

## Eugenius, Vincent, and Vergil: Poetry and the Saints in Seventh-Century Zaragoza

This talk explores an epigram written by the late Latin poet Eugenius of Toledo in celebration of the (legendary) early Christian martyr Vincent of Zaragoza (ancient Caesaraugusta). At the time of composition (c. 640 CE) Eugenius was a deacon in the church at Zaragoza although he would end his clerical career as bishop of the royal city of Toledo (646-57). Eugenius's recently re-edited corpus of polymetric poetry (*CCSL* 114, 2005) includes several epigrams written to honor the saints and martyrs of both cities. *Carmen* 10 is an epigram of six elegiac couplets. It is not clear if it was ever actually inscribed at St. Vincent's shrine, but it was obviously composed *as if* for inscription since it presents itself in the form of a late antique *carmen epigraphicum*. The epigram is a fascinating example of late antique or early medieval classicizing poetry. It indulges in epanalepsis, anaphora, and internal rhyme. It is also, I will argue, smartly intertextual. There is no doubt, for example, that Eugenius had read and draws upon a poem celebrating Vincent that was written about the year 400 by Prudentius, also a "Spanish" poet, or that it echoes the *carmina epigraphica* of the fourth-century bishop of Rome and impresario of the saints, Damasus, himself reputed to have Spanish roots. Less often noticed are *carmen* 10's likely allusions to Vergil's *Aeneid*.

Close reading suggests that Eugenius's first three couplets contain allusions to three different passages of the *Aeneid*: 5.225-31, 6.129-31, and 9.461. All these passages touch upon the theme of divine favor or honor won through heroic or self-sacrificial action, notions especially relevant to the representation of the witness of the martyrs. The potential allusions also work nicely to align the actions of the early Christian martyrs with the heroes of Rome's one-time national epic. The implicit comparison may also have suggested to some readers that

the martyrs played the same role in the creation of a new Roman identity that the heroes of the *Aeneid* had played in the foundation of now superseded old Rome. Vergil, that is, was still good for Christian poets to think with, as he had been among the poets of late Latin poetry's fourth- and fifth-century "golden age."

I do consider the possibility that Eugenius could have drawn inspiration from earlier late antique poets who certainly did read and echo Vergil (e.g., Prudentius) or late ancient Latin grammarians and commentaries (e.g., Servius) rather than from direct reading of Vergil. I will argue, however, that it is more likely that Eugenius (and some of his readership in mid-seventh Iberia) had direct knowledge of Vergil. That argument, in turn, has implications for the state of education and literacy in the late Visigothic kingdom. It is indubitable that previously, in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, a period associated with the literary savor faire and prodigious output of Isidore of Seville, the classical poets, including Lucretius, were being read. Eugenius's *carmen* 10 is good evidence that the practice continued in the monastic and episcopal schools and settings of the peninsula after that time.

### Bibliography

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