*. Rivero García, *La poesía de Prudencio*, 233-236).

[532] See Chapter 1, pp. 5-7.

In this light, Hymn 1 functions as both a regional and personal statement, offering *Calagurris* an elevated Christian identity through its patron martyrs. To understand how Prudentius constructs this image, it is necessary to examine the narrative structure and rhetorical strategies he employs. The following section analyzes how Emeterius and Chelidonius are situated within the established *Peristephanon* pattern for Spanish martyrs, while also drawing attention to the distinctive features that set this hymn apart.

1.1 Soldier-Martyrs: Emeterius and Chelidonius in *Peristephanon* 1

The hymn to Emeterius and Chelidonius follows a structure closely resembling that of other *Peristephanon* hymns dedicated to the Spanish martyrs examined in previous chapters. The most representative model is the hymn to Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius of Tarraco, where Prudentius reshapes the narrative of the pre-existing *Passio Fructuosi*. This *passio*-based narrative pattern recurs in the other Spanish martyr hymns, with only minor variations and adaptations shaped by the specific saint or city being praised.

Prudentius typically begins with a brief introduction and background, often including information about the saints, their imprisonment, and the specific persecution during which they were arrested. This is followed by an exchange of words between the martyrs and the Roman authorities, usually an interrogation or hearing before the governor that ends in a death sentence. The second part of the narrative heightens the drama, describing the tortures inflicted after sentencing and incorporating, where relevant, interventions from bystanders or eyewitnesses. The poet often concludes with

magnalia—miraculous manifestations of the martyrs' post-mortem presence—affirming their ascent to heaven and privileged place beside God, earned through their suffering. Finally, the hymns typically closes with praise for the city where the martyrdom occurred, sometimes including details about the burial site (if known), alongside an idealized portrayal of the saint's cult and associated festivities.[533]

1.1.1 Introduction and Context (vv. 1–69)

One of the first striking features of *Peristephanon* 1 is that, unlike other hymns analyzed in this dissertation, the names of Emeterius, Chelidonius, and even the city of *Calagurris* appear only in the title and are not mentioned again in the poem itself.[534] The opening section begins instead with an extended exaltation of *Calagurris*, continuing the topos of *laus urbis* found, to varying degrees, in most of the *Peristephanon* hymns.[535] This praise, however, introduces distinctive elements: Prudentius attributes to *Calagurris* and its martyrs qualities not repeated in the hymns to other Spanish martyrs.

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[533] On the structure of Prudentius' hymns, see Jean-Louis Charlet, *La création poétique dans le Cathemerinon de Prudence*, 63.

[534] Anne-Marie Palmer suggests that Prudentius composed this hymn specifically for the audience of *Calagurris*, who were so familiar with the saints that they did not need to be named (Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 22, n. 50). Pierre-Yves Fux, on the other hand, proposes that Prudentius intentionally omits the names of both the martyrs and the city in order to illustrate the futile attempt at *damnatio memoriae* described in lines 73–81 of Hymn 1, where the poet denounces the destruction of the records of the martyrdom by the imperial authorities (Fux, *Prudence et Les Martyrs*, 22). Fux's thesis is the more convincing in light of John Petruccione's extensive analysis of the topos of *damnatio memoriae* and the persecutor's *invidia* in this hymn (see John Petruccione, "The Persecutor's Envy and the Rise of the Martyr Cult: 'Peristephanon' Hymns 1 and 4," *Vigiliae Christianae* 45, no. 4 (1991): 327–46). The association of Emeterius and Chelidonius with *Calagurris* is later confirmed by Gregory of Tours, *De gloria martyrum*, 1.93.

[535] *Peristephanon* 1.1-20, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 98-101.

The first distinguishing feature is the elevation of *Calagurris* above not only other cities in Hispania but also, in rhetorical terms, on a global scale: "For this glory the land of Spain has the fortune to be held in honor through all the world. This spot [*Calagurris*] has seemed to God worthy to keep their bones, pure enough to be host to their blessed bodies."[536] In Prudentius' portrayal, Calahorra becomes a sacred city whose fame surpasses that of major urban centers such as *Tarraco* and *Emerita*, since the martyrs he esteems as most illustrious—and thus worthy of worldwide renown—are those of what is presumed to have been his own hometown.

Prudentius further develops this privileged status by stressing the sanctity of the ground, "colored with the holy blood" of the martyrs (*inlitas cruore sancto nunc harenas*), as a place of pilgrimage visited not only by the *incolae* (inhabitants) of *Calagurris* but also by *exteri orbis coloni* (foreigners from distant lands).[537] More than for any other city praised in the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius seems to intent on portraying Calahorra and its martyrs as a universal pilgrimage center, presenting Emeterius and Chelidonius not merely as patrons of the city but as patrons of the world: "for report has run through all lands publishing the news that here are patrons of the whole earth."[538] In

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[536] "*pollet hoc felix per orbem terra Hibera stemmate, hic locus dignus tenendis ossibus visus Deo, qui beatorum pudicus esset hospes corporum*." (*Peristephanon* 1.4-6, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 98-99).

[537] "*hic calentes hausit undas caede tinctus duplici, inlitas cruore sancto nunc harenas incolae confrequentant obsecrantes voce, votis, munere. exteri nec non et orbis huc colonus advenit …* - It [*Calagurris*] drank in the warm stream when it was wetted by the slaughter of the twain, and now its people throng to visit the ground that was colored with their holy blood, making petitions with voice and heart and gifts; and dwellers in the outside world too come here … " (*Peristephanon* 1.4-10, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 98-99).

[538] "*fama nam terras in omnes percucurrit proditrix hic patronos esse mundi* …" (*Peristephanon* 1.10-12, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 98-99).

this way, the poet goes beyond his approach in earlier hymns, which primarily aimed to preserve the local tradition and cult of martyrs—such as Fructuosus in *Tarraco* or Eulalia in *Emerita*—and instead gestures toward the elaboration of a cult for Emeterius and Chelidonius that transcends the boundaries of *Calagurris*, and even of Hispania, setting them alongside universally revered martyrs such as Cyprian of Carthage.[539]

Following the exaltation of *Calagurris* as a potential pilgrimage destination, Prudentius turns to introduce its martyrs. He describes them as two soldiers whom he calls *fratres*—not in the literal sense, but as men united by a *fida sodalitas* ("faithful companionship"), a phrase that simultaneously evokes their fellowship as soldiers and their bond as brothers in the Christian faith.[540]

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[539] "*Punica terra tulit, quo splendeat omne quidquid usquam est, inde domo Cyprianum, sed decus orbis et magistrum.* - The Punic land bore Cyprian to give lustre to the whole earth everywhere; that was the home he came from, but he was to be the glory and the teacher of the world." (*Peristephanon* 13.1-2, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 328-329).

[540] "*hic duorum cara fratrum concalescunt pectora, fida quos per omne tempus iunxerat sodalitas*. - Hereupon two brothers' loving hearts grew warm, faithful comradeship had ever united them." (*Peristephanon* 1.52-53, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 102-103). The term *sodalitas* (or *sodalis*) admits a range of translations, from "society" or "association" to the broader sense of friendship, companionship, or intimacy. In a Christian context, the word could denote fellowship in faith, as in Jerome's correspondence: "Another might perhaps describe how for his [Nepotian's] salvation you left the East and the desert, and how you fed me, your dearest comrade, with hopes of your return … *Alius forsitan scriberet, quod ob salutem illius orientem heremumque dimiseris et me, carissimum sodalem tuum, redeundi spe lactaveri* …" (*Letters* 60.9, 396 CE; in Jerome, *Select Letters*, trans. F. A. Wright, Loeb Classical Library 262 [Harvard University Press, 1933], 280-81). The letter is addressed to Jerome's friend and fellow Christian Heliodorus, bishop of Altino, as consolation for the death of his nephew Nepotianus. An example of *sodalitas* used in the sense of military fellowship appears in the correspondence of Sidonius Apollinaris: "… *quem te quantumque nuper omnis aetas ordo sexus e semirutis murorum aggeribus conspicabantur, cum interiectis aequoribus in adversum perambulatis et vix duodeviginti equitum sodalitate comitatus aliquot milia Gothorum* … - … as every age and class and both sexes watched you from the ruined ramparts not long ago, when you traversed with no backward look the level ground that intervened, and with a following of barely eighteen mounted comrades you made your way through several thousands of Goths …" (*Letters*, III.3.3; in Sidonius. *Letters: Books 3-9*, trans. W. B. Anderson, Loeb Classical Library 420 [Harvard University Press, 1965], 14-15). The letter is addressed to Ecdicius Avitus—Sidonius' brother-in-law and son of Emperor Avitus—in praise of his defense of Clermont during the Visigothic siege in the early 470s CE.

Prudentius ascribes to these soldier-martyrs not only the protective and civic patronage that he attributes elsewhere to saints in the *Peristephanon*, but also distinctive intercessory gifts that mark their cult site as a particularly potent *locus* of divine favor. Emeterius and Chelidonius are said to hear and promptly convey the petitions of their faithful to "the ear of the everlasting King," from whom "gifts flow generously on to earth from the very fountain-head, pouring on the petitioners' maladies the healing remedies they sought for."[541] This explicit emphasis on healing sets them from the other martyrs of the collection. While such powers might be inferred more generally from the saints' role as patrons and intercessors, here Prudentius makes them a concrete, defining feature of Emeterius and Chelidonius' intercession. These healing gifts, in turn, help explain the global renown of *Calagurris* celebrated in the hymn's opening verses: if the poet's portrayal reflects—or perhaps amplifies—perceptions already circulating in his own time, the martyrs' power to cure disease could have made their cult site a destination for pilgrims from far beyond Hispania. In the hymn's closing verses, Prudentius will return to this theme, elaborating on the favors and blessings the martyrs bestow.

Alongside their introduction, Prudentius establishes the central theme of the poem: the abandonment of the *militia Caesaris* for the *militia Christi*. The martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius' renounce service to the emperor in order to join the ranks of God through martyrdom: "They abandoned Caesar's ensigns, choosing the standard of the cross, and in

[541] "*audiunt statimque ad aurem regis aeterni ferunt. inde larga fonte ab ipso dona terris influunt, supplicum causas petitis quae medellis inrigant*." (*Peristephanon* 1.18-20, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 100-101).

place of the swelling draperies of the serpent which they used to carry, led the way with the glorious wood which subdued the serpent.[542] To reinforce this idea, Prudentius develops a series of military analogies, contrasting the dragon (*draco*) standard—also interpretable as a serpent, a common emblem on the banners of Roman troops in Late Antiquity[543]— with the standard of the Cross, by which the martyrs now subdue the serpent, a symbol of sin and the devil in Scripture.[544] This imagery does not directly invoke Constantine, but it inevitably recalls the broader triumph of Christianity associated with his reign. In particular, it resonates with the well-known scene of Constantine's vision before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (312 CE), when he was reportedly instructed to place the sign of the Cross upon his standards.[545] Prudentius' hymn does not make Constantine part of the narrative, but the parallel imagery suggests an implicit claim: the triumph of Christianity inaugurated in Constantine's time is mirrored and reaffirmed in the victory of the soldier-martyrs of *Calagurris*.

Their status as soldiers also shapes the verse form chosen by Prudentius. *Peristephanon* 1 is composed in trochaic tetrameter catalectic, a meter used in the *carmina triumphalia*—compositions, often obscene, sung in praise of victorious generals

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[542] "*Caesaris vexilla linquunt, eligunt signum crucis proque ventosis draconum, quos gerebant, palliis praeferunt insigne lignum, quod draconem subdidit*." (*Peristephanon* 1.34-36, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 100-101).

[543] Michael Speidel P., "The Master of the Dragon Standards and the Golden Torc: An Inscription from Prusias and Prudentius' *Peristephanon*," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 115 (1985): 283–87.

[544] See Karen R. Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament: A Linguistic, Archaeological, and Literary Study* (Haddonfield House, 1974) and James Charlesworth H., *The Good and Evil Serpent. How a Universal Symboll Became Christianized* (Yale University Press, 2010).

[545] Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 1.26-32 and *Hist. eccl.* 9.9; Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 44.5.

during triumphal processions (*triumphus*).[546] As Fux observes, Prudentius's choice here is rare but wholly deliberate, perfectly suited to the hymn's martial archetype and purpose.[547]

Beyond the fact that they were soldiers, Prudentius offers few specific details about Emeterius and Chelidonius in the introduction, though in the hymn's climactic section he will explain this lack of information. The poet even seems uncertain about the exact manner of their death, initially suggesting the sword: "A noble thing it is to suffer the stroke of the persecutor's sword" (*pulchra res ictum sub ense persecutoris pati*), in a reflection on the corruption and fragility of the body and the martyrdom as the most glorious form of death.[548]

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[546] Apart from their laudatory purpose, *carmina triumphalia* are also considered to have had an apotropaic function, protecting the general from the envy that his triumph might arouse; see Alberto Del Campo Tejedor, "Ritual-Feast Mockery and Humiliation during Roman Triumphs. Functions and Meanings of *Ioci* Militares from a Cultural-Historical Perspective," in *Processions and the Construction of Communities in Antiquity. History and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Elena Muñiz-Grijalvo and Alberto Del Campo Tejedor (Routledge, 2023), 171-190 (esp. 179-180). Mary Beard, however, offers a critical assessment of this theory (*The Roman Triumph* [The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007], 248).

[547] Fux, *Prudence et Les Martyrs*, 25-26. As Kathleen Kirsch notes, this meter has no prior record in the genre of martyr verse; Kathleen Kirsch, "Shaping Christianity in *Calagurris*: Prudentius' *renovatio* of Ambrose in *Peristephanon* 1," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 32, no. 2 (2024): 198. Prudentius' choice of the meter of the *carmina triumphalia* is particularly interesting in light of the apotropaic function often attributed to these verses and of John Petruccione's thesis on the persecutors' envy that permeates the *Peristephanon* hymns. The poet may have had a similar function in mind when selecting this meter, but inverted: rather than protecting the victorious general, the verses protect the martyrs and Christians from envy in their triumph over the persecutors.

[548] "*hoc genus mortis decorum est, hoc probis dignum viris, membra morbis exedenda, texta venis languidis, hostico donare ferro, morte et hostem vincere.* - It is an honourable way of death and one that becomes good men, to make of the body, which is a fabric of feeble flesh and doomed to be wasted by disease, a gift to the enemy's sword, and by death to overcome the foe." (*Peristephanon* 1.24-27, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 100-101). Prudentius here pays homage to the famous line from Horace's *Odes*: "*dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*" ("It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country," *Odes* 3.2.13). In Prudentius, the reference reconfigures Horace's concept of martial virtus and civic identity—developed in *Odes* 3.2, a poem concerned precisely with military and social virtues—from the *patria* as an honorable cause for which to die, to God as the noblest reason to give one's life.

A few verses later, he attempts to reconstruct what he imagines their martyrdom might have been, envisioning the possible torments endured by the soldier duo:

> The prison-house fettered men's necks with hard links and held them fast, the torturer plied his savage hands at every assize, integrity was reckoned a crime and faithful speech was punished. Then was goodness cut down with the sword and smote the unhappy ground, or laid on the sorrowful pyre it sucked the flames in through the mouth … they [Emeterius and Chelidonius] stood ready to bear whatsoever their fortune's extremity should bring, whether they must submit their necks to the executioner's axe after suffering the assault of the cracking scourge or the burning-hot gridiron, or must present their breasts to leopards or lions.[549]

As this passage illustrates, the information provided by Prudentius about their deaths is highly generic, functioning more as a poetic reconstruction based on other martyrdoms known to him from earlier sources. He also echoes other hymns in thee *Peristephanon*, citing details from his own accounts: the voluntary inhalation of flames recalls Eulalia's death; the burning gridiron evokes the martyrdom of Lawrence and Vincent among the Spanish saints;[550] and the prospect of being thrown to wild beasts recalls Hippolytus, condemned to be torn apart by horses.[551]

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[549] "*tunc et ense caesa virtus triste percussit solum et rogis ingesta maestis ore flammas sorbuit. dulce tunc iustis cremari, dulce ferrum perpeti* … [Emeterius and Chelidonius] *stant parati ferre quidquid sors tulisset ultima, seu foret praebenda cervix ad bipennem publicam verberum post vim crepantum, post catastas igneas, sive pardis offerendum pectus aut leonibus*." (*Peristephanon* 1.49-51 and 54-57, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 102-103).

[550] "*extrema omnium igni, grabato et lamminis exerceatur quaestio*. - Let the last degree of torture be applied, with fire and bed and plates." (*Peristephanon* 5.206-208, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 180-181). In the case of Lawrence, "*postquam vapor diutinus decoxit exustum latus, ultro e catasta iudicem conpellat adfatu brevi* … - After the long-continued heat has burned his side away, Lawrence on his own part hails the judge and addresses him briefly from the gridiron …" (*Peristephanon* 2.397-400, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 132-133).

[551] "*ergo sit Hippolytus, quatiat turbetque iugales, intereatque feris dilaceratus equis*. - Hippolytus let him be, then. Let him get a team frightened and agitated and be torn to death by wild horses." (*Peristephanon* 11.87-88, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 310-311).

In this way, Prudentius borrows from the stock repertoire of martyrdom narratives—decapitation, burning, and *damnatio ad bestias*—to propose possible scenarios for the deaths of Emeterius and Chelidonius. He also echoes other hymns in the *Peristephanon*, citing details from his own accounts, such as Eulalia swallowing the flames, to formulate plausible possibilities about the tortures and executions that the Calagurris martyrs might have endured. These examples should therefore be read as imaginative hypotheses rather than historical claims, underscoring the poet's role in shaping a heroic narrative from a fragmentary tradition.

The introductory section of the hymn concludes with yet another attempt by Prudentius to supplement the information he lacks, this time through a constructed direct speech: an imagined exchange between the martyrs and the governor or judge who condemns them. In this short speech, Prudentius develops the overarching theme of abandoning the *militia Caesaris* in favor of the *militia Christi*, grounding it in two main arguments. The first is the renunciation of the financial rewards and compensations attached to military service: "'Shall we who are children of Christ dedicate ourselves to Mammon? Shall we who wear the likeness of God be slaves to the world?'"[552] In this

[552] "*nosne Christo procreati mammonae dicabimur et Dei formam gerentes serviemus saeculo*?" (*Peristephanon* 1.58, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 102-103). On the concept of Mammon as the personification of greed and materialism in the Scriptures, see, for example, Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money"; *cf*. Luke 16:13. The only other mention of Mammon in Prudentius' works occurs in *Hamartigenia* 428, where the poet uses Old Testament enemies of Israel as allegorical figures to represent the spiritual forces of evil. The Gibeonites, a Hivite community, trick Joshua and the Israelites into a peace treaty, thus making them "subjects of Mammon through their love of peace" (*Mammoneamque fidem pacis sub amore sequuntur*, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 234-235). Here Mammon again represents the embodiment of the avarice and greed of the Hivites, luring the Israelites into a treaty through deceptive means.

speech, Prudentius advances an almost ascetic argument for rejecting material wealth, paired with a critique of excessive materialism and greed, personified by the concept of Mammon.[553]

This argument, consistently supported by military imagery, expands into a condemnation of the state gods on which imperial authorities rest, in line with the anti-pagan critique that permeates the entire *Peristephanon*: "Away, ye masters of the standards! Stand off, ye tribunes! Take away the gold circlets that our wounds have won … Christ condemns your ill-famed gods and you who fashion yourselves divine persons out of absurd monstrosities."[554] Here, the martyrs symbolically renounce not only wealth but also the *dona militaria* granted to soldiers for acts of bravery. In particular, Prudentius refers to the *torques* (*aureos auferte torques, sauciorum praemia*), one of the soldier's decorations awarded in Rome as a military honor.[555]

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[553] Prudentius also appears to elaborate on the theme of greed as a form of idolatry—a form of enslavement to material possessions—in line with other contemporary authors such as John Chrysostom, who interprets greed as a service and obedience to something material that is, by definition, not God (John Chrysostom, *PG* 62:123 — 18th Homily on Ephesians). On this theme, see Brian S. Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor* (Eerdmans, 2007), 21-23.

[554] "*ite, signorum magistri, et vos, tribuni, absistite. aureos auferte torques, sauciorum praemia clara nos … Christus … damnat infames deos vosque, qui ridenda vobis monstra divos fingitis*." (*Peristephanon* 1.64-69, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 102-103).

[555] On the origin of the *torques* as Roman military decoration, see Valerie A. Maxfield, *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army* (Batsford, 1981), 86-88. Maxfield notes that the *torques*—originally worn as a personal ornament or symbol of rank among Persians, Scythians, Celts, and other peoples with whom Rome came into contact—was adopted by Rome through such encounters. By the Principate, the *torques* was regarded as one of the lesser military decorations, typically awarded to centurions and soldiers of lower rank, though it could also be granted collectively to entire units (as in the Republican case of the *turma Salluitana*). See Maxfield, *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army*, 250-253 for the use of the *torques* in Late Antiquity.

The poet's stance resonates with Tertullian's position in the classic debate over whether Christians should engage in the profession of arms—a dilemma that also frames the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius:

> Will it be "You cannot serve God and mammon" to devote your energies to mammon, and to depart from God? … But even then, you are still the soldier and the servant of another; and if of two masters, of God and Caesar; but assuredly then not of Caesar, when you owe yourself to God, as having higher claims, I should think, even in matters in which both have an interest.[556]

In the speech he attributes to Emeterius and Chelidonius, Prudentius seems to draw on the same line of thought as Tertullian's regarding the soldier-martyr. He links the rejection of Mammon's servitude and avarice with the renunciation of the *torques*—the soldier's honors—and with the anti-pagan polemic that concludes the dialogue.[557]

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[556] "*Hoc erit 'Non potestis Deo seruire et mammonae,' mammonae manum tradere et Deo absistere? … Sed et tu proinde miles ac seruus alterius, et si duorum, Dei et Caesaris, certe tunc non Caesaris, cum te Deo debes, etiam in communibus, credo, potiori*." (Tertullian, *De Corona Militis*, 12.3-5, *The Complete Works of Tertullian*, trans. Sydney Thelwall [Delphi Ancient Classics 89 , 2018], 3133 – 3134). As Tertullian notes, the practice of awarding military crowns derives from the custom of offering crowns to the gods and therefore had its roots in paganism: "*quo satis instruamur quam alienum iudicare debeamus coronati capitis institutionem ab eis prolatam et in eorum deinceps honorem dispensatam, quos saeculum deos credidit*. - how foreign to us we should judge the custom of the crowned head, introduced as it was by, and thereafter constantly managed for the honor of, those whom the world has believed to be gods." (Tertullian, *De Corona Militis*, 7.7, *The Complete Works of Tertullian*, 3127 – 3128).

[557] The incompatibility—or the necessity of choosing—between material gain and service to God is a recurring theme in other passions whose protagonists are soldier-martyrs. For example, the *Passio* of Julius the Veteran, set during the last edict of Diocletian, presents a scenario in which the martyr is compelled to choose between the monetary rewards of his profession and fidelity to his Christian oath: "*Maximus praeses dixit: Iuli, uideo te sapientem uinim et grauem. immola ergo diis persuasus a me, ut remunerationem magnam consequaris* - 'Julius,' said Maximus the prefect, 'I see that you are a wise and serious person. You shall receive a generous bonus if you will take my advice and sacrifice to the gods.'" As expected, the veteran soldier refuses to sacrifice, even at the cost of declining the bonus offered by the prefect: "*Iulius respondit: Non facio quae desideras, ne incurram in poenam perpetuam*. - 'I will not do what you wish,' answered Julius, 'lest I incur an eternal penalty.'" (*Passio Iuli Veterani* 2.4, Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. 262-263).

1.1.2 Narrative and dramatic development (vv. 70–93)

The second part of *Peristephanon* 1 opens with Prudentius' direct intervention in the narrative: a digression in which the poet explains to his audience why so little is known about the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius and why he must rely primarily on oral memory.[558] Although concrete information is lacking—apart from what he hints may have been a fragile oral tradition—Prudentius nonetheless seizes the opportunity to embellish the account, ensuring that the martyrs of his city stand on equal footing with, or even surpass, the saints he celebrates in larger urban centers such as *Emerita* or *Tarraco*.[559]

After the martyrs' brief speech and Prudentius' imagined depiction of the tortures endured by Emeterius and Chelidonius, the poet pauses the narrative (vv. 73–81) to explain that all documentary evidence concerning their martyrdom has been lost to the silence of time.

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[558] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 237-239. As Ian Fielding notes, in *Peristephanon* 1 Prudentius reveals an almost obsessive concern with preserving the ephemeral nature of oral tradition in a durable medium, one capable of withstanding the erosive effects of time and safeguarding the memory of the martyrs—something the authorities nearly succeeded in erasing in the case of Emeterius and Chelidonius. Hymn 8, an epigram, represents the most refined expression of this endeavor: a commemoration of the martyrs written in the form of an inscription, intended to be placed on a perishable monument but also incorporated into the *Peristephanon*. As part of the poetic collection, the hymn would endure beyond the lifespan of any physical marker (Ian Fielding, "Elegiac Memorial and the Martyr as a Medium in Prudentius' Peristephanon," *Classical Quarterly* 64, no. 2 [2014]: 808–20, esp. 809-810). See also Julieta Ríos, "Los caminos de la memoria en el *Peristephanon* de Prudencio," *Rivista Di Cultura Classica e Medioevale* 50, no. 2 (2008): 359–69, for a comparable analysis in Spanish.

[559] Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 47.

According to Prudentius, a guard or attendant removed or destroyed the records, presumably under imperial orders:

> Alas for what is forgotten and lost to knowledge in the silence of the olden time! We are denied the facts about these matters, the very tradition is destroyed, for long ago a reviling soldier of the guard took away the records, lest generations taught by documents that held the memory fast should make public the details, the time and manner of their martyrdom, and spread them abroad in sweet speech for posterity to hear.[560]

The "records" to which Prudentius refers were most likely the *acta*—the official trial proceedings documenting the martyrs' condemnation—which, as Eric Rébillard points out, were perceived as essential authenticating devices in hagiographic tradition.[561] Their absence leads Prudentius to acknowledge that he lacks crucial details about the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius, such as the precise date. The mention of an officer seizing the *acta*, however, offers a clue for situating their execution around the time of Diocletian's first edict of persecution (303 CE), when, according to Lactantius and Eusebius, the emperor ordered the destruction of churches as well as Christian writings.[562]

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[560] "*o vetustatis silentis obsoleta oblivio! invidentur ista nobis fama et ipsa extinguitur. chartulas blasphemus olim nam satelles abstulit, ne tenacibus libellis erudita saecula ordinem, tempus modumque passionis proditum dulcibus linguis per aures posterorum spargerent*." (*Peristephanon* 1.73-78, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 104-105).

[561] Éric Rebillard, *The Early Martyr Narratives: Neither Authentic Accounts nor Forgeries* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 32-34. As Clifford Ando observes, "In fact, earlier Christian Latin writers had universally assented to the truth value of imperial documents. … the acts of the Christian martyrs everywhere preserve, both implicitly and explicitly, the testimony of official proceedings, as well as testimonials to the accuracy of those proceedings." (Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* [University of California Press, 2000], 129). The essential role of compiling the *acta martyrum* is also evident in authors such as Eusebius, who explicitly describes these accounts as part of a "collection of martyrs" to be preserved for posterity (*Hist. eccl.* 5.1 and 5.4.3).

[562] Lactantius, *De mort. pers.* 13.1 y Eusebius, *His. eccl.* 8.2.4. As Luis Rivero García notes, the association with the popular account of the soldier-martyr Marcellus—especially well known in Hispania—has also led

While the date of their death, the length of their imprisonment, the tortures they endured, and their method of execution are all lost to history,[563] Prudentius preserves one detail that the oral memory of *Calagurris* appears not to have forgotten: "One honor at least is not hidden from us nor wanes through lapse of time, how the offerings they sent up flew off through the air to show, as they went shining on before, that the path to heaven was open."[564] This miracle occurs immediately before the deaths of Emeterius and Chelidonius and is witnessed by several bystanders as well as the executioner who, despite his astonishment, nevertheless carries out the sentence. By using the word *ictus* (*sed tamen peregit ictum*, 1.93) to describe the "final blow" that killed the martyrs, Prudentius once again implies death by the sword, likely decapitation.

The miracle that survived the "*blasphemus … satelles*"'s attempt to obliterate the martyrs' memory is presented as a vivid, visible testimony of their souls' ascent to heaven: "A ring (*anulus*), representing the faith of the one, was carried up in a cloud, while the other, as they tell, gave a handkerchief (*orarium*) as the pledge of his lips, and

by association to placing the execution of Emeterius and Chelidonius during the persecutions of the Tetrarchy (Prudencio, *Obras I,* trans. Luis Rivero García, 68). Prudentius was clearly familiar with the *passio* of Marcellus, since in *Peristephanon* 4 he devotes several lines (vv. 45–48) to Cassian of *Tingis*, supposedly a *notarius* present at Marcellus' trial in that city; *cf*. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxxvii-xxxix.

[563] "*hoc tamen solum vetusta subtrahunt silentia, iugibus longum catenis an capillum paverint, quo viros dolore tortor quave pompa ornaverit*. - Yet all that the silence of the old days takes from us is the knowledge whether their hair grew long with constant imprisonment, and what pains the tormentor laid on the heroes, or rather with what triumph he furnished them." (*Peristephanon* 1.79-81, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 104-105).

[564] "*ilia laus occulta non est nee senescit tempore, missa quod sursum per auras evolarunt munera, quae viam patere caeli praemicando ostenderent*." (*Peristephanon* 1.82-84, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 104-105).

they were caught up by the wind of heaven and passed into the depths of light."[565] Although this scene recalls the account of Eulalia's soul ascending in the form of a white dove after her execution, in the case of the *Calagurris* martyrs the tokens representing their spirits are released just before their deaths, not afterward. This inversion gives the miracle and its witnesses' vision complete narrative prominence, while the method of execution—unknown to Prudentius—remains in the background.

Although Prudentius claims that this miracle was witnessed by bystanders, the account appears to be largely his own literary elaboration, perhaps encouraged by the absence of concrete information about the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius. The lack of details gave him greater freedom to develop a more artistic version of their passion.[566] Prudentius implicitly acknowledges that, in the case of the martyrs of *Calagurris*, he is reconstructing the missing elements with far more creative license than in other hymns to Spanish martyrs, where fidelity to whatever tradition existed tends to play a greater role in shaping his reconfiguration of memory—a notable example being the hymn to Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius of *Tarraco*.

[565] "*illius fidem figurans nube fertur anulus, hie sui dat pignus oris, ut ferunt, orarium, quae superno rapta flatu lucis intrant intimum*." (*Peristephanon* 1.85-87, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 104-105).

[566] As Anne-Marie Palmer observes, *Peristephanon* 1 represents "the first written account of this martyrdom, and the poet can thus treat his subject matter more freely than if a well-known written version of the martyrdom already existed." In the absence of such a text, Prudentius not only produces "a more literary version of his chosen popular theme from the stylistic point of view," but also gains the freedom to introduce the central ideas he wishes to explore. Where a recognized version already circulated, Palmer notes, "the poet has none of this liberty" (Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 153). Nevertheless, as Michael Roberts observes, although the destruction of the martyrs' memory by the pagan enemy is a literary *topos*, "the emphasis it receives suggests that we are to view this poem as an exercise in the construction of a martyr account from the most minimal of resources" (Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 45).

1.1.3 Conclusion of the poem (vv. 94–120)

At this point, Prudentius shifts from symbolic tokens to the tangible and ongoing power of the martyrs' bodies in the city of *Calagurris*—and beyond. This final section reveals how their presence transforms the urban space, heals diseases, expels demons, and catalyzes festive devotion. The exaltation of the city and its inhabitants ultimately reinforces Prudentius' broader aim: to endow his native city with powerful martyrs, to root the authority and efficacy of their cult locally, and at the same time to project an imagined universalization of their veneration by presenting the martyrs of Calagurris as *patroni mundi*.

The concluding sequence starts with an allusion to the Vascones, whom Prudentius describes as *bruta quondam gentilitas*—brutish and adherent to pagan "superstition": "Believe ye now, ye Vascones, once dull pagans, how holy was the blood which cruel superstition sacrificed? Believe ye that the victims' spirits were taken back to God?"[567] The Vascones were the native inhabitants of the northern Iberian Peninsula, between the river Ebro and the Pyrenees.[568] They were previously stereotyped in Roman literature as rustic, peripheral communities on the margins of *Romanitas* by authors such as Strabo, Pliny, and Juvenal.[569]

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[567] "*iamne credis, bruta quondam Vasconum gentilitas, quam sacrum crudelis error immolarit sanguinem? credis in Deum relatos hostiarum spiritus*?" (*Peristephanon* 1.94-99, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107).

[568] Scott De Brestian, "Creation and Transformation of Identity in Northern Spain in Late Antiquity," in *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Ralph Mathisen W. and Danuta Shanzer (Routledge, 2011), 283.

[569] "I mean those whose boundary is the north side of Iberia, the Callaicians, the Asturians, and the Cantabrians as far as the Vasconians and Pyrenees … Their restiveness and wild nature does not result

This depiction of the Vascones as brutish and savage persisted as a literary *topos* into Late Antiquity.[570] This characterization was closely linked to the theme of pagan survival, which late antique authors often located in the northern regions of Hispania.[571] In Prudentius' hymn, the reference to the Vascones as uncivilized also functions within a broader narrative of alterity, where the urban is equated with the civilized and the rural

solely from warfare, but also because of their remoteness …" (Strabo, *Geog.* 3.3.8-9, Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. Duane W. Roller [Cambridge University Press, 2014], 167-168. Also Pliny, *HN* 3.3.26, 4.20; Juvenal, *Sat.* 15; among others (see Javier Andreu Pintado and Ángel A. Jordán Lorenzo, "Nuevas reflexiones en torno a las fuentes literarias sobre los Vascones en la Antigüedad," *Lvcentvm* 25 [2007]: 233–52, at 241).

[570] Paulinus of Nola, in a reply to an earlier letter from Ausonius preserved in the latter's correspondence, characterizes the Vascones as "unimproved and ignorant of laws" (*multa hominum studiis inculta, expertia legum*), affirming that "if one without stain of wickedness spends his life in a Vasconian glade, his character, unblemished as before, draws no infection from his host's barbarity" (Ausonius, *Epistles*, XXXI. 200, 212-215 [Loeb Classical Library 115, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, 1921], 138-139). Ausonius shares this same view of the Vascones. In the letter to which Paulinus is responding, he portrays Vasconian lands in similar terms: "Do Biscayan [refering to Vizcaya, in the Basque region] glades and sojourns in the snowy Pyrenees and doth forgetfulness of our clime work thus? What curse shall I not righteously call down on thee, O land of Spain?" Ausonius, *Epistles*, XXIX.50-53 (Loeb Classical Library 115), 116-117. See also Asier H. Aguirresarobe, "Power and Alterity: Depictions of the Vascones from Antiquity to the Middle Ages," *Social Science History* 48 (2024): 316-317.

[571] Later literary sources after Prudentius provide evidence that the persistence of paganism remained a concern for the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Iberian Peninsula well into the sixth century, particularly in rural areas of the northern regions. However, the sources attesting to these pagan survivals are primarily concentrated in the province of *Gallaecia*. Several canons of the Second Council of Braga (572)—specifically canons LXXI to LXXV—report the continued presence of pagan practices among Christians (J. Vives, *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos: Ed. preparada por José Vives con la colaboración de Tomás Marín Martínez y Gonzalo Martínez Díez*, ed. T.M. Martínez and G.M. Díez, España Cristiana. Textos, v. 1 [CSIC, Instituto Enrique Flórez, 1963], 27-28. A valuable example of the association between paganism and the rural sphere is found in the sermon of Saint Martin of Dumio (or Braga), *De correctione rusticorum* (ca. 574), addressed to Polemius, bishop of Astorga—another city in the north of the Iberian Peninsula—in which Martin urges him to enforce the canons of the aforementioned Second Council of Braga regarding the "correction" and reform of Priscillianist and pagan customs that appeared to prevail among the *rustici* Christians (*De correctione*, 8, 9, 16). See Jorge López Quiroga and Artemio A. Martínez Tejera, "El destino de los Templos paganos durante la Antigüedad Tardía," *AEspA* 79 (2006): 125–52, at 127; and Juan Antonio Jiménez Sánchez, "Aristocracias hispanas y pervivencias paganas durante la Antigüedad Tardía," in *Ex Baetica Romam: homenaje a José Remesal Rodríguez*, ed. Víctor Revilla Calvo et al. (Universidad de Barcelona, 2020), 1263-1268.

with the wild.[572] Within this paradigm, the comparison extends to align the civilized with Christianity and, in turn, with the urban space—demonstrated by the presence of the martyrs' relics in the city of *Calagurris*—while the pagan or non-Christian is equated with the "barbarian," evoking an image of the lands surrounding the countryside as untamed.[573] In doing so, the poet reinforces through this binary a definition of Christianity not merely as a belief but as a core element of civic identity, suggesting that the individual in Roman society could only achieve their full potential by being—or becoming—Christian.[574]

Recent archaeological findings suggest that the spread of Christianity in the Vascon territories occurred not as early—whether in literary references or archaeological evidence—than in the southern half of the Iberian Peninsula or in regions of greater administrative importance, such as *Tarraco*.[575]

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[572] In this hymn, Prudentius also mirrors Roman conceptions of Roman versus barbarian as emphasized in the celebration of the military *triumphus*; see Thomas S. Burns, *Rome and the Barbarians, 100 B.C. - A.D. 400* (The John Hopkins University Press, 2003); Ida Östenberg, *Staging the World: Spoils, Captives, and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession* (Oxford University Press, 2009); and Erich S. Gruen, "Did Romans Have an Ethnic Identity?," *Antichthon* 47 (2013): 1–17. Yet, despite continuing to stress this stereotype and the implicit social differences it entails in his allusion to the Vascones in *Peristephanon* 1, the Christian triumph celebrated by Prudentius in this hymn is universal in scope—that is, the Christian faith has the potential to transcend such differences and unify the worshipping community under devotion to the martyrs.

[573] This is also an established topos in Roman Christian literature, one that has led modern scholars to view Christianity as an almost exclusively urban movement (Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (HarperCollins, 2006). Other scholars, however, have challenged this "urban thesis" of Christian development; see Thomas Robinson, "The Ancient Village and the Rise of Christianity," in *The Village in Antiquity and the Rise of Early Christianity*, ed. Alan Cadwallader et al. (T&T Clark, 3-26).

[574] Juan José Sayas Abengochea, "Algunas consideraciones sobre la cristianización de los Vascones," *Príncipe de Viana* 46, no. 174 (1985): 45.

[575] On the relatively late establishment of Christianity in the Ebro region, see Urbano Espinosa et al., "*Civitates* y *territoria* en el Ebro Medio," 73-77. Espinosa notes that although Christian centers may have

Prudentius nevertheless capitalizes on the Vascones stereotype to craft a before-and-after narrative: from pagan ignorance to Christian enlightenment, mediated by the blood of the martyrs shed in the soil of *Calagurris*. The rhetorical contrast he constructs—from *bruta gentilitas* to witnessing the divine power of Emeterius and Chelidonius at their tomb—heightens the transformative potential of martyrdom and presents Christianity as both a civilizing and salvific force.[576] Just as earlier hymns celebrated cities like *Tarraco* and *Caesaraugusta* as ennobled by the relics of their martyrs, *Calagurris* is here not only elevated but also "redeemed" from its pagan past by the *cruore sancto,* the holy blood of Emeterius and Chelidonius.[577]

begun to emerge from the late fourth century—Calahorra being a case in point, based primarily on the testimony of Prudentius—even in the fifth century the phenomenon remained largely peripheral and situated outside the city walls. He emphasizes that "sólo podemos apuntar algún indicio general de que los espacios religiosos cristianos debieron de ir ganando presencia en el interior de las ciudades sobre todo durante los siglos VI y VII" ("we can only point to general indications that Christian religious spaces began to gain real presence inside urban centers above all during the sixth and seventh centuries," Espinosa et al., "*Civitates* y *territoria* en el Ebro Medio," 74). See also Koldobika Sáenz del Castillo Velasco, "Registro material, rituales funerarios y cristianización del territorio en la Vasconia de la Antigüedad Tardía," 7-28.

[576] In constructing the antagonistic binary between paganism and stupidity with which he appeals to the Vascones, Prudentius employs the term *gentilitas* to refer to the paganism they had once professed. A similar association between paganism and stupidity appears, for example, in *Contra Orationem Symmachi* 2.57-59: "*desine, si pudor est, gentilis ineptia, tandem res incorporeas simulatis fingere membris, desine terga hominis plumis obducere*." (Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 10-11). As Alan Cameron notes, such "imprecise and general collective nouns like *ethnē/gentes*" were common in Christian literature, which used them to imply "a separate race, a race of persecutors" (Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* [Oxford University Press, 2011], 20). Prudentius is consistent in his use of *gentilitas* to denote paganism in this sense, "as a separate race." Yet he also adds to his interpretation of paganism an association with "rusticity," "barbarism," and "stupidity," using the term *paganus* or its derivatives in combination with *brutus* (dull, stupid) or related synonyms. For instance, in *Contra Orationem Symmachi* 1.449-451: "*sint haec barbaricis gentilia numina pagis, quos penes omne sacrum est, quidquid formido tremendum suaserit*…" (Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 384-385); or in *Cathemerinon* 11.85–90: "*sed cum fideli spiritu concurrat ad praesepia pagana gens et quadrupes, sapiatque quod brutum fuit, negat patrum prosapia perosa praesentem Deum*." (Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 100-101).

[577] *Peristephanon* 1.8, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 10-11. While much scholarship has argued that Christians chose *paganus* because of its "derogatory" associations implying rusticity or barbarism, Alan Cameron rejects this etymology, though he concedes that "it is true that one or two Christian writers do exploit these associations," citing Orosius and Prudentius—both from Hispania—as examples. Yet, as he stresses, "Not

This transformation is underscored by the only account of demonic possession and exorcism in the entire *Peristephanon*—one of the distinctive powers that Prudentius attributes exclusively to the martyrs of *Calagurris*. "See how clearly here wild devils are subdued" (*cerne quam palam feroces hic domantur daemones*), he urges, directing the reader's gaze to the martyrs' tomb (*hic*).[578]

What follows is a vivid scene of demonic possession, described in violent and physical terms.[579] In Prudentius' narration, the *virtus* of the martyrs alone effects the exorcism (*his modis spurcum latronem martyrum virtus quatit*), subduing the demonic force in an equally overwhelming manner: "[The martyrs' *virtus*] constrain, torture, burn, enchain him, till the plunderer is so harried that he slips out of his victim's marrows and departs."[580] As Peter Brown observes, "In the healing of the possessed, the *praesentia* of

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only do these two or three texts (out of more than 600) not prove the 'rural' etymology; they do not even prove that contemporaries believed it rather than simply exploited it to make an offensive point." (Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*, 19 and n. 38 and 39). In Prudentius' case, it is very possible that he did not personally believe in the etymological connection between *paganus* and rusticity, but his use of associations linking paganism with rusticity, barbarism, and stupidity—in the passages cited and in his appeal to the Vascones—shows that, in his poetic construction of the martyrs of *Calagurris*, he did indeed, borrowing Cameron's words, exploit these associations "to make an offensive point" and to emphasize the salvific and redemptive character of the martyrs' sacrifice. On the soteriological and redemptive interpretation of martyrdom in *Peristephanon* 1 see also Kirsh, "Prudentius' *renovatio* of Ambrose," 220-221.

[578] *Peristephanon* 1.97, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107.

[579] "*tunc suo iam plenus hoste sistitur furens homo spumeas efflans salivas, cruda torquens lumina, expiandus quaestione non suorum criminum. audias, nec tortor adstat, eiulatus flebiles, scinditur per flagra corpus, nec flagellum cernitur, crescit et suspensus ipse vinculis latentibus.* - For then the maniac possessed by his enemy is presented here foaming at the mouth and rolling his blood-shot eyes, to be cleansed by the trial of sins which are not his own. You may hear woeful cries of agony though no torturer is here; his body is cut with lashes though you see no whip; he is slung on the rack and his limbs are stretched with cords invisible." (*Peristephanon* 1.100-105, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107).

[580] "*haec coercet, torquet, urit, haec catenas incutit; praedo vexatus relictis se medullis exuit. linquit inlaesam rapinam, faucibus siccis fugit …*" (*Peristephanon* 1.107-108, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107). On the theme of virtus in this hymn, see Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 141-146 and 151-153; Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 48-49. For an overview of *virtus* in Prudentius' other works, see Marc

the saint was held to be registered with unfailing accuracy, and their ideal power, their *potentia*, shown most fully and in the most reassuring manner."[581]

The subjugation of demons becomes the most irrefutable proof of the saints' power, staged as a melodramatic dialogue in the form of a judicial inquiry in which the roles of audience and judge are inverted from the martyrs' own trials. Prudentius participates in this tradition but stages it in his own theatrical manner: the exorcism becomes a demonstration of divine justice, an unmistakable sign of the martyrs' *praesentia* and *potentia* for the Christian reader of his hymns—who would recognize this evidence as entirely compelling.[582]

The inclusion of a vivid exorcism scene in this hymn also reinforces one of the *Peristephanon*'s programmatic aims and reveals an important dimension of Prudentius' personal devotion to the martyrs: the effort to fix their memory through the repeated re-enactment of their triumph at the tomb of Emeterius and Chelidonius. This repetition

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Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity: Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), esp. Ch. 1, 14-40.

[581] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 107.

[582] As Lucy Grig observes in her analysis of the exorcism scene in *Peristephanon* 1: "It is in the final section of the poem that Prudentius sets up the awesome *potentia* of the martyrs. It is here that he provides the 'proof ' of the holiness of their blood. … Here the *quaestio* is performed by the martyr; it is something cleansing, its function being to expiate crimes. Here we find combined both a punitive and restorative concept of the *quaestio*." (Lucy Grig, "Torture and Truth in Late Antique Martyrology," *Early Medieval Europe* 11, no. 4 [2002], 332-333; *cf.* Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 109). As Robert Wiśniewski notes, scenes of demonic expulsion at the shrine of the martyrs are a widespread motif in late antique hagiography, and one of their main functions of such scenes is to present the saint "as having a power inaccessible to other people, and the evil spirit *volens nolens* brings witness to it." (Robert Wiśniewski, "Demons in Early Latin Hagiography," in *Demons in Late Antiquity. Their Perception and Transformation in Different Literary Genres*, ed. Eva Elm and Nicole Hartmann [De Gruyter, 2019], 101).

allowed the faithful to relive—either physically at the shrine or imaginatively through the poem—the martyrs' victory and the triumph of divine will over evil. In this way, memory was perpetuated not only through the text itself but also through a physical and visual experience, enabling the community to witness martyrdom's triumph anew. Prudentius thus succeeds in connecting past and future, giving meaning in his own present to a Christian civic identity rooted in the cult of the martyrs in a world where Christians no longer died for their faith. The *damnatio memoriae* once imposed by persecutors is overturned, as the Christians of *Calagurris* continue to affirm the martyrs' presence through ongoing veneration and the ritualized repetition of the triumph of martyrdom at their tomb.[583]

Closely connected to the exorcism episode is Prudentius' description of the martyrs as healers. In lines 112–114, the poet shifts to depict the bodily restoration of the afflicted. The miracles in this scene follow a quasi-medical logic: specific symptoms are described—such as chills and the discoloration and swelling of the face, likely indicative of a tumor—and their resolution is narrated as cleansing and return to health: "I need not tell how bodies whitened by lasting diseases have been cleansed of them, cases in which a cold shivering shakes limbs that have lost their color, how in one a swelling leaves the

[583] As John Petruccione argues, the relationship between the martyr's passion and the act of exorcism is "fundamentally identical." Exorcism functions as a repeated ritual that mirrors the moment of the passion, insofar as the defeat of the demons reenacts, again and again, the same triumph that the martyrs achieved through their death (Petruccione, "The Persecutor's Envy," 329-333. *cf.* Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, Subsidia Hagiographica 20 (Société des Bollandistes, 1933), 39.

face, or in another the natural hue returns."[584] This passage is also unique in the *Peristephanon*, as Emeterius and Chelidonius are the only martyrs explicitly credited with curing physical illnesses. While the other hymns stress the martyrs' protective power and role as patrons, here Prudentius devotes almost clinical attention to diagnosis and cure, presenting the martyrs as intercessors capable of mediating between their supplicants and God in matters of bodily health.

In attributing such powers to the martyrs of *Calagurris*, Prudentius aligns Emeterius and Chelidonius with a broader Late Antique tradition of healing saints such as Martin of Tours and Felix of Nola.[585] In Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini*, Martin is described as a healer of the sick, though his cures took place during his lifetime.[586] Like Emeterius and Chelidonius, Martin's healing powers extended to the exorcism of demons: "And at the same time, a slave belonging to Tetradius, a man of proconsular rank, was possessed by a demon and was being tortured to a grievous death. … Thus,

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[584] "*quid loquar purgata longis alba morbis corpora*, *algidus cum decoloros horror artus concutit, hic tumor vultum relinquit, hie color verus redit?*" (*Peristephanon* 1.112-114, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107).

[585] The healing miracles attributed to Saint Felix are documented in the writings of Paulinus, who describes how the faithful who come to the saint's tomb receive cures when they ask for them, thereby demonstrating how the saint remains alive after death through the miracles he grants: "With the growth of faith Christ's grace overflows and grants them the living Felix as a healing gift. Felix lives on after his body's span, a saint presiding over his own bones … from the tomb they breathe out the life-giving fragrance of his triumphant soul, by which efficacious healing is granted to the sick who pray for it" (Paulinus of Nola, *Carm.* 18, *The Poems of St. Paulinus of Nola*, trans. P. G. Walsh (Newman Press, 1975), 120; Alex Dressler, *Selections from the Poems of Paulinus of Nola, Including the Correspondence with Ausonius. Introduction, Translation and Commentary* [Routledge, 2023], 226). Like Emeterius and Chelidonius, Felix of Nola also had the power to exorcise demons (*Carm*. 14.21-43); Dennis Trout E., *Paulinus of Nola. Life, Letters, and Poems* (University of California Press, 1999), 176.

[586] "As for the gift of working cures, that was so powerful in Martin that few if any came to him sick and did not immediately regain his health …" (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, 16.1, trans. Philip Burton, 112-113).

Martin laid his hand on the boy and drove out the impure spirit."[587] The miracle not only freed the suffering slave but also prompted Tetradius, who witnessed it, to convert to Christianity: "On seeing this, Tetradius believed in Jesus as Lord. He became a catechumen forthwith, and was baptized not long afterwards …"[588] This example suggests that Prudentius may have had a similar function in mind when attributing healing and demon-subduing powers to Emeterius and Chelidonius: a pagan who witnessed such a miracle at their tomb could, like Tetradius, be moved to embrace Christianity—especially in a region that, in Prudentius' rhetoric, was still inhabited by the *bruta Vasconum gentilitas*. The hymn's emphasis on the association between the salvific power of Emeterius and Chelidonius' blood, their relics, and the baptistery later placed in the site of their martyrdom further supports this idea: any new convert inspired by witnessing the martyrs' power at their tomb would find the baptistery of *Calagurris* close at hand.

As this analysis has shown, Prudentius carefully signifies the martyrs of *Calagurris* within the *Peristephanon*. Positioned at the very beginning of the collection, Hymn 1 signals their special importance for both the poet and his city. Programmatically, the hymn sets out the core features of martyr devotion as Prudentius conceived them, while distinguishing Emeterius and Chelidonius through the detailed narration of their exceptional powers. By aligning them with renowned confessors such as Martin of Tours

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[587] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, 17.1 – 4, trans. Philip Burton, 112-113.

[588] "*Quo viso Tetradius dominum Iesum credidit, statimque catechumenus factus nec multo post baptizatus est* …" (Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, 17. 4, trans. Philip Burton, 112-113).

and Felix of Nola, Prudentius inserts the martyrs of *Calagurris* into the broader late antique discourse of martyrial intercession as a tangible and bodily phenomenon, localized in the sacred space of their tomb.[589]

The theological weight of these miracles culminates in the customary *laus urbis* that closes the hymn (vv. 115–117). In this case, the final praise is notably brief compared to other hymns examined, since Prudentius had already delivered an extended compliment to the city as a sacred *locus* in the introduction. *Calagurris* was there elevated to the highest rank by virtue of possessing the relics of the martyrs, who have secured a place in the pantheon of Christian heroes by triumphing over the oblivion of time. Their achievement, Prudentius tells us, has been inscribed by Christ "in letters of gold" (*aureis quae Christus illic adnotavit litteris*).[590] This motif closes again with final praise, reinforcing the idea that the martyrs prevailed by surviving the *damnatio memoriae* imposed by the Roman authorities who condemned them. As a gift for their sacrifice "the Savior himself … consecrated the martyrs' bodies in our town."[591]

The shift from universal saviors to local benefactors shows Prudentius' vision of a sacred geography: the salvific function of the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius is neither abstract nor remote but inscribed in the land and people of Hispania, "where now they protect the folk who dwell by Ebro's waters" (*sospitant quae nunc colonos quos*

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[589] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 62, 65-66.

[590] *Peristephanon* 1.1-3, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 98-99.

[591] "*hoc bonum Salvator ipse … martyrum cum membra nostro consecravit oppido*." (*Peristephanon* 1.115-116, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107).

Hiberus alluit).[592] As in *Tarraco* or *Emerita Augusta*, the presence of martyrial tombs confers spiritual prestige on the city. In *Calagurris*, however, this effect is intensified by the poet's personal investment, which makes this town the center from which the martyrs' favor and protection radiate. Prudentius presents *Calagurris* not merely as a blessed city, exalted by divine favor.

As in other hymns, the composition closes with an invitation to the communal celebration of the martyrs and to the integration of their feast into the civic calendar: "let us hold festival this day and consecrate our joy" (*sit dies haec festa nobis, sit sacratum gaudium!*).[593] Here, however, the celebration is represented in gendered terms: "Stand now, ye mothers, and sing hymns for little ones given back to you; let wives' voices sound loud in gladness for the recovery of their husbands."[594] Mothers and wives are named as the principal actors in the festivities, singing hymns in gratitude for the salvation of their children and husbands. This gendered choreography of communal praise is also unparalleled elsewhere in the *Peristephanon*.

As seen in the hymns to Eulalia and Fructuosus, Prudentius' depiction of participants in martyrial celebrations normally encompasses all genders and ages. In *Peristephanon* 3 (Eulalia), he invokes *virgines* and *pueri* (girls and boys) offering garlands and baskets of flowers to the martyr; in Hymn 6 (Fructuosus), he calls on

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[592] *Peristephanon* 1.117, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 106-107.

[593] *Peristephanon* 1.120, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 107-108.

[594] "*state nunc, hymnite, matres, pro receptis parvulis, coniugum salute laeta vox maritarum strepat*." (*Peristephanon* 1.118-119, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 107-108).

"*heroes, virgines, pueri, senes, anulae*" (grown men, girls and boys, old men and women) to sing to the martyrs. By contrast, in the case of Emeterius and Chelidonius, Prudentius appears to appeal specifically to women as the protagonists of devotion, while men are portrayed primarily as the recipients of salvation (*coniugum salute laeta vox maritarum strepet*).

Anne-Marie Palmer proposes that the explicit reference to mothers and wives as the performers of supplicatory hymns for the restoration of their children and husbands may represent Prudentius' conception of an "antiphonal performance" underlying the hymns he describes.[595] In this reading, as Palmer notes, "the poet in effect assumes a speaking role within the poem: it is the poet as author of the poems concerned who organizes the performance and issues instructions."[596] That is, Prudentius addresses the congregation exhortatively in the second person plural, while detaching himself from the exhortation as a kind of "choir leader." In the case of *Peristephanon* 1, where he calls upon women to sing, Palmer's theory plausibly suggests that Prudentius envisioned an antiphonal structure for the hymn, sung or chanted alternately by two groups—in this case, mothers and wives.[597]

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[595] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 69.

[596] Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 79.

[597] We have precedents in both classical and Christian traditions of women's roles as protagonists in ritual song. See for example Livy, who reports that before the departure of the consuls Gaius Claudius Nero and Marcus Livius in 207 BCE and following a portent at the city of *Veii*, the pontiffs decreed that "three groups of nine young girls should sing a hymn in a procession through the city" (*History of Rome* 27.37.7; in *History of Rome, Volume VII: Books 26–27*, trans. J. C. Yardley. Loeb Classical Library 367 [Harvard University Press, 2020], 344-345). Macrobius likewise describes a ritual of supplication, decreed after consultation of the Sibylline Books: "…the books, when inspected, declared that supplication should be offered on the Capitoline and a special banquet should be offered to the gods, funded by contributions from the community;

What is plausible to be said is that Prudentius' direct address to women seems aimed at defining their "proper" role within the Christian civic community, in contrast—perhaps deliberately—to the Priscillianist model, where female participation in ascetic practices and scriptural gatherings was highly contested by orthodox Christianity.[598] Prudentius thus proposes an alternative model for integrating the female role into the Christian community, one complemented by the female ascetic archetypes he develops in the hymns to Eulalia and Agnes. The "new" civic identity permeated by Christianity is, in his view, defined within the unifying framework of devotion to the martyrs; communal cohesion is strengthened and renewed through the supplicatory songs of mothers and wives.[599] For women, active participation in martyrial devotion becomes the appropriate

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freedwomen, who wore long garments, were also to contribute for that purpose. So the ritual of supplication was performed, with a hymn sung by freeborn boys and freedmen's sons, and by girls of marriageable age with two living parents…" (*Saturnalia* 1.6.14; in *Saturnalia, Volume I: Books 1-2*, trans. Robert A. Kaster. Loeb Classical Library 510 [Harvard University Press, 2011], 58-59). In the Christian tradition, women are also explicitly represented as participants in ritual through the singing of hymns. For example Susan Ashbrook Harvey, in her analysis of the *Hymns on the Nativity* by Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–372 CE) and the Syriac Marian tradition, notes that "Ephrem's hymns were often sung by women's choirs, while the dialogue hymns were sung antiphonally apparently by both male and female choirs" ("On Mary's Voice: Gendered Words in Syriac Marian Tradition," in *The Cultural Turn in Late Ancient Studies. Gender, Asceticism, and Historiography*, ed. Dale B. Martin and Patricia Cox Miller [Duke University Press, 2005], 63). It is even possible that Prudentius envisioned not only an antiphonal performance but also a specific physical arrangement within the shrine of Emeterius and Chelidonius: women occupying a particular space where they sang hymns of supplication, while husbands and children occupied another space within the sanctuary to receive the martyrs' healing. Nonetheless, beyond the singularity of Prudentius' appeal only to mothers and wives in *Peristephanon* 1—not paralleled elsewhere in the text—none of these theories can be confirmed with certainty. We have no secure parallels, nor do we know for sure whether Prudentius intended his hymns to be sung or performed in liturgical settings.

[598] Probably a stereotype constructed by sources hostile to Priscillianism, yet one that appears to have been a real concern in the churches of Spain; see Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic. Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (University of California Press, 1995), esp. 25-46; Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila. The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Clarendon Press, 1976), 14, 20, 37, 56.

[599] On the continuity and transformation of domestic values under Christianity, see Geoffrey Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity. The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (Routledge, 2000); Elizabeth A. Clark, "Antifamilial Tendencies in Ancient Christianity," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 3 (1995): 356–80; Kristina Sessa, *Daily Life in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

means of assimilating and belonging to the civic identity of *Calagurris*. This final image seals the sanctification of the city by its martyrs with an affective and gendered ritual scene.

The final verses of Hymn 1 operate as a powerful synthesis of the poem's central themes: the triumph of the martyrs despite efforts to obliterate their memory; their ongoing intercession through healing and exorcism; the civic transformation of *Calagurris* into a *urbs Christiana sancta*; and its communal liturgical celebration. Prudentius closes with a theologically reflective yet deeply local vision of Christianity—rooted in the soil of the city and animated by the potent remains of two otherwise unknown soldier-martyrs.

This emphasis on physical presence and locality raises the question of whether such a cult actually existed and what material traces it may have left in Calahorra. The next section shifts from Prudentius' poetic vision to the archaeological record, assessing how far the surviving evidence supports or challenges his account.

2. Shaping a cult for *Calagurris*: Poetic Construction of a Sacred Space

2.1 The Cult of Emeterius and Chelidonius in Calahorra: Historical Plausibility and Archaeological Silence

Although Prudentius provides both the earliest and the only late antique account of the martyrdom of Emeterius and Chelidonius, his depiction in *Peristephanon* 8 raises some questions about the possible material reality of their cult in fourth- and fifth-century *Calagurris*. In this hymn, the poet evokes a baptistery constructed on the very site of the

martyrs' execution and implies the existence of an established local devotion, suggesting a physical infrastructure of cult. Yet despite this literary testimony and Prudentius' reference to an oral tradition linking the martyrs to the foundations of a Christian Calahorra, archaeological excavations in the city have produced no definitive evidence for a late antique martyrial sanctuary or for a baptistery associated with Emeterius and Chelidonius.

Unlike Tarragona or Mérida—where archaeological research has complemented, expanded, or clarified Prudentius' text—Calahorra lacks a comparable material record, at least for the period of Late Antiquity. Numerous excavations in the city have brought to light remains dating primarily to the early Roman Empire (first–second centuries CE), which attest to an urban development pattern consistent with other Roman cities in the Iberian Peninsula.[600] Monumental activity in *Calagurris* appears to decline from the third

[600] Few remains survive of *Calagurris*' Roman public buildings, but archaeological excavations have identified the probable location of the forum (Urbano Espinosa, *Calagurris Iulia* [Colegio Oficial de Aparejadores de La Rioja, Excmo. Ayuntamiento de Calahorra], 1984), 112; Javier Andreu Pintado, "Algunas consideraciones sobre las ciudades romanas del territorio Vascón y su proceso de monumentalización," *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie II, Historia Antigua* 17–18 [2004-2005]: 275), and the remains of public baths (J.A. Tirado Martínez, "Arqueología rrbana de Calahorra. El Mosaico Romano de la Calle La Enramada," *Estrato: Revista riojana de arqueología*, 7 [1996]: 35-37; Andrés Hurtado, "Seguimientos arqueológicos en varios puntos del casco antiguo de la ciudad de Calahorra," *Estrato: Revista riojana de arqueología*, 9 [1998]: 36-42; Cinca Martínez et al., *Historia de Calahorra*, 97-98), Both structures are located in Calahorra's present-day historic center, believed to have been the acropolis of the Roman city, where remains of the early imperial wall have also been found (Cinca Martínez et al., *Historia de Calahorra*, 100-101). Of the usual entertainment buildings, only traces of the circus—situated in the northwestern sector of the city—have been discovered (J. Núñez Marcén, "La arquitectura pública de época romana en el País Vasco y sus áreas geográficas limítrofes. Una aproximación crítica," *Iberia* 1 [1998]: 135). This area has also yielded evidence of artisanal production (José Luis Cinca Martínez and P. Iguácel de la Cruz, et al. "El alfar romano de *Calagurris* (Calahorra, La Rioja): Nuevos Datos," *Kalakorikos* 14, [2009]: 178-195) and a necropolis later dismantled to build the circus (Espinosa, 1984: 120-124). Most of these constructions date to the first century CE, under the Julio-Claudian and Flavian dynasties, when many newly founded or recently promoted *municipia*, including *Calagurris*, underwent

century onwards, marked by the spoliation and reuse of building materials from public structures such as the circus, as well as ceramic finds deposited in the city's sewer system, suggesting a reduced capacity for public evergetism to maintain such infrastructure regularly.[601] Despite this evidence of gradual urban decline, *Calagurris* remained a site of relative importance in the middle Ebro valley during the fourth and fifth centuries. It likely continued to serve, as it had in the previous centuries, as an occasional administrative center for the *legati iuridici* of the former province of *Hispania Citerior*.[602]

For the fourth and fifth centuries, the broader archaeological silence in the middle Ebro valley is striking. With the exception of *Vareia* (modern Logroño, c. 50 km from Calahorra), the rest of the region's cities—including *Calagurris*—offer little data beyond scattered literary references that might allow us to reconstruct their fortunes in the last centuries of Roman rule.[603] In any case, the absence of archaeological remains makes it

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processes of monumentalization (Adrián Calonge Miranda, "*Calagurris Iulia*. Ciudad y territorio en los procesos de monumentalización de época Altoimperial," *Cuadernos de arqueología de la Universidad de Navarra* 29 [2021]: 129-156.

[601] Espinosa et al., "*Civitates* y *territoria* en el Ebro Medio," 50.

[602] Subordinate to the provincial governor, the *legati iuridici* assisted in judicial administration. As Urbano Espinosa notes, two *legati iuridici* of the province of *Hispania Citerior* are attested as patrons of *Calagurris*: Q. Glitius Atilius Agrícola, under Domitian (between 85 and 88 CE), and T. Iulius Maximus Manlianus, under Trajan (100–103 CE). A detailed study of these officials and their patronage ties with Calahorra is provided in Urbano Espinosa, "*Iuridici* de la Hispania Citerior y *patroni* en *Calagurris*," *Gerión* 1 (1984): 305-325.

[603] Urbano Espinosa attributes the scarcity of evidence largely to "the uninterrupted superimposition of habitation from Antiquity to the present." Urbano Espinosa, "El siglo V en el valle del Ebro: Arqueología e Historia," *Antigüedad y Cristianismo* VIII (1991): 276. See also from the same author, *Vareia. Enclave romano en el valle del Ebro* (Exposición arqueológica VAREIA, 2004).

difficult to measure the impact of Christianity in *Calagurris* apart from the written sources—returning us once again to Prudentius's hymns as the main, and almost the only, testimony for the Christian presence in the city.[604]

The literary record attests, in a fragmentary way, to bishops and other ecclesiastical representatives in *Calagurris* during the fourth and fifth centuries. José Vives translates the reference to a participant at the Council of Elvira (c. 305–315 CE)—a certain Eucharius (*Eucharius Municipio*)—as Eucharius of Calahorra.[605] However, as Iñaki Martín Viso points out, this identification is highly doubtful. There is no other parallel for *municipio* being rendered as *Calagurris* and given that the episcopal sees of all other participants are explicitly named, it would be surprising for *Calagurris* to have been omitted if the city had sent a representative from its episcopal seat to the council.[606]

After this mention, the sources fall silent until the reference to Bishop Valerian (*Valerianus*) in *Peristephanon* 11. The fact that Prudentius addresses the hymn specifically to him, together with his request at the end of the poem that the bishop include the feast of Hippolytus "among your yearly festivals," suggest that Valerian was

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[604] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 98.

[605] Vives, *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romanos*, 1.

[606] Iñaki Martín Viso suggests that *Municipio* may have been the name of another town within the *conventus Caesaraugustanus*—one that, unusually, bore that designation—or that Eucharius was a presbyter from *Illiberis* (Elvira, present-day Granada) attending the council, which would explain why only the term "*Municipio*" is mentioned along his name. Iñaki Martín Viso, "Organización Episcopal y Poder Entre La Antigüedad Tardía y El Medievo (Siglos V-XI): Las Sedes de Calahorra, Oca y Osma," *Iberia* 2 (1999): 153, n. 8.

likely bishop of Prudentius' own city, *Calagurris*—an inference based also on the personal tone of the address.[607]

No further bishops are securely documented for *Calagurris*—or the city as an episcopal see—until the second half of the fifth century, when Silvanus appears as bishop (c. 465 CE) in a correspondence between Ascanius, bishop of *Tarraco*, and Pope Hilarius, concerning episcopal ordinations carried out by Silvanus that Ascanius deemed illegitimate.[608] This isolated reference suggests both the instability and the relatively

[607] The title of Hymn 11 refers to Valerian as *episcopus*: "*AD VALERIANUM EPISCOPUM DE PASSIONE HIPPOLYTTI BEATISSIMI MARTYRIS*." The epistolary character of the hymn is reinforced by the direct address to Valerian in its opening line: "*Innumeros cineres sanctorum Romula in urbe vidimus, o Christi Valeriane sacer*." (*Peristephanon* 11.1-2, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 304). Yet, as Anne Marie Palmer has noted, the titles of the hymns may have "arose from later, inept distinctions made by copyists/editors of the text, simply on the basis of a superficial appraisal of the nature of the contents" (Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 76). Thus, the title alone cannot serve as conclusive evidence of Valerian's episcopal office. Within the hymn itself, however, Prudentius addresses him as *Christi sacer* ("priest of Christ," 11.1), *venerande sacerdos* ("venerable priest," 11.179; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 316), *sancte magister* ("holy teacher," 11.233; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 320), and *optime papa* ("most honorable father," 11.127; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 312). As John Moorhead notes, while the term *papa* is commonly associated with the bishop of Rome, "it could be applied to other bishops as well" ("Papa as Bishop of Rome," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 36, no. 3 [1985], 337). We find parallels of bishops outside Rome being addressed as *papa* in Sidonius Apollinaris' correspondence, who makes frequent use of the term for fellow bishops of Gaul—for example, in a letter to Principius of Soissons: "*SIDONIUS DOMINO PAPAE PRINCIPIO SALUTEM. Iam diu nobis, papa venerabilis, etsi necdum vester vultus aspectus*…" (*Letters*, VIII.14; trans. W. B. Anderson, LCL 420, 484–85). Sidonius himself is also addressed as *papa*, as in the salutation of a letter sent by Claudianus Mamertus, priest of Vienne: "*Claudianus Sidonio Papae Salutem*" (*Letters*, IV.2; trans. W. B. Anderson, LCL 420, 64–65). Further evidence for Valerian's episcopal role may be found in Prudentius' prayer for Valerian's "flock" at the close of the hymn: "*orantem Christus audiat omnipotens; sic tibi de pleno lupus excludatur ovili, agna nec ulla tuum capta gregem minuat*. - So may Christ the almighty hear your prayers for the people whose life has been committed to your care; so may your sheepfold be full and the wolf shut out from it and your flock never diminished by his seizing a lamb." (*Peristephanon* 11.240–42; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 320–21). Prudentius also urges Valerian to include the feast of Hippolytus among the city's annual festivals, which we may assume would be the prerogative of the bishop: "*sancte magister, annua festa inter dinumerare velim*." (*Peristephanon* 11.233–34; Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 320). Taken together with the possible existence of a baptistery in *Calagurris* at the site of Emeterius and Chelidonius' martyrdom, these references strengthen the hypothesis that Valerian was indeed serving as bishop of the city in Prudentius' time.

[608] Ramón Barenas Alonso, "Calahorra y el cisma de la *Tarraconense* occidental," *Kalakorikos* 21 (2016): 155–86.

recent establishment of the *Calagurris* see, as well as the gradual penetration of Christianity outside the major metropolitan centers of Hispania.

Thus, *Peristephanon* 8, dedicated to the baptistery of *Calagurris*, together with the data from Hymn 1 (and scattered references in Hymns 4 and 11), remain the main sources supporting the possible existence of a martyr cult in *Calagurris* during Prudentius' lifetime. Of these, Hymn 8 is regarded in modern scholarship as the most substantial evidence for the presence of a place of martyrial cult in the city between the mid- and late fourth century.[609]

Given the scarcity of archaeological data, the possibility of a baptistery existing before or during Prudentius' lifetime should be consider primarily in relation to the two most relevant locations for commemorating the martyrs: their burial place and/or their place of their death. In Hymn 8 of the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius situates the baptistery on the place where the martyrs shed their blood: "On a Spot where Martyrs suffered at *Calagurris*, now a Baptistery … Here two heroes that were slain for the Lord's name won scarlet martyrdom by their noble death, and here too mercy flows in the limpid fount and washes away old stains in its new stream."[610] Prudentius' testimony suggests the

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[609] According to Ramón Barenas Alonso, the Prudentius' own verses suggest that between the fourth and fifth centuries a basilica or *martyrium* existed in *Calagurris* where the relics of these soldier-martyrs were venerated. A baptistery—later associated with this basilica and celebrated by Prudentius in *Peristephanon* 8—was also likely present, though no remains have been found. Ramón Barenas Alonso, "La nueva religión: el cristianismo," *Historia de Calahorra*, 146. See also Pedro Castillo Maldonado, "Prudencio y los mártires calagurritanos," *Kalakorikos* 5 (2000): 74; 149; Eliseo Sáinz Ripa, "Primer cristianismo en La Rioja," in *VII Semana de Estudios Medievales: Nájera, 29 de Julio al 2 de Agosto de 1996*, ed. José Ignacio de la Iglesia Duarte (Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 1997), 346.

[610] "*DE LOCO IN QVO MARTYRES PASSI SVNT NVNC BAPTISTERIVM EST CALAGORRA … hic duo purpureum, Domini pro nomine caesi, martyrium pulchra morte tulere viri. hic etiam liquido fluit indulgentia fonte ac veteres maculas diluit amne novo*." (*Peristephanon* 8. 3-6, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II,

intersection of these two *loci*—the site of Emeterius and Chelidonius' execution and their place of burial—yet it remains unclear whether he envisions them as distinct or unified. Two main scenarios can therefore be outlined.

The first possibility is that the sites of martyrdom and burial were separate, located in different parts of *Calagurris*. Such an arrangement could have generated two distinct cult spaces: one associated with the place of execution, the other with the saints' tomb. This model finds parallels in Hispania. As discussed in Chapter 3, the case of *Tarraco* provides a good example of this model: its patron martyrs were buried in the Francolí necropolis outside the city walls, where a basilica was constructed in the early fifth century, focusing the cult on the burial place. Later, in the sixth century, a second basilica was erected in the amphitheater to mark the site of martyrdom.[611] If *Calagurris* followed a similar pattern, the baptistery mentioned by Prudentius might have been linked either to the site of execution or to the burial place.

220-221). As Michael Roberts observes, both hymns 1 and 8 of the *Peristephanon* emphasize the fixed spatial and temporal location of sites connected to the cult of the saints in *Calagurris* (Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 12). Throughout these hymns, Prudentius repeatedly uses the spatial marker hic ("here") to refer to the contemporary site of cult—e.g. *hic duo purpureum …*, *hic etiam liquido fluit …*—or later, "*ipse loci est dominus laterum cui vulnere utroque hinc cruor effusus fluxit et inde latex, ibitis hinc, ut quisque potest, per vulnera Christi evectus gladiis alter et alter aquis*" (*Peristephanon* 8.15-18). This present-tense reference contrasts with the past-time marker *tunc* ("then"), which situates the martyrdom in its historical moment—e.g., "*forte tunc atrox secundos Istrahelis posteros ductor aulae mundialis ire ad aram iusserat, idolis litare nigris, esse Christi defugas* - It happened at that time that the cruel head of the government of the world had commanded the second successors of …" (*Peristephanon* 1.40-42, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 100-103)—thereby linking the physical site of present devotion (*hic*) with the blood shed in the past time at the same location.

[611] See the discussion in Chapter 3, pp. 163-179.

The second possibility is that the place of martyrdom and burial were concentrated in a single area, creating a unified cult space that encompassed the martyrs' tomb—or a *martyrium*, church or basilica—together with the baptistery described in *Peristephanon* 8. Although *Tarraco* provides precedent for the two-site model, *Calagurris* may have developed differently. Calahorra is the only city to which he dedicates two hymns, one of which highlights an architectural element tied to the martyrs' cult. His repeated use of emphatic spatial markers—*hic locus* ("this place")—may suggest that Prudentius envisioned a single, integrated cult site, where martyrdom, burial, and baptism would converge.

As for the possible burial site, comparative evidence from *Tarraco* and *Emerita* indicates that burials were typically located outside the city walls, often in pre-existing necropolis areas. A Roman necropolis has indeed been identified to the northwest of *Calagurris*, adjacent to the circus.[612] However, the evidence of Hymns 1 and 8 may point instead to the southeast region of the city, adjacent to the River Cidacos (**Figure 18**). Although no archaeological remains have been securely linked to a martyrial shrine or baptistery there, Prudentius' topographical cues leave open the possibility of a cultic place in that area.

[612] See n. 595.

Figure 18. Map of fourth century *Calagurris*. The area where the baptistery of Emeterius and Chelidonius might be located is marked as "Ar" (El Arenal)

José Luis Cinca Martínez et al. *Historia de Calahorra*, 94

The first clue for this identification lies in Prudentius' account of the martyrs' place of death. In Hymn 1, he writes: "*hic locus dignus tenendis ossibus visus Deo, qui beatorum pudicus esset hospes corporum. hic calentes hausit undas caede tinctus duplici, inlitas cruore sancto nunc harenas incolae confrequentant* …" The Latin term he uses for the location—*harenas*—is translated by Thompson as "ground," but can also mean

"sands."[613] The word *harenas* could be taken literally, as sandy ground, or metaphorically, as "the sands" of a gladiatorial spectacle, as in the case of the martyrs of *Tarraco*. Since an amphitheater has not yet been identified archaeologically in *Calagurris*, this latter reading remains possible but less certain.[614]

A second indication comes from the location of the baptistery, which the title of Hymn 8 situates "On a Spot where Martyrs suffered at *Calagurris*." Although a baptistery did not strictly require proximity to a natural water source, such a location would have been a preferable place.[615] In the proposed southeastern area of Calahorra, the River Cidacos runs directly alongside the city walls. References in Hymns 1 and 8 to "running water" can be read both as a metaphor for the martyrs' blood and as a possible allusion to the river itself, suggesting that Prudentius may be situating the place of martyrdom near the Cidacos.[616]

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[613] "This spot has seemed to God worthy to keep their bones, pure enough to be host to their blessed bodies. It drank in the warm stream when it was wetted by the slaughter of the twain, and now its people throng to visit the ground that was colored with their holy blood …" (*Peristephanon* 1.5-9 Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 98-99.

[614] The hypothesis of a possible amphitheater in Calahorra arises from a pottery fragment bearing the inscription -LADIATO-, probably part of GLADIATOR (Amigos de la Historia de Calahorra, "Hallazgos Varios," in *Arqueología de Calahorra: Miscelánea* [Amigos de la Historia de Calahorra, 1991], 257-262. However, the inscription has not been analyzed beyond its discovery, and no archaeological excavation in the city has uncovered any structure or remains that could be attributed to such a building. For now, we may assume that *Calagurris* lacked an amphitheater, although scholars such as Antonino González Blanco, support its existence (Antonino González Blanco, "El Anfiteatro de Calahorra," *Kalakorikos* 3 [1998]: 193–96).

[615] See the discussion about baptism and martyrdom in Chapter 2, pp. 109-113.

[616] "*haurit terra sacros aut fonte aut sanguine rores exundatque suo iugiter uda Deo. … ibitis hinc, ut quisque potest, per vulnera Christi evectus gladiis alter et alter aquis*. - The earth drinks in sacred drops of water or of blood and is ever wet and streaming to the glory of her God. … When you pass from here you will have been raised up through Christ's wounds, each as he is able, one by the sword, another by water." (*Peristephanon* 8.13-14 and 17-18, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 220-221).

On this interpretation, *harenas* would evoke not the arena of an amphitheater but the sandy ground adjacent to the river. Following Urbano Espinosa's hypothesis, the baptistery could have been located in the lower part of the city, specifically in the southwest corner of the present cathedral, between it and the River Cidacos—an area still known today as *El Arenal*.[617] Thus, the modern toponym (*Arenal*, "sandy place") would align directly with Prudentius' use of *harenas* to designate the site of martyrdom.

In his dedication to the baptistery, Prudentius does not specify the type of structure—if any—that housed the martyrs' remains. Pedro Castillo Maldonado has proposed a fourth- or fifth-century architectural complex comprising a *martyrium*—to enshrine the relics—and a separate baptistery, to which a basilica would later be added, following the established models of *Tarraco* and *Emerita Augusta*.[618] Urbano Espinosa, by contrast, suggests a baptistery that incorporated an individualized space for the relics, either within the baptistery itself or in an adjoining structure (*cella memoriae*). In Espinosa's reconstruction, the Cathedral of Santa María in Calahorra would later have been deliberately constructed over this earlier martyrial complex.[619]

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[617] Espinosa, *Calagurris Iulia*, 223. Reinforcing this hypothesis, later the Mozarabic Liturgy (ca. 8th–12th centuries) locates the custody of the relics of Emeterius and Chelidonius in the Cathedral of Calahorra, situated outside the city walls on the banks of the River Cidacos: "… *quorum corpora eternis titulis vivacis memorie consecrata Calagorritana custodit Ecclesia.*" (Marius Férotin, *Le Liber Mozarabicus Sacramentorum et Les Manuscrits Mozarabes*, col.145 [Librairie de Firmin -Didot et Cie, 1912], 146); *cf.* Ramón Barenas Alonso, *Calahorra Cristiana. De centro de culto martirial a sede episcopal (Siglos III-VIII)* (Amigos de la Historia de Calahorra, 2017), 62.

[618] Pedro Castillo Maldonado, "Prudencio y los mártires calagurritanos," 74.

[619] Pedro Castillo Maldonado, "Prudencio y los mártires calagurritanos," 74. Cristina Godoy Fernández follows Urbano Espinosa's hypothesis, while also suggesting the possibility that two martyrial cult sites may have existed: one in the forum, where the martyrdom likely took place, and another outside the city, adjacent to the Cidacos River. See Cristina Godoy Fernández, "*Calagurris*, centro de culto martirial de los

Archaeological exploration of the riverside area remains limited, since the cathedral now occupies the site (**Figure 19**). In 1996, repair works along the north wall of the cathedral prompted a small excavation, which uncovered a medieval necropolis with most burials dating between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.[620] Beneath these slab-stone graves lay the remains of a cobble wall—cut by the cathedral wall—that predated both the medieval necropolis and the Visigothic remains found nearby.

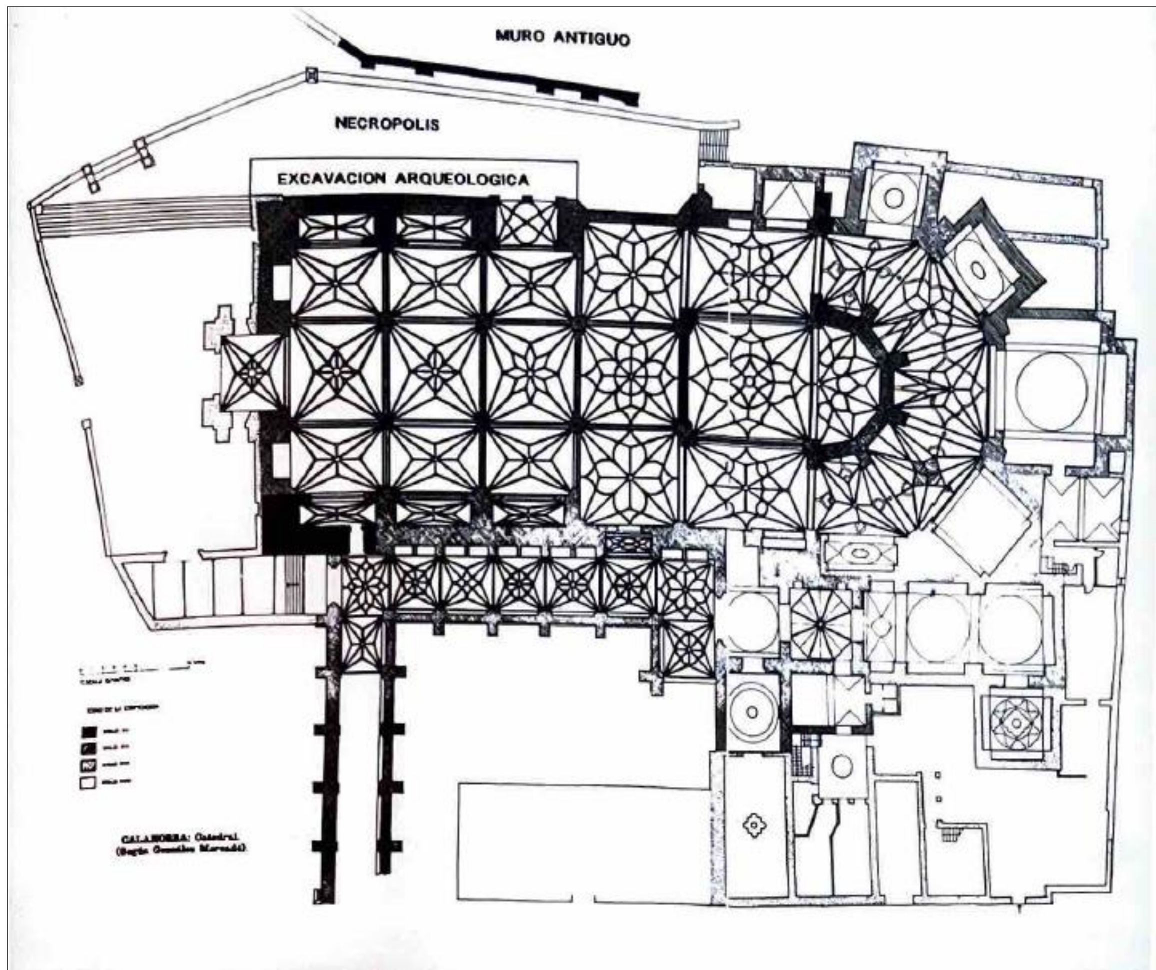
Next to this wall, and below the upper level of medieval burials, excavators uncovered part of a tank, cistern, or pool constructed in masonry and coated with plaster. The surviving portion suggests a rectangular structure with plaster-finished corners (**Figure 19b**). The preserved fragment measures 110 × 60 cm on the inside, pointing to an original size of roughly 110 × 120 cm. The structure shows signs of patching and repairs, suggesting a prolonged use; its function appears to have been water related. The excavators remarked that its form resembles early Christian baptismal pools used for immersion, though its dating remains uncertain and no secure connection can be established with the baptistery praised by Prudentius in *Peristephanon* 8.[621]

Santos Emeterio y Celedonio. Observaciones sobre la restitución arquitectónica de la *memoria martyrum* a partir de Prudencio," *Kalakorikos* 5 (2000): 93; and Cristina Godoy Fernández, *Arqueología y Liturgia. Iglesias Hispánicas (Siglos IV al VIII)* (Universidad de Barcelona, 1995)., 22-24 and 51-54.

[620] Javier Ceniceros Herreros, "Excavación arqueológica en el muro norte de la catedral," *Estrato: Revista riojana de arqueología: Revista Riojana de Arqueología*, 8 (1997): 56.

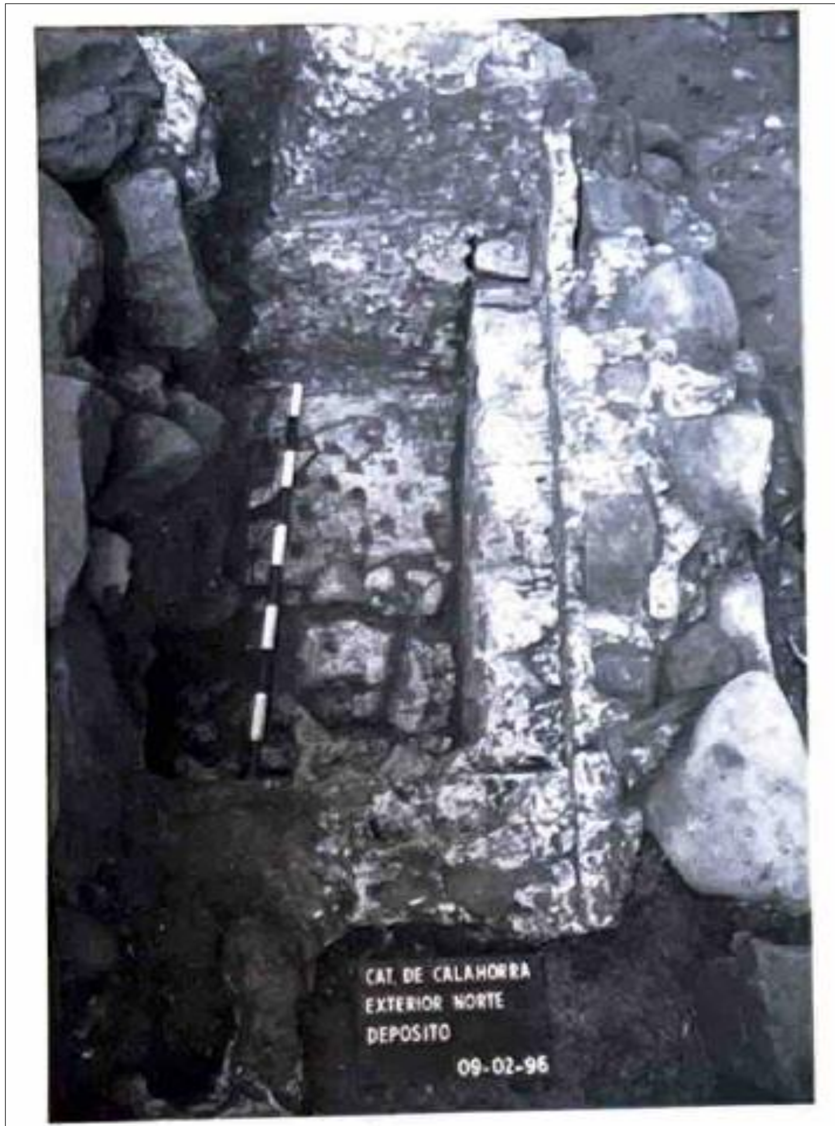
[621] Ceniceros Herreros, "Excavación arqueológica en el muro norte de la catedral," 54.

Figure 19. Archaeological excavation in the north wall of the Cathedral of St. Mary, Calahorra, Spain (marked as “Excavación arqueológica”)



Javier Ceniceros Herreros, “Excavación arqueológica en el muro norte de la catedral de Calahorra,” 47.

Figure 19b. Traces of rectangular structure (possibly a pool), excavation of the north wall of the Cathedral of St. Mary, Calahorra, Spain



Javier Ceniceros Herreros, “Excavación arqueológica en el muro norte de la catedral,” 54.

Although these remains are inconclusive—especially since the rest of the cathedral floor has not been excavated—they nonetheless lend some support to the hypothesis that the present cathedral site may have been the earliest focal point for the cult of Emeterius and Chelidonius in Calahorra.

In the absence of further corroborating evidence, Prudentius' testimony remains our only testimony for any martyrial architectural complex prior or contemporary to the composition of his hymn. Pedro Castillo Maldonado interprets the poet's reference to oral tradition in Hymn 1 as an indication that the baptistery represented the officialization of a pre-existing collective memory of the martyrs within the Christian community of *Calagurris*. He considers the alternative—that Prudentius engaged in an *inventio reliquiae*—less likely in this case, concluding that "popular worship must be pushed back in time, so that the veneration paid to the two martyrs would be closer to their presumed chronology, consequently, confirming the real or historical existence of our two protagonists."[622]

Yet, even if Prudentius' role leaned more toward imaginative reconstruction, this would not rule out the possibility that, during his lifetime, plans were already underway to construct a baptistery on the site he designates as the place of martyrdom, or that such a structure was erected posthumously on that *locus sanctus*.[623] This scenario seems

[622] "El culto popular ha de retrotraerse en el tiempo, de modo que la veneración tributada los dos mártires sería más próxima a su presunta cronología y que, en consecuencia, ratifica la existencia real o histórica de nuestros dos protagonistas" (Pedro Castillo Maldonado, "Prudencio y los mártires calagurritanos," 75).

[623] Local tradition and records from the archives of the Cathedral and Diocese of Calahorra (all postdating the sixteenth century) have associated the alleged location of the prison of Emeterius and Chelidonius with the present-day chapel of Santos Mártires, also known as the "Casa Santa." Archaeological excavations at

plausible when we consider the nature of *Peristephanon* 8 as an "epigraphic poem," whose style and brevity suggest that it may have been intended to be an inscription in connection with the baptistery's consecration.[624] It is therefore possible that Prudentius composed the Hymn 8 for a project already envisioned during his lifetime—perhaps encouraged by his relationship with Bishop Valerian—and that he died shortly thereafter. If so, his poetic work—whether grounded in memory, imagination, or both—would have been instrumental in securing the martyrs' place within the collective memory and Christian civic identity of *Calagurris*.

This interplay of poetic embellishment, adaptation of established cultic models, and local monumentalization is central to understanding how Prudentius presents Emeterius and Chelidonius. In the following section, I propose the examination of

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the site uncovered remains attributable to the Roman period, though without specific dating. The excavators noted a "conscious preservation" of the octagonal plan of the first chapel (built in 1712) in the construction of a second (1815), yet no evidence supports the idea that the earlier chapel replicated an original Roman prison layout. Given the likely short imprisonment of Emeterius and Chelidonius, and the improbability of a building purposedly built to function as a prison in Roman Calahorra, any room in any building of the city could have served as space for imprisonment. As the excavators emphasize, none of the excavated wall structures allows identification of the plan, building type, or function of the space surrounding Casa Santa in the Roman period—nor do they provide evidence for a connetion with a prison for the martyrs. See Pepa Castillo et al., "Informe de la intervención arqueológica en la Ermita de los Santos Mártires o 'Casa Santa' (Calahorra, La Rioja," *Iberia* 2 (1999): 47–86; and Asunción Antoñanzas et al., "La ermita de los Santos Mártires o Casa Santa (Calahorra, La Rioja): ¿Una cárcel romana?," *Kalakorikos* 5 (2000): 13–28.

[624] Similarly to the *Tituli Historiarum* or *Dittochaeon*, a set of 48 biblical epigrams complementary to Prudentius' work but, as noted in the *Praefatio*, not intended as part of any edited collection of his other poems. These verses appear to have functioned as inscriptions or captions explaining visual scenes—such as murals, mosaics, relief sculptures, or manuscript miniatures. As Luis Rivero García observes, no certainty exists about the nature of these visual representations or the specific function of Prudentius' biblical epigrams (Prudencio, *Obras*, I, trans. Luis Rivero García, 82-83). On Prudentius' *Tituli Historiarum*, see also Christian Kaesser, "Text, Text, and Image in Prudentius' Tituli Historiarum," in *Text Und Bild*, ed. Victoria Zimmerl-Panagl and Dorothea Weber (Hg.) (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 151-166; and Francesco Lubian, "*Tituli* for Illiterates? The (Sub)Genre of *Tituli Historiarum* between *Ekphrasis*, Iconography and *Catechesis*," in *Culture and Literature in Latin Late Antiquity: Continuities and Discontinuities*, ed. Francesca Romana Moretti et al. (Turnhout, 2015), 53-68.

Peristephanon 1 and 8 as paradigmatic and programmatic examples of how the poet constructs and codifies the key markers of martyrial cult in Hispania.

2.2 Markers of Martyrial Cult in the *Peristephanon*: Hymns 1 and 8 as Paradigmatic Examples for the Martyrs of Hispania

The poetic representation of Emeterius and Chelidonius in *Peristephanon* 1 and 8 offers not only a narrative of martyrdom but also a carefully articulated model of its commemoration. While Prudentius acknowledges that concrete information about these martyrs had largely been lost—and since the possibility of a pre-existing oral tradition in *Calagurris* cannot be ruled out—his hymns elaborate upon this fragile memory to construct a framework for martyr cult that includes both devotional and ritual elements. In this sense, the representation of Emeterius and Chelidonius functions programmatically within the *Peristephanon*, setting out the essential elements that, in Prudentius' view, should define martyrial devotion in Hispania and the Christian civic identity associated with it.

As the preceding chapters have shown, this framework is shaped by multiple influences: Ambrose of Milan's hagiographical models, biblical allusions, classical literary forms inherited from Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, or the monumental and epigraphic strategies of Damasus' martyrial topography in Rome.[625] Yet, beyond these literary debts, I argue that Prudentius' cultic model also draws on traditions from established Iberian martyr cults, integrating their *topoi*, ritual practices, and spatial markers. The cults of

[625] Martha Malamud, "Making A Virtue of Perversity: The Poetry of Prudentius," *Ramus* 19, no. 1 (1990): 65 and n.3.

Fructuosus in Tarragona, Eulalia in Mérida, and Vincent in Valencia/Zaragoza provided familiar precedents for rooting the martyrs' presence in the urban landscape, organizing their commemoration, and embedding them in local identity.

Through his strategic adaptation of the previously noted influences, Prudentius seems to pursue two complementary goals: lending legitimacy to a newly articulated local cult by aligning it with prestigious precedents, and institutionalizing its presence through poetic authority, which shapes the collective memory of his audience and embeds the cult within the sacred geography of Hispania.

In Hymn 1, Prudentius articulates nine foundational markers that, in his view, are essential for a fully developed martyr cult: the physical presence of relics within the city; post-mortem or tomb-associated miracles; pilgrimage to the holy site; validation of contact or object relics; praise of the city as the cult's setting; communal and public celebration; and incorporation of the feast into the liturgical calendar. To these we may add two contextual markers—not indispensable for the existence of a cult but present in some hymns to reinforce or localize its impact: a popular and domestic dimension of the cult, and the association between baptism and martyrdom. The following sections examine each marker in turn as it relates to Hymn 1.

2.2.1 Foundational markers of cult

1. Physical presence of the martyrs

The first and most important marker of a martyr cult in Prudentius is the *praesentia* of the saints: the bodies of Emeterius and Chelidonius are physically present in *Calagurris*, just as the remains of other martyrs are located in their respective cities of martyrdom. The tomb is not presented as a mere commemorative *locus*, but as an active agent of divine intervention: *hoc bonum Salvator ipse, quo fruamur, praestitit, martyrum cum membra nostro consecravit oppido, sospitant quae nunc colonos quos Hiberus alluit* (*Peristephanon* 1.115–117). This principle—protection and sanctification through corporeal relics—also appears in Prudentius' accounts of Eulalia in Mérida and Fructuosus in Tarragona, where burial *in situ* legitimizes and sustains the worshipping community.[626]

In Hymn 5, dedicated to Vincent, Prudentius reinforces this emphasis by narrating the failure of the *damnatio memoriae* imposed by the infamous governor Datianus,[627]

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[626] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 1-22; Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Cornell University Press, 2009), 95-100; Marianne Sághy, "Martyr Cult and Collective Identity in Fourth-Century Rome," in *Identity and Alterity in Hagiography and the Cult of Saints*, ed. Ana Marinkovic and Trpimir Vedriš (Hagiotheca, 2010), 17-34.

[627] The historicity of this figure has sometimes been questioned, as he is often seen as part of the literary reconstruction typical of Spanish martyr passions. Epigraphic evidence, however, records two individuals named *Publius Datianus* in Hispania during the Tetrarchy: one as governor of Lusitania (c. 283–293 CE) and another as governor of *Hispania Citerior* (c. 305), possibly the same person (A.H M. Jones et al., *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire. Volume I A.D. 260-395* [Cambridge University Press, 1971], 244). As Pedro Juan Galán notes, doubts about Datianus' existence stem chiefly from his role as the archetypal embodiment of cruelty, fury, and evil in martyr passions of Spain—not only in Prudentius' hymns but also in Visigothic passions, many of which rework his narratives—so much that a sub-genre of passions "*sub Datiano praeside*" emerged, with Publius Datianus being the martyrs' nemesis in all of them (Pedro Juan Galán, "Lugares comunes en siete pasiones hispanas *sub Datiano praeside*," in *Héroes, Semidioses y Daimones*, ed. Jaime Alvar et al. [Ediciones Clásicas, 1992], 389).

who attempted to prevent future veneration by destroying Vincent's body: first exposing it naked to wild beasts, then casting it into the sea in a sack.[628] Guided by divine will, the body returned to the shore to remain with its community.[629] Only after the end of the persecutions was it properly buried, becoming the center of gathering and veneration: "But later, when their enemies were subdued and peace given back to the righteous, an altar ensured to the blessed bones the rest that was their due; for laid under the sanctuary, buried at the foot of the altar, they drink in the aura of the heavenly offering."[630]

This episode underscores the centrality of the martyr's body and tomb for the development of the cult: until Vincent received proper burial, no veneration arose around his grave. For all the Spanish martyrs more generally, the tomb—housing the martyr's physical remains—emerges as the primary and indispensable relic, enabling the activation of the cult at the local level and potentially extending its reach beyond the city's boundaries.

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[628] "Forthwith I shall utterly destroy even his bones, so that his corpse shall have no grave for the common herd to venerate and set on it a martyr's epitaph. - *iam nunc et ossa extinxero, ne sit sepulcrum funeris, quod plebs gregalis excolat titulumque figat martyris.' sic frendit, et corpus sacrum profanus (a dirum nefas!) nudum negato tegmine exponit inter carices*." *Peristephanon* 5.389-396, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 192-193.

[629] "*cernunt stupentes navitae, vectam remenso marmore, labi retrorsum leniter aestu secundo et flamine*." (*Peristephanon* 5.493-496, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 198-199).

[630] "*sed mox subactis hostibus, iam pace iustis reddita, altar quietem debitam, praestat beatis ossibus; subiecta nam sacrario imamque ad aram condita caelestis auram muneris perfusa subter hauriunt*." (*Peristephanon* 5. 513-520, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 198-201).

2. Post-mortem and tomb-related miracles

The second cult marker in Prudentius is the occurrence of miracles after the martyrs' death and/or at their tombs, serving as proof of their *potentia*. Such miracles not only authenticate the site as a space of spiritual intercession, but also define each saint's specific powers, often linked to the protection and patronage of the city in a pattern inherited from the old bonds of the *patronus–cliens* relationship.[631]

In Hymn 1, Prudentius associates Emeterius and Chelidonius with distinctive attributes—exorcising demons and curing illnesses—that he does not ascribe to other Spanish martyrs such as Fructuosus or Eulalia. This may be because those traditions were already firmly established, and they were crystallized as such in Prudentius' hymns. By contrast, in shaping his portrayal of the *Calagurris* martyrs, Prudentius seems to draw on elements from his hymns to non-Spanish martyrs, especially Lawrence (*Peristephanon* 2) and Cassian of Imola (*Peristephanon* 9), where individual and direct supplication to the saint forms the core of cultic interaction.[632]

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[631] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 80. On broader conceptions of Christian patronage in Late Antiquity, see Maijastina Kahlos, "Christianisation and Late Antique Patronage. Conflicts and Everyday Nuisances," in *Reconceiving Religious Conflict New Views from the Formative Centuries of Christianity*, ed. Wendy Mayer and Chris L. de Wet (Routledge, 2018), 182-208; Kate Cooper, "Poverty, Obligation, and Inheritance: Roman Heiresses and the Varieties of Senatorial Christianity in Fifth-Century Rome," in *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900*, ed. Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165-189.

[632] According to Pierre-Yves Fux, the hymn to Lawrence belongs to the first phase of composition of the *Peristephanon*, prior to Prudentius' journey to Rome (Pierre-Yves Fux, *Les Sept Passions de Prudence (Peristephanon 2.5.9.11-14). Introduction Générale et Commentaire* [Editions Universitaries Fribourg, 2003], 43). Anne-Marie Palmer likewise argues that the hymns dedicated to Spanish martyrs most likely date to this early phase (Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs*, 24; also Jill Harries, "Prudentius and Theodosius," *Latomus* 43, no. 1 [1984]: 74). By contrast, the hymn to Cassian belongs to the final phase of composition, after the trip to Rome, together with hymns 11 and 12 (Rivero García, *La Poesía de Prudencio*, 158).

In Lawrence's case, Prudentius presents himself as a *poeta rusticus* who confesses sins and begs to be freed from worldly bonds, depicting a martyr who grants all requests: "What each one asks in prayer, he has happily granted him."[633] Cassian, by contrast, grants petitions selectively, fulfilling only "those that he finds acceptable."[634] In both instances, the petitions occur outside the framework of collective celebration and instead take the form of an intimate, almost conversational exchange between the petitioner and the saint, in which the saint listens and responds.

These models resonate in the case of *Calagurris*, where locals and visitors alike arrive with prayers, words, and offerings,[635] and always depart joyful—though only when their petitions are just: "No man here in making his requests has offered sincerely prayer on prayer in vain; from here the petitioner returns happy, with his tears dried, and conscious that all his righteous requests have been granted."[636]

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[633] "*quod quisque supplex postulat, fert inpetratum prospere; poscunt, iocantur, indicant, et tristis haud ullus redit … audi poetam rusticum cordis fatentem crimina et facta prodentem sua …* - What each one asks in prayer, he has happily granted him. They ask, and are gay, and tell, and none returns home sorrowful … Listen to a country poet as he acknowledges the sins of his heart and confesses his deeds … " (*Peristephanon* 2.565-568 and 574-576, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 142-143).

[634] "The martyr, you may be sure, hears with all favor every prayer, and fulfils those that he finds acceptable … I [Prudentius] reviewed all my private distresses, and murmured my desires and fears, with a prayer for the home I had left behind me (Spain) … I was heard - *audit, crede, preces martyr prosperrimus omnes, ratasque reddit quas videt probabiles … tunc arcana mei percenseo cuncta laboris, tunc quod petebam, quod timebam murmuro, et post terga domum dubia sub sorte relictam …audiorr*" (*Peristephanon* 9.97-98, 101-103 and 105, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 228-229).

[635] "*incolae confrequentant obsecrantes voce, votis, munere*" (*Peristephanon* 9.8-9, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 98-99).

[636] "*nemo puras hic rogando frustra congessit preces; laetus hinc tersis revertit supplicator fletibus omne quod iustum poposcit inpetratum sentiens*" (*Peristephanon* 1.13-15, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 98-99).

The combination of generosity and discernment attributed to the martyrs of *Calagurris*, together with Prudentius' detailed prescription for the proper way to request favors, carries a pedagogical tone. It suggests that the poet was not merely transmitting a possibly existing tradition but actively shaping the contours of devotion to Emeterius and Chelidonius, perhaps giving fuller form to practices or beliefs that circulated locally in less defined ways.

3. Pilgrimage to martyrial cult sites

Another important marker within the set of practices that, in Prudentius' view, ought to shape Christian devotion to the martyrs is pilgrimage, which operates on two levels. On the one hand, the idea of a literary journey, which permeates the entire *Peristephanon*: idealized and detailed descriptions of sanctuaries allow readers who cannot travel physically to "visit" these sites through the text. Cillian O'Hogan has described this as a "travel by proxy,"[637] while Paula Hershkowitz has related it to *visual culture*.[638] Through poetic yet precise depictions of cultic sites—such as those in *Peristephanon* 4, which maps both Spanish and non-Spanish martyrs by naming them alongside their respective cities and emulates Damasus' work in Rome[639]—Prudentius offers a solution to participate in devotion for the faithful unable to undertake a sacred journey, using topographical *ekphraseis* as a literary substitute.

[637] Cillian O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 19.

[638] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 123-159 esp. 124.

[639] Marianne Sághy, "*Scinditur in partes populus*: Pope Damasus and the Martyrs of Rome," *Early Medieval Europe* 9, no. 3 (n.d.): 273–87, esp. 273-279.

On the other hand, pilgrimage in Prudentius also aims to be physical. In Hymn 1, he presents *Calagurris* as a destination for the devotees "from all over the world" and attributes to its martyrs a catalogue of intercessory powers that justify the journey. The poet seems to speak here from his own lived experience as a pilgrim: his well-known visit to Rome, along with probable travels to *Tarraco* and *Emerita Augusta* during his provincial appointments, may have reinforce his authority in inviting others to travel.

As Martin Grünewald notes, simply leaving one's everyday environment is enough for a journey to qualify as pilgrimage.[640] Thus, even though sanctuaries such as those in *Tarraco* or *Emerita Augusta* are sometimes excluded from the pilgrimage category due to their regional scope, a visitor from *Tarraco* to the *Calagurris*' baptistery might be considered just as much a foreign pilgrim as one from Rome. Beyond promoting *Calagurris* as a renowned cult center, Prudentius' emphasis here seems to return to inclusion and accessibility. Drawing on his own experience as a pilgrim, he equates visiting Spanish shrines with visiting the tombs of the martyrs at Rome or the Holy Land, constructing a vision of pilgrimage that encourages accessibility and reduces logistical and financial barriers. In this framework, holy places are not limited to the most prestigious pilgrimage centers but include any site blessed by martyrs and saints.[641] For

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[640] "If the journey is religiously motivated, what journey length can be defined as a pilgrimage? Anthropological models assume that leaving the everyday environment is sufficient for the definition" (Martin Grünewald, "Roman Healing Pilgrimage North of the Alps," in *Excavating Pilgrimage Archaeological Approaches to Sacred Travel and Movement in the Ancient World*, ed. Troels Myrup Kristensen and Wiebke Friese [Routledge, 2017], 130).

[641] As Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony notes in her analysis of Paulinus of Périgueux's late fifth-century reinterpretation of the *Life of Martin of Tours*: "The author (Paulinus) agrees that the places in which Jesus was born, suffered, and was resurrected are holy; but he says that holy sites are also to be found in other places in the world that they were blessed with the presence of martyrs and righteous men" (Brouria Bitton-

Prudentius, when traveling to Rome or Jerusalem is difficult, Spanish tombs could offer a legitimate and competitive substitute, while also fostering local pride in the presence of relics within one's own community.

4. Contact relics and object relics

In Hymn 1, Prudentius appears to validate contact relics as a marker of cult, though his primary emphasis always falls on the martyr's bodily remains and tomb, conceived as the primary and indivisible relic. In line with the *Passio Fructuosi*, he rejects the division of bodies (*Peristephanon* 6.130-141) yet admits contact relics as a legitimate complement. The clearest example appears in the hymn to Vincent, where the faithful, before his death, kiss and lick his wounds and soak cloths in his blood to keep them "as a holy safeguard for their descendants."[642] Unlike his stance toward Fructuosus' ashes, here Prudentius does not criticize but rather seems to approve the private preservation of such objects, already imbued with divine power through contact with the martyr.[643] In the case of Emeterius and Chelidonius, the ring and the handkerchief—

Ashkelay, *Encountering the Sacred The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* [University of California Press, 2005], 197).

[642] "From the whole town a throng of the faithful might be seen gathering, making a soft bed furnished with supports, and wiping dry the bleeding wounds. One covers with kisses the double cuts made by the claws, another eagerly licks the red gore on the body. Many wet a linen garment with the drops of blood, to lay it up at home as a holy safeguard for their descendants. - *coire toto ex oppido turbam fidelem cerneres, mollire praefultum torum, siccare cruda vulnera. ille ungularum duplices sulcos pererrat osculis, hic purpurantem corporis gaudet cruorem lambere. Plerique vestem linteam stillante tingunt sanguine, tutamen ut sacrum suis domi reservent posteris*." (*Peristephanon* 5.333-344, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 188-189).

[643] In *Peristephanon* 5, Prudentius not only explores the idea of contact relics but also, in an exceptional move, departs from his usual practice of assigning a martyr the patronage of the city in which they were executed. Vincent, though martyred near *Saguntum*, had served as deacon in *Caesaraugusta*—the capital of the *conventus* to which *Calagurris* belonged. For this reason, Prudentius appears to feel a personal connection to Vincent, claiming him for his own region and extending the saint's patronage and protection

poetic symbols of their ascension—also function as venerable objects in the absence of verifiable bodily remains, perhaps even anticipating the possibility of their miraculous discovery.[644]

The preference for corporeal relics is linked not only to their sanctity, but also to their exclusivity and to the local pride that fuels pilgrimage. As Sabine Feist notes, referring to sixth-century examples in which body relics were requested from the papacy in Rome for the consecration of new churches, "Rome did not give away its saints in the form of body relics, even if the highest dignitaries requested this valuable and scarce resource. Nevertheless… there was no reason to prevent the distribution of contact relics."[645] Because corporeal relics were exclusive, they reinforced the control of cult impresarios over the prestige and popularity of martyrial tombs and the power relations they implied.

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to the *conventus Caesaraugustanus*: "*noster est, quamvis procul hinc in urbe passus ignota* … - Ours he is, though as it befell was in a strange city far from here …" (*Peristephanon* 5.162-163, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 188-189). As Len Krisak and Joseph Pucci observe, "The idea, for example, that Vincent's followers dipped their garments into the blood of the saint may well go to a local Christian practice superimposed on Vincent's story by Prudentius in order to strengthen the saint's connection to Saragossa" (Len Krisak and Joseph Pucci, *Prudentius' Crown of Martyrs: Liber Peristephanon* [Taylor & Francis, 2019], 12).

[644] Both objects became integral to the iconography of Emeterius and Chelidonius in most depictions—whether textual or in other media—such as the Retablo Mayor (altarpiece) of the Cathedral of Calahorra, erected near the site where, according to Prudentius, the soldiers were executed and a baptistery was later built. The martyrs' imagery was generally fixed around two identifying elements: their decapitated heads, often carried in their own hands, and the ring and handkerchief as distinctive attributes. In some representations, the palm of martyrdom is also included, symbolizing Christian victory and triumph over paganism. See José C. Miralles Maldonado, "Naturaleza y difusión del culto a los mártires calagurritanos Emeterio y Celedonio," *Kalakorikos* 5 (2000): 229-231.

[645] Sabine Feist, "Relics as Resource: Dependency from Holy Remains," in *Control, Coercion and Constraint. The Role of Religion in Overcoming and Creating Structures Od Dependency*, ed. W. Kinzig and B. Loose (De Gruyter, 2024), 130.

Prudentius, however, does not mention any authority overseeing relics in the case of Vincent, presenting them instead as a communal and devotional initiative. In Hymn 1 too, it seems clear that the poet understood the potential of such relics to spread the cult of the martyrs of *Calagurris*. As observed by Robert Wiśniewski: "While those pilgrims could hardly obtain body parts, they certainly could bring home some non-corporeal relics."[646]

5. The city as the stage for martyrial devotion

This marker, analyzed in detail elsewhere in the dissertation, can be summarized here in its key components as presented in the *Peristephanon* as part of Prudentius' vision for the martyr cult in Hispania. All hymns dedicated to Spanish martyrs display a dual structure: the protagonists are, on one hand, the martyrs and their narratives of suffering as heroic examples for Christendom, and, on the other, the *laus urbis* or praise of the cities that hold their remains, granting the urban setting a narrative weight equal to that of the martyrial story. This combination is evident in the hymns to Fructuosus, Eulalia, and Emeterius and Chelidonius, as well as in Hymn 8, centered on the *Calagurris* baptistery.

[646] Robert Wiśniewski, *The Beginnings of the Cult of Relics* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 167. Wiśniewski provides numerous examples of Christian figures contemporary with Prudentius acknowledging the efficacy of contact relics, ranging from cloths to stones, chain fragments, and even martyrs' blood (discussed in detail in chapter 9, "Dividing Relics," 159–179). For a broader perspective on the sanctification of objects linked specifically to healing sanctuaries—such as that of Emeterius and Chelidonius—see Béatrice Caseau, "Ordinary Objects in Christian Healing Sanctuaries," in *Objects in Context, Objects in Use. Material Spatiality in Late Antiquity*, ed. Luke Lavan et al. (Brill, 2007), 625-656.

To this urban map of Spanish sanctity, we may also add *Valentia* and *Saguntum*, linked to the cult of Vincent, and the cities listed in Hymn 4.[647]

In Prudentius' view, the city serves as guardian of the bodies—an extension of the tomb itself—which is the central focus of the cult. Its prestige and sanctity derive directly from the presence of the martyrs, who in return offer protection from danger, patronage, and favors manifesting as miracles, healings, or apparitions.

The city is also the framework in which Christian civic identity is articulated, understood as the configuration and negotiation of individual and collective identities in the public sphere. This identity is structured around the martyr cult as a unifying common element. In Prudentius' conception, the city becomes the place where the Christian civic body becomes visible, both in religious spaces and in the secular realm. Finally, the city constitutes the natural stage for martyrial liturgy: tombs, whether inside or outside the walls, function as focal points of communal and civic gathering for the entire population.

6. Public, communal, and inclusive liturgical celebration of the martyrs

In the *Peristephanon*, this marker appears with a series of recurring features, though adapted by Prudentius to each hymn and martyr. The principal feast is always the *dies natalis*, with no reference to other celebrations—except in the case of Fructuosus,

[647] The Spanish cities elevated to holy status by Prudentius in Hymn 4—according to the territorial division established after Diocletian—include, in addition to those already mentioned, *Caesaraugusta* (Zaragoza), *Gerunda* (Girona), *Barcino* (Barcelona), *Complutum* (Alcalá de Henares), *Corduba* (Córdoba), and *Tingis* (Tangier). Most belong to the province of *Tarraconensis*—five in total, including *Tarraco* and *Calagurris*—the province of his birthplace and probably the one most familiar to him. From the rest of Hispania, two cities from the *Carthaginiensis* (*Complutum* and *Valentia/Saguntum*) are named, along with one from *Lusitania* (*Emerita*), one from *Baetica* (*Corduba*), and one from *Mauretania Tingitana* (*Tingis*). To these, the same hymn adds two Gallic cities (*Narbo* and *Arelas*) and one African city (*Carthago*).

Augurius, and Eulogius, where Prudentius mentions the practice of *statio* (Wednesday and Friday fasting), taken almost verbatim from the *Passio Fructuosi*. This suggests that the *statio* may have been part of the cultic activities associated with Fructuosus in the city.[648]

Prudentius depicts the martyrs' festivals as communal and inclusive occasions. In Fructuosus, men and women of all ages are summoned;[649] in Eulalia, the emphasis is on youth, though the whole community participates;[650] in Vincent, the festival day is described with a collective "we";[651] and in Emeterius and Chelidonius, women (*matres et maritae*) take the lead, yet men and children (*coniuges et parvuli*) are included as recipients of prayers.[652] Unlike the hymns dedicated to Roman martyrs—where a bishop

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[648] Along with the *dies natalis* others festivities of various kinds may be added, such as the commemoration of specific miracles of the saint—either during life or post-mortem—or festivals marking the anniversary of the discovery or translation of a martyr's relics. For the first, we have an example in Gregory of Tours, who recounts a miracle in the church of Saint Lawrence in Milan (San Lorenzo Maggiore): a deacon accidentally broke a glass chalice, placed it upon the altar, and after a night of prayer the saint restored it intact. The event prompted the institution of an annual festival in Lawrence's honor, with the chalice suspended over the altar: "The chalice was hung over the altar. The bishop of the city celebrated the festival then and directed that in the future a festival be celebrated most piously every year. - *Tunc pontifex loci, suspensum super altare calicem, et tunc agens, et in posterum per singulos annos devotissime instituit celebrari*" (Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*, 45. *Translated with an Introduction by Raymond Van Dam* [Liverpool University Press, 1988], 44). For the second, we have a sermon delivered by Augustine of Hippo to commemorate the anniversary of the "discovery" of the relics of Gervasius and Protasius in Milan by Ambrose—celebrating not their translation but the day they were found (*Sermon* 286, *PL* 38, 1299-1300); *cf.* Robert Wiśniewski, *Cult of Saints*, E02323 http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02323 - (last accessed August 2, 2025).

[649] *Peristephanon* 6.148-150.

[650] *Peristephanon* 3.206-207.

[651] "*si rite sollemnem diem veneramur ore et pectore, si sub tuorum gaudio vestigiorum sternimur, paulisper huc inlabere, Christi favorem deferens* … - If we duly reverence the day of thy festival with lips and heart, if we bow down before thy relics rejoicing in them, come down to us here for a little while bringing the favor of Christ …" (*Peristephanon* 5.206-207, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 202-203).

[652] *Peristephanon* 1.118-120.

or priest presides over the celebrations—in Hispania there is no mention of direct clerical mediation; here, Prudentius depicts the community itself occupying the center of the celebration.[653] Inclusivity is further expressed in the offerings: prayers, songs, and hymns (Fructuosus; Emeterius and Chelidonius) and baskets of "purple violets and blood-red crocuses" (*purpureas violas sanguineosque crocos*) for Eulalia. These are accessible to all, requiring neither wealth nor social status.[654]

Prudentius' presentation of these festivals resonates with Peter Brown's description of martyr festivals as *spectacula*, in which "the believers were drawn by the deeper imaginative logic of the occasion to participate in the glory of the martyrs rather than to imitate them. They gathered so as to share, for a time of high celebration, in the original, death-defying moment of 'glory' associated with God's triumph in the saint."[655]

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[653] For example, in Hymn 11 dedicated to Hippolytus: "*fronte sub adversa gradibus sublime tribunal tollitur, antistes praedicat unde Deum*. - Facing you, at the top of some steps rises the pulpit from which the priest (*antistes*) proclaims God" (*Peristephanon* 11.225-226, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 320-321).

[654] Jaclyn Maxwell notes that the ascetic movement led Late Antique ecclesiastical leaders to promote more egalitarian modes of thought inspired by the apostolic ideal, with the cult of martyrs and saints—often humble or illiterate figures—acting as a catalyst for this change. Nevertheless, as she observes, "None of these writers completely renounced social hierarchy on earth," reflecting the tension between a religion that originated among the lower classes and a later church leadership drawn from the upper strata of Roman society (Jaclyn Maxwell, *Simplicity and Humility in Late Antique Christian Thought. Elites and the Challenges of Apostolic Life* [Cambridge University Press, 2021], 158-163).

[655] Peter Brown, "Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity," *Early Medieval Europe* 9, no. 1 (2000): 9. In this article, the author analyzes the contrast between the imitation and the celebration of martyrs in writers such as Caesarius of Arles, Gregory of Tours, and, above all, Augustine, who sought in Hippo and Carthage to ensure that festivals were centered on sober imitation, eliminating "exuberant" practices such as kissing, bowing, or the mingling of sexes during night vigils ("Enjoying the Saints," 3–5). Prudentius, although mentioned by Brown in the article, depicts in the *Peristephanon* celebrations without exhortatory sermons by bishops and including precisely these practices, even dramatizing his own devotion at the tomb of Cassian with gestures such as weeping, kneeling, and "warming the altar with his lips" (*pareo, conplector tumulum, lacrimas quoque fundo, altar tepescit ore, saxum pectore*, *Peristephanon* 9.99-100).

For Prudentius, the festival is a moment of active participation in the martyr's triumph, not merely of imitation. The narrative of martyrdom gives the model to follow; the liturgical celebration, by contrast, provides the communal space of joy, where the faithful could draw near to martyrs distant in time and place through drama and festive communion.

7. Use of liturgical calendar

This marker is closely connected to the previous one and appears in the *Peristephanon* as the integration of the martyrs' *dies natalis* into the city's annual cycle, even when Prudentius does not always indicate the precise date. The idealized description of the festivities, rather than exact dating, are sufficient to encourage participation and presupposes an annual commemoration that binds the saint's memory into the community's shared temporal rhythms.

The clearest testimony in this regard appears in Hymn 11 to Hippolytus, where Prudentius asks Bishop Valerian(us) of *Calagurris* to include his feast in the local calendar, giving the Roman date and linking it to those allegedly already established of Cyprian, Eulalia, and Emeterius–Chelidonius.[656] In doing so, Prudentius acknowledges

[656] "If I remember right, beauteous Rome honors this martyr [Hippolytus] on the Ides of August (the 13th), as she herself names the day in the old fashion, and I should like you too, holy teacher, to count it among your yearly festivals. … Along with the festivals of Cyprian and Chelidonius and Eulalia let this day too come round for you. - *Idibus Augusti mensis, ut ipsa vocat prisco more diem, quem te quoque, sancte magister, annua festa inter dinumerare velim. … inter sollemnes Cypriani vel Chelidoni Eulaliaeque dies currat et iste tibi*." (*Peristephanon* 9.232-234 and 237-238, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 320-321). Although it could be interpreted that Prudentius is urging the addition of the feasts of Cyprian, Eulalia, and the martyrs of *Calagurris* alongside that of Hippolytus, it is more likely that these were already part of the calendar. The cult of Cyprian was widely diffused in the western Roman world and was among the most popular in Prudentius' time (Jonathan P. Conant, "Europe and the African Cult of Saints, circa 350–900: An Essay in Mediterranean Communications," *Speculum* 85 [2010]: 1-46, esp. 37-38 analyzing the spread of Cyprian's

episcopal authority over the liturgical calendar and underscores its value as a central gesture of cultic recognition.[657]

For Prudentius, these festivals are not static memorials but annual reenactments of the martyr's triumph, renewing the collective experience. As Lucy Grig observes, Christianization was built and reinforced through a calendar "replete with martyrs," whose ritual repetition functioned as *anamnesis*: hymns, offerings, prayers, and liturgical gestures that brought the past into the present.[658]

Annual commemoration also creates a liminal space in which—just as in the Roman feast of Hippolytus—men and women, children and the elderly, locals and foreigners, rich and poor, gather together, with social boundaries temporarily blurred without undermining the established hierarchy.[659] In Prudentius' hands, the calendar is

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cult in northeastern Spain). As argued in this dissertation, the cult of Eulalia already had a long trajectory in Mérida prior to the *Peristephanon*, which supports this hypothesis. In the case of Emeterius and Chelidonius, their *dies natalis* was probably already introduced in *Calagurris*, since Hymn 11 belongs to the late phase of writing of the *Peristephanon*'s composition (ca. 401–403) and, by that time, Prudentius' narration of their passion in Hymn 1 and his close relationship with the bishop could have popularized their cult and secured the inclusion of their feast in the liturgical calendar.

[657] As Nicola Denzey Lewis observes, "As leading, influential Christians actively 'Christianized' time, they could exploit older patterns of festal commemoration and overlay them with the celebration of a new saint's natal day." (Nicola Denzey Lewis, "(En)Gendering Christian Time Female Saints and Roman Martyrological Calendars," in *Narratives of Time and Gender in Antiquity*, ed. E. Eidinow and L. Maurizio (Routledge, 2020), 168).

[658] "Christianisation comprised external processes … but also had to be written: it had to be represented. The (re)enactment of the triumph of Christianity was relentlessly performed through a calendar stuffed full of martyrs. This (re)enactment or performance played a crucial role in enabling the construction of Christianisation" (Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* [Duckworth, 2004], 34-35).

[659] "The love of their religion masses Latins and strangers together in one general body … And then when the months have run their course and the year begins afresh, when the festival of his passion brings again its anniversary … with equal ardor patricians and plebeian host are jumbled together shoulder to shoulder, for the faith banishes distinctions of birth - *conglobat in cuneum Latios simul ac peregrines permixtim populos religionis amor … natalemque diem passio festa refert … una et patricios ambitione pari confundit plebeia phalanx umbonibus aequis discrimen procerum praecipitante fide*." (*Peristephanon*

not a neutral register but an instrument of civic and theological formation, situating the cities of Spain within a sacred geography of liturgical observance, creating a collective memory, and anchoring their patron saints within the rhythms of the Christian city.[660]

9.191-202, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 318-319). As Peter Brown notes "It was on such occasions, also, that the greatest cleavage of all in late-antique urban society was bridged … Yet these exciting moments did not happen every day." Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 43.

[660] The oldest and only surviving manuscript of the Visigothic liturgy—also known as the Old Hispanic Rite or Mozarabic Rite—is the Verona Orational or *Libellus Orationum* (late seventh to early eighth century; García Rodríguez, *El culto de los santos en la España romana y visigoda*, 51). This liturgical manuscript is considered the most important source for analyzing the Visigothic calendar of festivals, all of which were religious in character, given the close relationship between church and state in this period (Sam Koon and Jaimie Wood, "Unity from Disunity: Law, Rhetoric and Power in the Visigothic Kingdom," European Review of History 16, no. 6 [2009]: 793–808). The place of composition of the Verona Orational is commonly attributed to Tarragona, on the basis of a rubric in the manuscript referring to a procession for the recitation of a "completuria"—a prayer of thanksgiving or dismissal characteristic of the Hispanic Rite, which concluded the celebration of communion—in honor of Saint Fructuosus. This procession took place "*dominica ante carnes tollendas*," that is, on the Sunday before the beginning of Lent (Eduardo Carrero Santamaría, Emma Hornby, and Rebecca Maloy, "Processional Liturgy in the Urban Space of Seventh Century Tarragona," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 15, no. 2 [2023]: 240–69, esp. 250–52). Although the exact route of the procession is still debated, it appears to have involved movement between Tarragona's cathedral—by then housing the remains of the martyrs Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius—and the basilica in the amphitheater, also dedicated to the martyrs. Furthermore, both Vincent and Eulalia are assigned feast days in the Verona Orational (January 22 and December 10, respectively). The exception is Emeterius and Chelidonius, whose feast on March 3 does not appear in the Orational—likely because it frequently coincided with Lent and would have needed to be moved either earlier or later (Emma Hornby and Raquel Rojo Carrillo, "The Liturgical Year in the Old Hispanic Rite," in *Understanding the Old Hispanic Office: Texts, Melodies, and Devotion in Early Medieval Iberia*, ed. Emma Hornby, et al. [Cambridge University Press, 2023], 32 n.9). However, prayers for the Mass corresponding to their feast do appear in the *Liber Mozarabicus Sacramentorum* (dated between the eighth and eleventh centuries), a missal that contained the prayers for all feast-day Masses (see n. 617; also Férotin, *Le Liber Mozarabicus Sacramentorum et les Manuscrits Mozarabes*, cols. 145–50; García Rodríguez, *El culto de los santos en la España romana y visigoda*, 49). Although these sources are much later than Prudentius, the inclusion of the procession for Fructuosus in Tarragona, the feast days of Eulalia and Vincent in the Verona Orational, as well as the incorporation of the feast of Emeterius and Chelidonius in the Mozarabic Rite, provide valuable evidence that the liturgical calendar played an essential role in fixing the memory of the martyrs celebrated in the *Peristephanon* after Prudentius' time.

2.2.2 Contextual markers of martyr cult

8. Popular and domestic dimension

In some hymns, Prudentius extends martyr devotion beyond the ecclesiastical sphere into the rhythms of domestic and family life. In *Peristephanon* 1, the miracles of Emeterius and Chelidonius culminate in a scene of thanksgiving explicitly addressed to the *matres* and *maritae*, whose voices celebrate the restored health of sons and husbands (vv. 118–120). This emphasis on women's ritual agency situates the cult in the intimate sphere of family relationships, suggesting how the *virtus* of the martyrs safeguarded both the civic body and the domestic unit. Such scenes fit within a broader Late Antique pattern in which women acted as key mediators between the public and private dimensions of Christian devotion.[661] A parallel link between domestic and cultic space appears in *Peristephanon* 5, where Vincent's blood is absorbed into cloths and preserved as a holy safeguard for their descendants (vv. 65–67), ensuring constant contact with the martyr even within the home.

Prudentius also captures the popular dimension of communal devotion, where the physical presence of laypeople and their direct interaction with the martyr imbue the cult with lived immediacy. In *Peristephanon* 6, Fructuosus is arrested in his *cubiculum*, the intimate setting of his own room (vv. 35–37), bringing the intrusion of persecution

[661] Philanthropy, charitable donations to the to the churches and tombs of the holy dead, or almsgiving are expressions of women's mediation between the private and public dimensions of Christian devotion (Coon, *Sacred Fictions. Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity*, 97). For the subversion of gender roles in Prudentius' hymn to Eulalia (*Peristephanon* 3) see Chapter 3, pp 210-225.

directly into the domestic realm.[662] On the way to execution, he is accompanied and assisted by a crowd imploring his intercession (*certant officiis pii sodales*, v. 73), making "the people" emerge not merely as spectators but as co-participants in the martyr's final act.

In both the women's thanksgiving of Hymn 1 and the movement from domestic to public space in Hymn 6, Prudentius situates the cult within a broad social spectrum—from the innermost household to the public spaces of the city—highlighting popular participation in martyr veneration beyond episcopal or liturgical frameworks.

9. Union of baptism and martyrdom

A distinctive contextual marker in some of Prudentius' Spanish hymns is the explicit union of baptism and martyrdom, in which the shedding of blood is presented as the supreme act of purification and salvation. In *Peristephanon* 1, the deaths of Emeterius and Chelidonius are described as a "scarlet baptism" (*lota mens in fonte rubro sede cordis exilit*, v. 30). The implicit reformulation of the soldiers as neophytes—who, by leaving the *militia Caesaris* for the *militia Christi*, undergo a sacramental conversion—

[662] As Kristina Sessa analyzes: "through scenes situated within the *cubiculum* the *gesta martyrum* collectively articulate a distinct model of Christianity at home. This model, served as the basis not only for private acts of personal piety like penance and prayer, but also for an alternative foundation legend that expressly linked the space of the elite household to the making of Christian Rome. This alternative foundation legend is striking not only in its focus on the household as a space and social institution, but also in its elision of expected ecclesiastical figures…" (Kristina Sessa, "Christianity and the *Cubiculum*: Spiritual Politics and Domestic Space in Late Antique Rome," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 15, no. 2 [2007]: 175).

reflects a theology in which martyrdom functions as a second baptism, a final cleansing through blood that echoes Tertullian's *baptismus sanguinis*.[663]

The same imagery recurs in *Peristephanon* 8, which celebrates the baptistery erected precisely on the site where "two heroes…won scarlet martyrdom by their noble death" (*duo purpureum… martyrium pulchra morte tulere viri*, vv. 3–4). Here, the "limpid fount" flows to "wash away old stains" (*veteres maculas diluit amne novo*, v. 6), turning the place into a site where purification through water mirrors the earlier purification through blood. The hymn makes the parallel explicit: "formerly crowned witnesses went up to the courts on high, now cleansed souls seek the heights" (*ante coronati scandebant ardua testes atria, nunc lotae celsa petunt animae*, vv. 9–10).

The *topos* is not limited to *Calagurris*. In *Peristephanon* 6, Fructuosus performs the sacrament of baptism during his imprisonment before execution (*exercent ibi mysticum lavacrum, et purgamen aquae stupent tenebrae*, vv. 29–30), transforming the prison into a catechumenal space and framing martyrdom as the direct sequel to initiation. By drawing these parallels across different hymns, Prudentius suggests that the martyr's blood completes and perfects the baptismal washing. In each case, the poet develops the nexus between baptism and martyrdom to present the martyrs as the

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[663] Prudentius also makes explicit the connection between martyrdom and baptism in the hymn to Quirinus of Siscia: "It is no matter whether a martyr's passion bathe him in glassy water or with a river of blood; glory springs equally whatever the stream that wets it. - *nil refert vitreo aequore an de flumine sanguinis tinguat passio martyrem; aeque gloria provenit fluctu quolibet uvida*." (*Peristephanon* 7.16-20, Thomson, *Prudentius*, II, 214-215).

supreme exemplars of Christian initiation, thereby reinforcing the soteriological power of their cult sites.

Taken together, these foundational and contextual markers articulate a coherent vision of what constitutes a fully developed martyr cult in Late Antique Hispania. In Prudentius' view, the cult is anchored in the physical presence of the martyr's body, validated by miracles, and embedded in both the sacred topography of the city and the rhythms of communal and liturgical life. It is reinforced through pilgrimage—whether actual or imagined—and enriched by the circulation of contact relics. Its reach extends from the public festival to the intimacy of the household, from civic pride to private devotion, and from the baptismal font to the blood of martyrdom. While some elements, such as the *praesentia* of relics or the annual *dies natalis*, are indispensable to his model, others—domestic devotion, the baptism–martyrdom nexus—serve to personalize and amplify the cult's local significance. By weaving these markers into the *Peristephanon*, Prudentius is not merely describing preexisting traditions but actively shaping the ideals, practices, and theological foundations of martyr veneration in Spain. His hymns serve as literary commemorations and as prescriptive models for how communities should remember, honor, and relate to their saints.

Conclusion. The Martyrs of *Calagurris*: Memory, Devotion, and the Role of Poetry

The hymns to Emeterius and Chelidonius in *Peristephanon* 1 and 8 provide perhaps the clearest case of Prudentius' capacity not merely to celebrate an existing martyr cult, but to shape and articulate one. Unlike the cases of Fructuosus and Eulalia, where archaeological and textual evidence suggests an established tradition predating his verses, *Calagurris* appears in his work as a cultic landscape largely filled by his own poetic intervention. This chapter has argued that Prudentius' presentation of the two soldier martyrs reflects both the markers of martyrial devotion observable elsewhere in Hispania and the poet's own agency in defining them for his hometown. By doing so, he simultaneously participates in the preservation of local Christian memory and positions *Calagurris* within a wider sacred geography of the late antique Christian world.

At the center of this construction lies Prudentius' personal investment in the martyrs. The narrative voice in Hymn 1 is more interventionist than in his other Spanish hymns, probably due to the lack of data available to the poet this time to construct his narrative but also suggesting a particularly close connection to these saints. This personal dimension is mirrored in the way the poet's own life resonates with their story. Like Emeterius and Chelidonius, Prudentius claims in the *Praefatio* (see Chapter 1) to have renounced the *militia Caesaris* for the *militia Christi*, exchanging imperial administrative service for a higher allegiance. And yet, the tools acquired during his career in law and administration — rhetorical training, mastery of persuasion, the capacity to frame and reshape narratives — are not abandoned but redeployed in service of his "personal"

martyrdom: the composition of his entire collection of works. In the absence of a literal execution for the sake of faith, the writing of the *Peristephanon* and the rest of his works becomes a salvific act, a literary offering intended to secure his own redemption, as he himself describes in the *Praefatio*: "Yet as my last end draws near let my sinning soul put off her folly. With voice at least let her honour God, if with good deeds she cannot."[664] In this sense, the verses themselves acquire a soteriological function, operating as both commemoration and spiritual testament.

One of the outcomes of this poetic intervention is Prudentius' success in fixing certain iconographic and narrative elements into the cult of Emeterius and Chelidonius. Despite the lack of earlier detailed accounts, his portrayal prevailed: later tradition consistently represents Emeterius and Chelidonius as decapitated saints, with their severed heads even venerated separately from their bodies. Medieval accounts claimed that their heads were translated to the city of Santander to protect them from the Muslim advance, while their bodies remained in Calahorra, a bifurcation of relics that echoes—and perhaps derives from—Prudentius' account of their martyrdom.[665]

This adaptive quality is central to understanding Prudentius' cultic construction. Rather than relying exclusively on "foreign" martyrs, such as Roman saints, he appears to tailor his narrative to local sensibilities while also drawing on established Spanish

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[664] "*atqui fine sub ultimo peccatrix anima stultitiam exuat: saltem voce Deum concelebret, si meritis nequit*." (*Praefatio* 34-36, Thomson, *Prudentius*, I, 4-5)

[665] On the veneration of Emeterius and Chelidonius and the transfer of their heads as relics to Santander, see Joaquín González Echegaray, "El culto a los santos Emeterio y Celedonio en Santander," *Kalakorikos* 5 (2000): 271-283.

traditions. His model reflects the influence of the cults of Fructuosus in *Tarraco* and Eulalia in Mérida, adopting and reworking elements such as the *laus urbis*, the integration of miracles that corroborate the powers of the martyrs, and the anchoring of devotion in the physical *praesentia* of relics. In doing so, Prudentius suggests a cultic profile for *Calagurris* that contains a significant element of locality.

Prudentius' approach also reveals his sustained concern with the preservation of martyrial memory. In Hymn 8, his epigrammatic style recalls that of Pope Damasus, omitting the names of the saints perhaps as a conscious literary choice. This omission may even hint at the intended primary audience for Hymns 1 and 8: the community of *Calagurris*. Yet this absence also signals a shift: for Prudentius, memory is not secured primarily through inscriptions carved in stone, but through the performativity of ritual. The "telling of the deeds of the old" (*vetera gesta*) becomes a liturgical act, renewed annually through festivals, processions, prayers, and offerings. In this sense, Prudentius' hymns cultivate a mode of memory where the repeated performance of rites both recalls and re-enacts the past, bridging the temporal gap between the martyr's death and the present celebration.[666]

[666] As Peter Atkins underlines, liturgy becomes memorable above all through repetition and imitation: "Liturgy needs to note that the human mind is wired to imitate … [and] will recognize that repetition is essential for the retention of material in the memory." He further observes that worship is structured to imprint memory by engaging the senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell—and by linking repeated words and actions to personal and communal identity (Peter Atkins, *Memory and Liturgy: The Place of Memory in the Composition and Practice of Liturgy* [Ashgate, 2004], 141–42). In this way, liturgical performance not only recalls but continually re-enacts the past, ensuring that memory is both preserved and lived anew.

The cult Prudentius envisions for *Calagurris* is at once local and universal. On the one hand, it reinforces civic identity by rooting Christian belonging in the physical and spiritual landscape of the city. *Calagurris*' martyrs become, in this sense, patrons of the city in the old Roman mode, their patronage reframed in Christian terms as intercession and protection. On the other hand, the cult's openness to pilgrims "from all the world" extends its reach beyond municipal boundaries. By integrating accessible rituals and inclusive festivals, Prudentius makes room for participants regardless of origin, social status, or local customs.

This dual focus also allows the cult to function as a marker of orthodoxy. In the *Peristephanon* as a whole, Prudentius often appears concerned with delineating the boundaries between Catholic orthodoxy and heresy, as in his portrayal of Hippolytus' opposition to the Novatian schism ("*nec mirere senem perversi dogmatis olim munere ditatum catholicae fidei*," *Peristephanon* 11.23-24). A similar dynamic may be at work in the formation of the *Calagurris* cult: by embedding the martyrs within a liturgical calendar, associating them with episcopal leadership, and framing their intercession in doctrinally correct terms, Prudentius reinforces both the civic identity of the community and its theological alignment with the wider Catholic Church.

The analysis in this chapter has identified nine foundational and two contextual "markers of cult" that Prudentius integrates into his portrayal of Emeterius and Chelidonius: the physical presence of relics; post-mortem miracles; pilgrimage; contact relics; public and inclusive liturgical celebrations; integration into the liturgical calendar; the domestic and popular dimensions of devotion; and the theological nexus between

baptism and martyrdom. Taken together, these elements form a coherent template for what Prudentius considers a “full” martyr cult, one capable of sustaining both local identity and broader Christian solidarity.

The scholarly contribution of this chapter lies in showing that *Peristephanon* 1 and 8 do not merely record a possibly preexisting cult in *Calagurris* but actively shapes it contours. Through a careful reworking of established Spanish models, strategic literary borrowing from non-Spanish martyr narratives, and poetic authority, Prudentius provides both the narrative content and ritual framework for. His work thus illustrates how late antique Christian poetry could operate in setting forth ideals for how communities might remember, honor, and relate to their saints.

In the end, the *Calagurris* hymns stand as a testament to the ways in which memory, devotion, and poetry intersect in late antique Hispania. They preset Prudentius as who appears closely engaged with his civic and religious environment. By “making martyrs” for this town, Prudentius offers a blueprint for integrating martyrial devotion into the fabric of civic life, thereby contributing to the endurance of the martyrs’ memory— and of his own his poetic voice—within the living tradition of the Church.

Conclusion: Revisiting the Martyr Cult in Late Antique Hispania through Prudentius

This dissertation has examined in depth the representation and function of the cult of the martyrs in Hispania from Prudentius' perspective, with particular focus on the hymns of the Peristephanon. As outlined in Chapter 1, the research was guided by several central questions: whether these hymns reflect preexisting traditions of martyr literature, cult sites, and devotional practices in Hispania; the extent to which the idealized vision of martyrdom and the cult of the saints in Prudentius' compositions corresponds to the available archaeological evidence from the cities he celebrates; the role the poet plays in shaping a *paideia* and a Christian civic identity for the inhabitants of Hispania; and, finally, the place he assigns to the cult of the martyrs in the broader construction of a Spanish Christian identity.

Answering these questions has required integrating literary analysis with the examination of archaeological and topographical evidence from Spain, as demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, situating Prudentius' work within the wider context of Late Antique Hispania and assessing the ongoing dialogue between text and materiality. This dual approach—combining philology, history, and archaeology—made it possible not only to identify correspondences and tensions between poetic narrative and material reality, but also to clarify the poet's role in the religious landscape of his time. The result is a nuanced portrait of Prudentius and his work, one that moves away from simplistic or binary interpretations.

Chapter 1 established the methodological foundations and scholarly framework, putting Prudence's *Peristephanon* in dialogue with both classical and recent studies on martyrial memory and the overall context of fourth and early fifth century Spain. This initial stage was crucial in developing an analytical lens that approached the hymns not simply as literary compositions, but as cultural artefacts in dynamic interaction with spaces, objects, and devotional practices.

Chapter 2 addressed the central comparative analysis between the *Passio Fructuosi* and *Peristephanon* 6, revealing how Prudentius reworked an earlier tradition to adapt it to his audience and his own vision of Christianity. The first major finding emerged here: his poetry operates simultaneously as inheritance and as renewal. This chapter highlighted the tension between preserved memory and literary creation and laid the groundwork for the hybrid model of authorship I propose.

In Chapter 3, the analysis expanded to the study of two well-established cult centers in major capitals of Roman Hispania: *Tarraco* and *Emerita Augusta*. Alongside a deeper study of the cult of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius, the hymn to Eulalia was analyzed with particular attention to the literary construction of the virgin martyr archetype. The detailed comparison between Prudentius' description of Eulalia's shrine and the available archaeological and topographical evidence for Mérida revealed that the poet drew on precise spatial knowledge, very likely derived from direct observation, integrating features of the city and its sacred memory into a literary portrait of great evocative power. This chapter demonstrated that Prudentius did not merely inherit

traditions but embedded them in a landscape recognizable to himself and his audience, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of his account.

Chapter 4 turned to the praise of the martyrs Emeterius and Chelidonius of *Calagurris*, a paradigmatic example of the shaping of a cult for his native city. Here, the defining features of soldier-martyrs as models of Christian conduct were identified and analyzed, along with the "markers of cult" that Prudentius presents as programmatic elements for the veneration of martyrs in Hispania. Although part of the planned research, Prudentius' typology of martyrial archetypes was ultimately not developed as a separate section. However, I have chosen to preserve in the conclusion a reference to this "gallery of *exempla*" that emerges from the reading of the *Peristephanon*: figures embodying distinct virtues within the ideal archetypes of bishop, virgin, and soldier martyr: Fructuosus as the calm and steadfast leader of his community; Eulalia as a model of femininity that defies established authority, ejects the "spiritual slavery" imposed by edicts, and embraces the renunciation of marriage as an ascetic practice for young Christian women; and Emeterius and Chelidonius as exemplars of Christian masculinity rooted in martial values. Through these three archetypes, Prudentius constructs settings that legitimize Christian authority over urban space and narratives that shape both conducts and emotions. This gallery thus serves as an implicit catalogue of devotional possibilities, where local specificity and universal ideals intersect to provide his audience with a repertoire of identities and practices.

Taken together, these four chapters show that Prudentius operates in an intermediate space between tradition and innovation, combining tangible knowledge of Hispania's geography and historical context with an ambitious literary and religious project.

The findings of the dissertation can be summarized in four main conclusions, each with broader historical and cultural implications —ranging from understanding the processes of Christianization and urban transformation of Spain in Late Antiquity to recognizing the role of literature in shaping collective memory and civic identity.

First, this study has demonstrated that consolidated martyr cults existed in Hispania before the composition of the *Peristephanon*, particularly in urban centers of high administrative and ecclesiastical rank such as *Tarraco* and *Emerita Augusta*. Chapter 3 reconstructed the cult of Fructuosus, Augurius, and Eulogius in *Tarraco* by combining the testimony of the *Passio Fructuosi* and *Peristephanon* 6 with the archaeological remains of the tomb, martyrial basilica and associated epigraphic evidence. Similarly, the analysis of the tradition of Eulalia in Mérida revealed the existence of an active cult site with regional influence, probably reinforced by the city's status as capital of the *dioecesis Hispaniarum*. In these cases, where textual tradition and archaeological record converge, it becomes clear that the cult of the martyrs could flourish in cities with strong administrative and ecclesiastical infrastructure, enabling influence beyond the local sphere. The consolidation of these cults in major urban centers shows that Spanish Christianity, at least in certain hubs, already possessed the capacity to

monumentalize martyrial memory—following patterns comparable to those in other provinces, yet with distinctive local nuances.

Second, the comparative examination undertaken in Chapter 2—between *Peristephanon* 6 and the *Passio Fructuosi*, as well as the analysis of *Peristephanon* 3 in relation to the material evidence of Eulalia's cult site—demonstrates that Prudentius engaged with and reworked preexisting Spanish martyr cult traditions in his own voice. Against the view held by some scholars,[667] which emphasizes his literary imagination over his role as a transmitter of established cults, this study proposes a hybrid model: Prudentius inherits, adapts, renews, and embellishes his sources, while still preserving substantial elements of the earlier traditions. In this sense, his hymns to the Spanish martyrs depart from mere imitation of Italian or Roman models, integrating local features that anchor his vision of the martyr cult in the landscape and memory of Hispania. My work thus diverges from the perspective of Anne-Marie Palmer, which focuses more on the literary unity of the *Peristephanon* and less on its archaeological grounding, and complements the reading of Michael Roberts, who emphasized the poet's rhetorical sophistication without exploring in depth the correlation between his discourse and the material evidence. By combining textual and archaeological analysis, this study positions

[667] For example, Cillian O'Hogan's reading of the *Peristephanon*: "[Prudentius' imitations of classical authors] serve both to familiarize the landscapes described and to abstract them from their fourth-century realities, underscoring the poet's tendency towards abstraction and away from lived experience" (O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity*, 70). Also, Michael Roberts in reference to Eulalia's hymn: "It certainly seems probable that there is a large element of invention in the *Peristephanon*, consistent with what Prudentius considers the basic themes and message of martyrdom" (Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 101).

Prudentius as an author deeply aware of the spatial realities and devotional traditions of Late Antique Spain.

Third, as argued in Chapter 4, Prudentius' hymns articulate a notion of identity that weaves together religious piety, attachment to urban space, the occupation of public and private places, the shaping of social relations, and the definition of "others"—most often pagan or heretical groups—into a single unifying element: devotion to the martyrs. In this respect, my analysis aligns with Cillian O'Hogan's emphasis on the civic projection[668] but adds that in some cases this projection is grounded in tangible physical realities rather than purely literary constructs. The civic dimension of Christian identity in Prudentius' vision is as important as its devotional dimension: his martyrs not only embody spiritual virtues but also serve as symbols of the community—of its ability to claim urban spaces and project a shared memory that transcends local boundaries. The memory of the saints becomes, in Prudentius' hands, a means to affirm the cohesion and legitimacy of the civic body. In the context of Late Antique Hispania, this phenomenon reflects broader processes of identity formation within an Empire where Christianity was becoming increasingly central to public life.

However, this vision is not restricted to the city. Prudentius describes himself as a *poetam rusticum* ("country poet"), which points at the reception of his hymns in private readings within Hispania's context of rural *villae*. Yet, despite this self-portrait, I do not

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[668] O'Hogan, *Prudentius and the Landscapes of Late Antiquity*, 77-94. Also Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs*, 9-38.

believe his primary audience was confined only to the rural and modest environment of the *villa*, as Paula Hershkowitz argues.[669] His hymns envision a Christian community rooted in the city, and while there has been an ongoing debate in modern scholarship about the alleged urban character of Late Antique Christianity, Prudentius' imagined community of worship is primarily focused but not limited to the urban sphere. Rather, it connects the city with a wider territory, as evidenced by *Peristephanon*'s references to "the inhabitants of the Ebro," "the lands of Hispania," and even, in the case of Emeterius and Chelidonius, the whole world—showing that his reach and intended audience cannot be restricted only to the *villa* setting.

Fourth, this study confirms Prudentius' dual role as both preserver and transmitter of traditions predating his work and as creator of new cults. While hymns 3 and 6 preserve and monumentalize earlier martyrial memories, hymn 1—dedicated to Emeterius and Chelidonius—programmatically outlines the features that, in Prudentius' view, should characterize martyr devotion in Hispania going forward. These "cult markers," analyzed in detail in Chapter 4, are not incidental descriptions but a normative framework for veneration, designed to be replicable elsewhere. This finding invites a reassessment of the function of Prudentius' poetry, positioning it not only as a vehicle for memory but also as a tool for shaping devotional practice.

[669] Hershkowitz, *Prudentius, Spain, and Late Antique Christianity*, 34-43.

Altogether, these conclusions suggest a more complex image of the poet than much previous scholarship allows. My research distances itself both from the reading that sees Prudentius solely as an inventor or promoter of the cult, and from the view that his hymns are literal reflections of preexisting devotional realities. Instead, he emerges as an author who actively engages with both the past and present of Christian communities, selecting, reworking, and proposing models of veneration adapted to his own time and vision of Christianity.

Seen from this perspective, the *Peristephanon* also invites us to situate Prudentius' work within the wider development of the cult of the saints in Late Antiquity. Across the Roman world, from North Africa to Gaul and from Rome to the East, the fourth and fifth centuries witnessed the consolidation of martyr cults as essential features of Christian life. Shrines, basilicas, and liturgical commemorations turned local heroes of the faith into civic patrons and symbols of orthodoxy, while authors such as Ambrose, Paulinus of Nola, and Augustine gave theological and literary shape to these practices. Prudentius belongs to this same moment of creative excitement. His poetry participates in the shared project of elevating local martyrs into figures of collective identity, yet it does so with a distinctive emphasis on Hispania's landscapes, cities, and communities.

In this broader picture, the *Peristephanon* functions not merely as a regional curiosity but as evidence that Spain was fully integrated into the Late Antique culture of devotion to the saints. The martyrs of *Tarraco*, *Emerita*, and *Calagurris* emerge alongside those of Milan, Rome, or Nola as figures who defined the memory of their communities and anchored Christian identity in urban and sacred space. The

Peristephanon demonstrates that Spanish martyr cults could serve as models within the wider Christian world: figures like Eulalia, Fructuosus, or Vincent (even if treated only briefly in this dissertation) were not merely local saints but part of a transregional memory, invoked in Gaul, Africa, and beyond. By weaving these diverse strands into his poetic imagination, Prudentius places Hispania within the spiritual map of Late Antiquity.

Thus, the *Peristephanon* illuminates not only the devotional culture of a single province but also the mechanisms by which martyr cults were transmitted, adapted, and reimagined across the Christian world. It shows how memory could be monumentalized in basilicas, preserved in inscriptions, or recast in poetry, and how each medium contributed to the ongoing construction of Christian civic identity. In this sense, Prudentius' work epitomizes the dual nature of the cult of the saints in Late Antiquity: at once local and universal, grounded in specific cities yet part of a transregional conversation about the meaning of martyrdom, orthodoxy, and Christian belonging. Hispania, far from being marginal, is revealed through his hymns as a vital participant in this shared devotional culture, with Prudentius acting as its most eloquent voice.

The principal contribution of this dissertation lies in its systematic integration of textual and material evidence, enabling a more precise assessment of the correspondences and divergences between narrative and materiality. It also advances an analytical framework based on "cult markers" and situates Prudentius within the context of the lay Christian elite—closely connected to ecclesiastical circles (as suggested by *Peristephanon* 11 on Hippolytus, apparently commissioned by Bishop Valerianus of

Calagurris), yet holding no formal office. his opens promising avenues for further research into the individual appropriation of religious practices and ideas, in line with the concept of "religious individualization," and into the traces of lived experience as indicators of "lived religion" in Prudentius' works.[670] These approaches not only offer comparative potential for other authors and regions but also invite a reconsideration of the role of lay figures as cultural brokers of the devotional landscape of Late Antiquity.

The scope of this study—geographically limited to Hispania in the fourth and fifth centuries and excluding topics such as the "villa culture" extensively analyzed by Hershkowitz—has necessarily conditioned its conclusions. Hymn 5 of the *Peristephanon* dedicated to Vincent has also been omitted from full chapter analysis. These choices were guided by methodological considerations and the need to maintain the internal coherence of the dissertation. The difficulty of securely dating certain architectural remains associated with private martyr cult in *villa* contexts, as well as the uncertainty over whether some cults predate Prudentius or were ultimately created by him—as may be the case for Vincent—justify a more cautious approach and point to their inclusion in future research.

Several avenues remain open for extending the findings of this dissertation. A first step would be a systematic comparison with regions such as Gaul and Africa, where

[670] "The individual is not seen as somebody who simply acquires and reproduces established or normative ways of thinking or acting; instead, hegemonic as well as alternative options are evaluated, selected, and transformed for the individual's purposes. Hence, the individual's actions are strategic, even subversive. … It is only through manifold individual appropriations that norms and traditions are reproduced, hence continued and modified at the same time" (Jörg Rüpke, *On Roman Religion. Lived Religion and the Individual in Ancient Rome* [Cornell University Press, 2016], 4).

figures like Augustine of Hippo refer in several sermons to Spanish martyrs celebrated by Prudentius in the *Peristephanon*. This would require detailed textual study of sermons, letters, and conciliar acts, complemented by archaeological analysis of cult sites with parallels in Hispania. A second line of inquiry would be to explore the major themes of the *Peristephanon* in relation to other genres cultivated by the poet—such as allegorical poetry or apologetic compositions—to evaluate the coherence of his religious vision and his ability to adapt his discourse. A third avenue of future inquiry would focus on the individual dimension of devotion, using frameworks from religious studies and concentrating on Christian authors outside the ecclesiastical hierarchy, to assess how such perspectives shaped the narratives, promotion, and networks of martyr cults. Finally, an avenue of research arising from this study is the analysis of the role of non-liturgical texts—such as Prudentius' hymns—as an element of martyr devotion and individual interaction with the saints, considering it as another "cult marker" among those proposed by Prudentius in *Peristephanon* 1. This could be expanded by comparing his work with other similar texts, regions, and contexts from Late Antiquity.

This project has also been a reflection on the research process itself, with significant methodological lessons. Integrating different types of evidence required navigating challenges such as the temporal disparity between texts and archaeological remains and the fragmentary nature of the material record. The lack of absolute dating for most Late Antique remains in Spain generally demands reliance on typological comparisons within Hispania and across the Empire. Likewise, the philological reading of the hymns has been a major challenge, demanding a balance between literary analysis

and the search for historical and material correlates—especially in an area outside my primary specialization. I acknowledge that the material evidence for Late Antique Hispania is both scarce and subject to divergent interpretations among excavators and scholars. Correlating texts with archaeological evidence can risk an interpretation that forces them to fit in the hypotheses posed in this dissertation. Nonetheless, I believe the combined analysis presented here, despite its limitations, remains valuable for placing the findings within a plausible framework.

Prudentius' work—combining the programmatic and the personal, the public and the intimate—illuminates a specific moment in Late Antique Hispania while also engaging with broader questions about how communities construct, preserve, and transform sacred memory. At the close of this study, it may be said that Prudentius was not merely a devout poet, but a mediator between memory and present, between tradition and creation, between the local and the universal. Recognizing this complexity not only enriches our understanding of his work but also contributes new perspectives to debates on identity, cult, and memory in Late Antiquity. The *Peristephanon* thus emerges as a privileged window into the interaction between literature, space, and community—and an invitation to continue wondering what it means to belong, remember and commemorate in a society that defines itself around its martyrs.

I am fully aware that this dissertation is only one small step in the study of the cult of the martyrs in Late Antique Hispania, and a modest contribution to a field that has been, fortunately, greatly developed thanks to the work of foundational scholars such as Peter Brown and to specialists on Prudentius' *Peristephanon* like Anne-Marie Palmer,

Michael Roberts, and Paula Hershkowitz. My aim has been to add my own perspective as a scholar from Spain, where the cult of the saints remains an essential part of collective identity even nowadays. I have also sought to bring into the discussion the abundant Spanish-language scholarship that often remains marginalized due not only to language barriers—between English and Spanish, but also between Spanish and Spain's co-official languages—but above all to the difficulty of connecting evidence from different provinces or cities within Spain. The extreme specificity and regionalism of the findings often result in their circulation being largely limited to scholars within the province to which they belong—an issue tied to the modern history of Spain's state construction and its autonomous communities. By addressing these gaps, I hope to have offered a more integrated and systematic view of the cult of the martyrs in Hispania.

In the end, I can only acknowledge that the more I have studied Prudentius, the more I am aware of how much remains to be explored. This is, however, an encouraging position from which to continue research. For now, I can only hope that this dissertation has contributed to shed a little more light on a phenomenon as exciting as the cult of the martyrs in Late Antiquity, and on a fascinating figure as Prudentius—"neither from here nor from there," to quote the famous Argentinian songwriter Facundo Cabral: a devout Christian yet a layman, offering us a small opening through which to glimpse his vision, ideas, and passion for the martyrs in the early fifth century.

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