

Introduction

[Cl.] Claudiani u.c. | [Cla]udio Claudiano u.c., tri | [bu]no et notario,
 inter ceteras | [de]centes artes prae[g]loriosissimo | [po]etarum, licet
 ad memoriam sem|piternam carmina ab eodem | scripta sufficiant,
 adtamen | testimoniū gratia ob iudicii sui | [fi]dem, dd. nn. Arcadius
 et Honorius | [fe-]licissimi et dictissimi | imperatores senatu petente |
 statuam in foro diui Traiani | erigi collocarique iusserunt.

Εἰν ἐνὶ Βιργιλίῳ νόον | καὶ Μοῦσαν Ὀμήρου |
 Κλαυδιανὸν Ῥώμη καὶ | βασιλῆς ἔθεσαν.¹

To Claudius Claudianus, vir clarissimus, tribune and notarius, among other noble arts the most renowned of poets, although his poems suffice for eternal memory, nevertheless as testimonial and proof of their judgement, our lords Arcadius and Honorius, the most blessed and renowned emperors, at the request of the senate, have ordered a statue to be erected and placed in the forum of the divine Trajan.

Rome and the emperors placed Claudian here,
 in a single man, the mind of Virgil and the inspiration of Homer.

This inscription, the prompt for this study, comes from a statue of Claudian erected in the Forum of Trajan, an honour of which the poet was proud since he refers to it as a mark of favour and great reward, *fauor* and *praemia tanta* (*Get. pr.* 11, 12). The inscription claims that by the consensus of the emperors and the senate, Claudian was an epic poet, writing in the tradition of Homer and Virgil. That Claudian agreed with this tribute is evident from the poetic persona he presents in the prefaces to his work. It is invariably and insistently epic, comparing the poet to the first sailor (*Rapt. 1 pr.*), a soldier in the camp (*Theod. pr.*) or Ennius, the warrior-poet (*Stil. 3 pr.*), and the aspirations are expressed in allusions to earlier Latin epic poets, Virgil, Statius, Silius and Ovid.²

¹ *CIL* vi.1710.

² For a detailed discussion of the epic quality of Claudian's prefaces, Ware 2004a.

Most modern scholars, however, would disagree with the inscription. Few might go so far as Platnauer's judgement that 'even as a poet Claudian is not always despicable'³ yet Claudian is far from ranking with the great Latin epic poets. Until recently, the most favourable comment has tended to be the rather grudging 'last classical poet of Rome' which, as Michael Roberts points out, inevitably leads to criticism of the non-classical elements of his poetry.⁴ Recently, Claudian's poetic skill has begun to receive proper critical attention but his classicising approach and his encomiastic subject matter continue to work against an unbiased appraisal. In the light of contemporary scholarship which demonstrates that late antiquity was a time of literary experimentation and generic creativity, the tag of 'last classical poet' has negative connotations, suggesting that Claudian's work belongs in the past, that it is an attempt to turn back time, the poetic equivalent, perhaps, of Symmachus' failure to keep the altar of Victory in place. Since Claudian's poems are largely written in support of his patron, Stilicho, and for the most part relate to court ceremony, honouring the inauguration of consuls, his work is classified not as epic but as 'panegyric-epic'. It is a classification which would have been unknown to Claudian but one which implies that whatever his statue may say, his work is in a different category to that of writers such as Virgil, Lucan and Statius.

Claudian's claim to be an epic poet in the manner of Virgil deserves reconsideration. To be a second Virgil was in a sense the aim of every post-Virgilian⁵ and it did not mean copying the master or writing mythological epic. Roman epic in its origins was nationalistic and allusive as writers such as Livius, Naevius and Ennius took inspiration from the Greeks to write epics which celebrated the origins and growth of the Roman state. Epic poets looked to what their predecessors had done, assimilated the advances and created their own works in response. Inspired by Homer and Ennius, Virgil recreated Roman epic as a genre which was both timeless and contemporary, an examination in mythological terms of *imperium* and of the newly founded Roman empire under Augustus. The Virgilian Jupiter had guaranteed an empire without end (*Aen.* 1.279): subsequent epic poets positioned themselves within this eternal chronological and Virgilian framework, acknowledging their debt to Virgil and writing of their own times for their own contemporaries, even if the language was coded and the message filtered through mythology or ancient history. During the first hundred years of empire, epic poets made subjects as diverse as the Punic

³ Platnauer 1922: xvii. ⁴ Roberts 1989: 2.

⁵ See, for example, Statius' aspirations for his *Thebaid*, *Theb.* 12.816–17, and for Lucan, *Silu.* 2.7.79.

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wars, the Seven against Thebes and the voyage of the *Argo* relevant both to Virgil and to their own contemporary Rome.

The epics of Silius, Statius and Valerius Flaccus are identifiable as classical epic, conforming in content and style to our expectations of the genre. They are extremely long, they tell of the deeds of heroes and they abound with familiar epic tropes: catalogues, similes, gods and speeches. Although narrative had become less linear and more episodic and the content more mannered and rhetorical, displaying a fondness for aphorisms, moralising and descriptive passages, scholars classify such works as epic without question. Stylistic changes, however, continued to evolve and, taken in connection with the new Christian themes which dominated the writings of late antiquity, resulted in the proliferation of new kinds of epic, now categorised by such terms as biblical or hagiographical or panegyric epic. While these labels are useful in pinpointing the differences between individual poems and poets, they can obscure the broader picture. Poets of late antiquity, as their predecessors had done, turned naturally to the medium of epic to redefine Rome for their own time and did so as earlier Roman epic poets had done, by intertextual *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, imitation and rivalry. The coexistence of old and new had always characterised Roman epic and never more than in the fourth century when the combination of classical themes and styles, evident in art as well as literature, often seemed at odds with their new ideological or Christian content. It is all too easy to see the differences and miss the similarities yet Elsner's remark is as applicable to the study of late antique epic as to monumental art: 'it is striking that once one has eschewed a conventional stylistic account in favour of a thematic analysis of images according to their social and cultural functions, the evidence points towards very deep continuities'.⁶

Like his contemporaries, Claudian favours episode over continuous narrative to the extent that narrative is more often a means of linking descriptive passages or lengthy speeches than an end in itself. Even with an abundance of epic material provided by the many challenges to empire at the end of the fourth century, Claudian avoids narrative, preferring to present instead a series of colourful tableaux. Frequently, the epic quality of his work depends on his own assertion of that quality and his insistence that his own heroes are as great as those of the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*, a technique taken not from epic but from the handbooks of rhetoric. Even so, Claudian's claim to be the heir of Virgil and Homer is merited in a number of ways, not least because of the close association between epic and panegyric

⁶ Elsner 1998: 11.

recognised in late antiquity. Writing of the deeds of contemporary great men and defining the empire of late antiquity in terms of classical Roman epic, Claudian's work is motivated by the same inspiration as his literary predecessors, the desire to become part of the Roman epic tradition and to do so in the epic language created by Virgil. Four hundred years after the *Aeneid*, Claudian's poetry shows that the power of *furor* still threatened to destabilise the *concordia* of empire, that contemporary Giants were still assailing heaven, that the *aurea aetas*, the golden age of peace and freedom from vice, remained the ideal. Many of these ideas had become clichés of imperial propaganda but in Claudian's work they are given new life. As Roman writers had always done, and as the Christian poets of his own time were doing, Claudian rewrote the past to bring it into line with the present.⁷ His audience, however, the court of Honorius and the senatorial aristocracy of Rome, did not look for Christian teaching in his work but for confirmation that Rome was mistress of the world as she always had been and would always continue to be. In poetry which is rooted in the great epics of the past Claudian reaffirmed the status quo and assured his readers that the *imperium sine fine* promised to Augustus and his successors would indeed last forever.

Although Claudian's poems were written as separate entities, complete in themselves and often to commemorate a particular occasion, it is not difficult to approach the corpus as a whole, as a sustained narrative. The fact that themes and characters continue from one poem to the next, as though throughout the books of a single epic, gives a sense of an ongoing storyline. With hindsight, reading the corpus in this way, the panegyric on Probinus and Olybrius seems programmatic. In this poem Claudian creates an ideal vision of Rome, which combines elements of golden-age fertility and peace with martial victory. The empire is in the capable hands of a great general, the emperor Theodosius. The threat of Eugenius' rebellion has arisen and has been overcome. Theodosius has conquered at Frigidus and now appears in informal council with the other divine protectors of the state: Roma herself, Mars and Bellona. The poem begins with an invocation to the Sun, the deity who turns the unending cycle of the ages, who has seen great ages arise before and will do so again. This will be the pattern for the rest of corpus, the same themes reinforced by sustained and self-referential allusion. In *De tertio consulatu*, Theodosius is replaced by Stilicho and Honorius, the former fulfilling the function of the epic

⁷ As Elsner 1998: 3 describes it, creating a 'rhetoric of continuity'. On this theme generally, see Gowing 2005.

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hero, and the latter taking over the divine role. The poems may focus on the threat to good government (*Ruf.*, *Gild.*) or on the stability of empire generally (*Stil.* 2) but these are only different instalments of the continuing story of the hero, Stilicho, and his maintenance of Roman order. Claudian's corpus is an ongoing epic with no conclusion other than the preservation of Roman *imperium sine fine*.

THE POET AND HIS AUDIENCE

Little is known for certain about the life of the poet Claudian Claudianus.⁸ The information supplied by his own poetry offers suggestions rather than factual detail. The traditional view is that he came from Egypt, most probably from Alexandria,⁹ and was a professional poet who believed that Rome would give full scope to his abilities,¹⁰ since he was as fluent in Latin as in Greek.¹¹ From the references to his friendship with the young brothers of the Anicii family, it is probable that he arrived in Rome as a young man.¹² Contemporary sources claim that he was a pagan;¹³ if this was the case, it did not appear to affect his career adversely. His panegyrics can be dated exactly and indicate a very swift rise to favour; it is likely that he went to Rome with letters of introduction to the Anicii family since his first Latin panegyric was on the consuls Probinus and Olybrius in 395.¹⁴ He attracted the attention of Stilicho, the regent of Honorius and *magister militum*,¹⁵ and he moved into imperial circles, writing his first panegyric in honour of the young emperor Honorius in 396. That for the most part Claudian's poetry was designed to promote the policies of Stilicho has been conclusively argued¹⁶ and from 395 until 404 Claudian remained the court poet, writing in honour of Stilicho and the imperial family. The poems written for the court include panegyrics, invectives, epithalamia as well as

⁸ Fargues 1933: 5–38; Schmidt 1976: 11–12. For a comprehensive examination of what is known of Claudian's life, see Cameron 1970: 1–29.

⁹ His own poems refer to *nostro Nilo* (c.m. 19.3) and describe Alexander the Great as *conditor hic patriae* (c.m. 22.20), which Cameron 1970: 3 interprets as Alexandria. On this topic see Christiansen 1997 and Mulligan 2007.

¹⁰ Cameron 1965 describes him as one of the 'wandering poets', professional poets of Egypt, largely pagan, who moved from city to city, in order to further their careers; cf. Cameron 1970: 22–3.

¹¹ It may be assumed that Claudian wrote exclusively in Latin after AD 395; of his Greek work, some epigrams and a fragmentary *Gigantomachy* survive.

¹² c.m. 40 and 41. Cameron 1970: 2 suggests AD 370 as the approximate date of his birth.

¹³ Augustine, *De ciu. Dei* 5.26, Orosius, *Historiae adversus paganos* 7.35. Cf. Döpp 1980: 24–41; for pagans writing in a Christian empire, see Consolino 1995 and Cameron 1965; on Claudian's lack of differentiation between religion and culture, McCormack 1981: 52; Döpp 1980: 33–6.

¹⁴ Cameron 1970: 31; Döpp 1980: 13–14. ¹⁵ On Stilicho, see *PLRE* 1.853–8; Cameron 1970: 38–9.

¹⁶ Cameron 1970. Cf. Döpp 1980, Schmidt 1976.

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Excerpt

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shorter poems on a variety of subjects. His last datable work, the panegyric on Honorius' sixth consulship, was written in 404 and it is assumed that he died shortly thereafter.

Although he claims Virgil as his model, Claudian was not a leisured poet who could devote his time to the composition of one lengthy epic, but a working professional poet of rapid output. Having come to Rome to make his fortune, he was ready to turn his hand to any type of poetry required, panegyric or invective, epithalamium, lampoon. In this sense, his true Latin predecessor was neither Virgil nor the writers of the *Panegyrici Latini*, but Statius, born in Naples and, like Claudian, steeped in the Greek tradition.¹⁷ In the introduction to the first book of the *Silvae*, Statius describes the circumstances of the work in a letter to his friend Stella.¹⁸ It is such a letter as Claudian might have written, dealing with the concerns of a successful professional poet.¹⁹ Although Statius complains that he was asked for three hundred lines on the equestrian statue of Domitian on the day after its dedication, the complaint disguises his pride, firstly that he was asked to write and secondly that the poem was delivered on time. He reminds Stella that it took only two days to finish an epithalamium of the same length (*Silu. 1 pr.*). Statius describes these as lighter poems produced in the heat of the moment and by a kind of joyful improvisation, *subito calore et quadam festinandi uoluptate*,²⁰ and as such, distinct from his *Thebaid*, recently finished.²¹ Short or long, however, they were all worthy of publication and all sprang from the same inspiration: the *subitus calor* which produced the shorter works so quickly appears in the introduction to the *Thebaid* as *Pierius calor*, the inspiration of the Muses (1.3).

A patron was probably a more likely source of inspiration than a Muse.²² Three hundred years later, Claudian began his court career under the patronage of the Anicii family with the panegyric for Probinus and Olybrius. As he continued to write for the imperial family and Stilicho, he also composed lighter works for others, an epithalamium for Palladius and Celerina (*c.m.* 25), short poems dealing with natural phenomena such as the lobster (*c.m.* 24), the phoenix (*c.m.* 27) and the magnet (*c.m.* 29), and various trifles to charm his patrons: 'On a strap embroidered by Serena for Honorius' horse' (*c.m.* 48). There was also the mythological epic,

¹⁷ A. Hardie 1983: 2–36, 74–102. ¹⁸ Nauta 2002: 249–56.

¹⁹ On professional poets, A. Hardie 1983: 15–36; on imperial patronage, 37–49.

²⁰ For his improvisation, K. Coleman 1988: xxvi.

²¹ Newlands 2002: 33 sees Statius' comments on his work as equivalent to Catullus' calling his poetry *nugae*. For the association of the *Silvae* and epic, Gibson 2006b.

²² Benefits of patronage by the imperial court and Stilicho included the offices detailed on his statue and a marriage arranged by Stilicho's wife, Serena, *c.m.* 31.53–4.

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De raptu Proserpinae, dedicated to Florentinus, the city prefect.²³ His audience was the senatorial aristocracy of the western empire, the imperial family and the family of Stilicho; the short poems, whether commissioned or offered as gifts, were luxury items, marking the dedicatee or patron as a discerning connoisseur of the arts.

What does their appreciation of Claudian's work suggest about his audience? Two characteristics of his poetry in particular are relevant in this regard: first, the elevation of Rome and of being Roman. The city of Rome and its ideological importance permeate his work: the panegyric to Honorius of 404 opens with a glorification of the city which, as established in the preface, is the equivalent of Olympus, the home of the gods. Although for most of Claudian's career Honorius was in Milan, Rome remains spiritually the home of the emperor and is present, personified, in many of the poems. Claudian is not unusual in this: the closer the barbarians came to the gates, the louder rose the proclamation of Roman eternity.²⁴ The presentation of Rome in all her golden glory reassured his audience that despite all threats, eternal Rome, *Roma aeterna*, would be saved. Of greater significance was the fact that Rome would be saved by one who had made himself Roman: Stilicho the Vandal, who possessed the truly Roman qualities of *pietas* (duty), *iustitia* (justice), *clementia* (mercy) and *uirtus* (virtue) and so became the successor of Fabius and Camillus, heroes from the past who had protected Rome against outsiders. The traditional senatorial aristocracy of the West might object to the upward mobility of a man of barbarian birth²⁵ but they could be assured at least that he had the *mos maiorum* at heart. Those who, like Stilicho, had risen high during the fluidity of the fourth century could be reassured that all it took to become Roman was the desire to be so. To act like a Roman was to be a Roman, while those who displayed non-Roman characteristics (the inhabitants of Constantinople for example) were deemed unworthy of citizenship in the idealised Roman empire which Claudian created for himself and his audience.

Classical learning and education were what unified the old and new aristocracies in the late fourth century. As Brown observes in *The World of Late Antiquity*, the desire of the fluid upper class to root themselves in the Roman past led to the patronage of art and particularly of neo-classical art evident in the Symmachus ivories, the Projecta casket and the poetry of Claudian.²⁶ Claudian complimented the learning of his readers by

²³ Gruzelier 1993: xviii–xix. ²⁴ Paschoud 1967. ²⁵ Levy 1958: 338–40.

²⁶ Brown, 1971: 29–33; Beckwith 1979: 50–5. Connor 1993: 258 sees the *De raptu Proserpinae* as 'one amongst many classicizing artefacts'.

giving them short poems on themes of scientific or topographical interest (the magnet, *c.m.* 29, or the river Nile, *c.m.* 28) or on works of art (the statue of two brothers at Catina, *c.m.* 13). More important was Claudian's assumption of his readers' knowledge of Latin literature. Claudian was utterly familiar with the classical canon, and the complexity of his intertextual usage, as will be demonstrated throughout this book, argues that he expected equal familiarity from his readers. Multiple and interlocking allusions, to different authors or different passages from a single author, are common. Self-reference creates thematic and ideological links between individual poems while the intertextual presence of Virgil, the guarantor of *Romanitas*, pervades the entire corpus. The complex patterning of reference in Claudian's work has only recently begun to be accepted for what it is, and establishing and explaining Claudian's intertext is the concern of much of this book. However, the complexity and proliferation of Claudian's allusion inevitably raises a question: to what extent if at all did his audience understand and appreciate his skill?

There cannot be a single answer. It is difficult to believe that court officials during a ceremony paid much attention to the panegyric unless it contained information of political importance or a personal compliment. The anonymous orator of a panegyric to Constantine describes the expectations of those around him but he gives the impression that they are local dignitaries or rival rhetoricians, determined that the speaker do proper justice to the occasion.²⁷ If Claudian refers to the audience, it is to incorporate them into his mythological setting whether as the court of Olympus in attendance on the earthly Jupiter (*VI Cons. pr.* 23–6) or deities coming to praise the slaughter of an earthly Python (*Ruf. 1 pr.* 15–16). They are not presented in their own right as eager or critical listeners and some indeed may have been the type of Roman aristocrat denounced by Ammianus as hating learning like poison and reading only Marius Maximus and Juvenal (28.4.14). These are not the sort to appreciate Claudian's learning and high level of culture.²⁸ In addition, the sophistication of Claudian's allusive technique would discourage any immediate comprehension of his complete intertextuality. As Von Albrecht observes of public recitals of epic, the audience would have noted the obvious effects: direct quotations, word and sound play.²⁹ On a single hearing, it could be difficult, even for the very well read, to recognise every slight reference and appreciate both old and new context.

²⁷ *Pan. Lat.* VI(7)1.1–3.²⁸ Cameron 1970: 305.²⁹ Von Albrecht 1999: 2.

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The poems, however, were intended to have a life beyond performance and his readers were those who read more widely than Ammianus' aristocrats. While we do not know if or to whom Claudian sent copies, we do know that Prudentius, Rutilius, Orosius and Augustine were among those who read his poems and that Stilicho was responsible for a collected edition of his works.³⁰ Claudian, therefore, could assume that he was writing for private study as well as a public performance and that his readership, like his first audience, the court of Honorius, would be composed of the most highly educated members of the Roman empire, and educated in a way that encouraged and enabled intertextual reading.

Some modern readers might find it difficult to accept that an ancient audience would recognise Claudian's allusions but such recognition was an essential part of every Roman education. Roman children learned Virgil by heart; Roman *grammatici* and amateur scholars delighted in recognising and comparing allusive passages.³¹ Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, the fictionalised account of a gathering of a group of intellectually minded friends, shows how this group at least read the classics and, as Macrobius presents the book as an educational tool for his son (*Sat.* 1 *pr.*), how they felt the classics should be read. Wide reading is a prerequisite to a good education and the group (itself seen by Macrobius as a recreation of Plato's *Symposium*)³² discusses history, philosophy and literature. Several complete books are devoted to Virgil, as polymath, orator and poet. As a prelude to his discussion of Virgil's sources, one of the guests, Eustathius, summarises some influences: Theocritus for pastoral, Hesiod and Aratus for agricultural and meteorological material in the *Georgics*, and Pisander for the second book of the *Aeneid*. These facts, says Eustathius, are known to everyone (*Sat.* 5.2.4) and are learned by schoolboys (*pueris decantata*, 5.2.6). He then proceeds to examine how Virgil was influenced by Homer in the opening lines of the *Aeneid* and compares many passages in the *Aeneid* with their Homeric origins, quoting lines from the Greek and Latin texts to make his point, and discussing how Virgil deliberately achieves different effects from Homer, in similes (5.11.4) or avoiding the monotony of a catalogue (5.15.1), where his version is superior (5.11.19–21) and where inferior (5.12.13). When Eustathius has finished, two of his fellow guests examine Virgil's borrowings from Roman poets (6.1.1–5.15) and then they turn to figures of speech and thought which originated with Virgil (6.6.1–6.7.3).

³⁰ Cameron 1970: 419–22. Cameron 1970: 228–52 and Levy 1958: 339 discuss the political aspect of Claudian's audience.

³¹ For the various ways in which Virgil was used in schools, McGill 2005: xvii–xxii.

³² *Sat.* 1.1.3–7.

The guests joke that Servius as a *grammaticus* should have much to say about Virgil after teaching him all day, but they are all enthusiastic and learned on the subject. This is a group which Macrobius described as the learned and leading men of the Roman nobility (I.I.I) and with reason. The members included Symmachus, Praetextatus and Nicomachus Flavianus, all distinguished in letters and politics.³³ Without suggesting that these were Claudian's readers,³⁴ they were the type who would appreciate both the political and the literary content. In the place of the ignorant aristocrats of Ammianus (28.4.14), we should imagine a readership with the wide-reading and analytical skills of these men.

Macrobius' Saturnalian gathering, although a particularly intellectual and highbrow one, was not unique in the ability to deconstruct literary texts. Familiarity with Virgil had its lighter side and appears to have been a literary parlour game. Late antiquity was the age of the *cento*, a pastiche created from lines and half-lines of a poet.³⁵ Virgil, the canonic poet, was particularly popular.³⁶ While serious examples survive (in the mid fourth century Proba's *cento* rewrote the Bible in Virgilian lines, and in the fifth century the empress Eudoxia did the same in a Homeric *cento*), the genre is more often ludic. Ausonius, poet and tutor of the emperor Gratian, wrote a Virgilian *Cento nuptialis*, the graphic narration of a wedding night. In the preface he excuses himself by saying that he wrote at the behest of the emperor Valentinian, who had written a *cento* of his own and had challenged Ausonius to do likewise (*pr.* 12–16). In short, Claudian's scholarship is aimed at a genuine readership, people who are steeped in the classics and proud of their knowledge, who are practised in playing wordgames and who would welcome the challenge of a complicated network of intertextual allusion.³⁷

INTERTEXTUALITY

Claudian's intertextual relationship with the literary past is intrinsic to his work and the focus of this study. As will be argued, to write Roman epic was to engage in a literary dialogue which dated back to Ennius and before. To Romans, Rome was timeless, a living palimpsest, containing simultaneously

³³ For the full group, see Kaster 2011: xxiv–xxxvi.

³⁴ Several were dead by the time Claudian began his career.

³⁵ On late antique centones generally, McGill 2005.

³⁶ McGill 2005: xvi: 'the loftier the status of the poet, the greater the effect of the cento'.

³⁷ For the delight in word-play which characterised late antiquity see, for example, Roberts 1989: 57–91; Malamud 1989: 27–46; M.S. Williams 2010: 90–105.