



Prudentius  
Complete Works

DELPHI  CLASSICS

Ancient Classics Series

*The Complete Works of*  
**PRUDENTIUS**

(348-c. 405)



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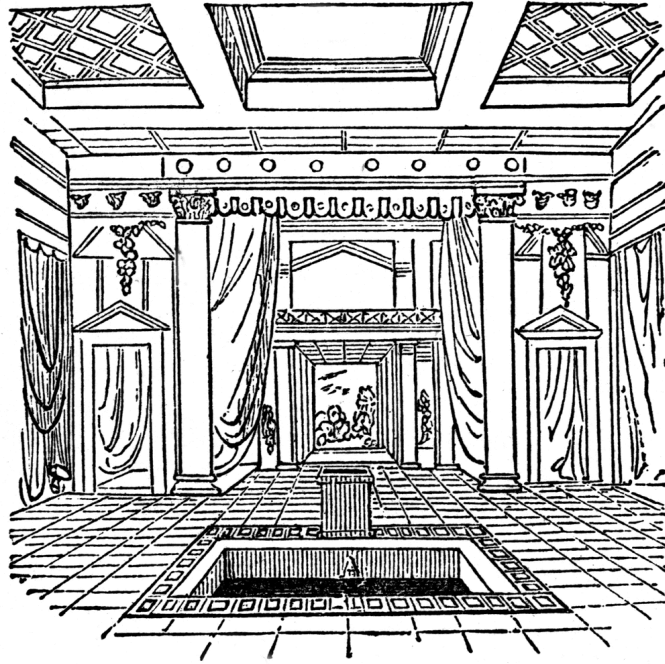
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Version 1

*The Complete Works of*  
**AURELIUS PRUDENTIUS CLEMENS**



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## *Complete Works of Prudentius*



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## The Translations



*Zaragoza, Aragon, Spain — a possible birthplace of Prudentius, who was born in 348 in the Roman province of Tarraconensis (Northern Spain).*



*Roman ruins at Zaragoza*

## The Poems of Aurelius Prudentius Clemens



*Translated by H. J. Thomson, Loeb Classical Library, 1949*

The poet Aurelius Prudentius was born in the Roman province of Tarraconensis (now Northern Spain) in AD 348. We know little of his life; even the location of his birth remains uncertain. His parents, presumably Christian, ensured he was educated in literature and rhetoric. He visited Rome between 400 and 405 and he practiced law with some success, serving twice as provincial governor in his native country, before the emperor Theodosius I summoned him to court. Towards the end of his life in c. 392, Prudentius suddenly retired from public life to become an ascetic, fasting until evening and abstaining entirely from animal food. He wrote poems, hymns and controversial works in defence of Christianity. He later collected the Christian poems of this period and added a preface, which he himself dated to 405.

Prudentius' poetry is influenced by early Christian authors, such as Tertullian and St. Ambrose, as well as the Bible and the acts of the martyrs. He was a strong Christian and yet he admired the old pagan literature and art, especially the great Latin poets whose forms he employed. His works promote the theme of the Roman achievement in history as a preparation for the coming of Christ and the triumph of a spiritual empire.

Prudentius' extant works are:

- Liber Cathemerinon — ("The Daily Round") comprising 12 lyric poems on various times of the day and on church festivals.
- Liber Peristephanon — ("Crowns of Martyrdom") containing 14 lyric poems on Spanish and Roman martyrs. Some were suggested to Prudentius by sacred images in churches or by the inscriptions of Pope Damasus I.
- Apotheosis — ("The Divinity of Christ") criticising disclaimers of the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus.
- Hamartigenia — ("The Origin of Sin") largely inspired by Tertullian, attacking the Gnostic dualism of Marcion and his followers.
- Psychomachia — ("The Fight for Mansoul") describing the struggle of faith, supported by the cardinal virtues, against idolatry and the corresponding vices.
- Libri contra Symmachum — ("Books against Symmachus") opposing the pagan senator Symmachus' requests that the altar of Victory, which had been removed by Gratian, be restored to the Senate house.
- Dittochæon — ("Scenes from History") comprising 49 quatrains, intended as captions for the murals of a basilica in Rome.

The allegorical poem *Psychomachia* (The Fight for Mansoul) is Prudentius' most influential work, incorporating elements of both Hellenic epic and inner psychological conflict. It became the inspiration and wellspring of medieval allegorical literature and its influence, according to C. S. Lewis, exceeded its intrinsic artistic merit. The first in a long tradition of works as diverse as the *Romance of the Rose*, *Everyman* and

*Piers Plowman*, the poem describes the conflict of vices and virtues as a battle in the style of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In slightly less than a thousand lines, it describes how the Christian faith is attacked by and defeats pagan idolatry. The work was extremely popular, surviving in many medieval manuscripts — twenty of them illustrated. The concept of the duality of good and evil in man was the first of its kind to depict the different moral realms that we all battle within ourselves. In this conflict between virtue and vice, full weight is given to the power of Luxuria:

“Flowershod and swaying from the wine cup,  
Every step a fragrance”.

With her attendants Beauty and Pleasure, and her weapons of rose-petals and violets, she succeeds in swaying the army of Virtue “in surrender to love”, before succumbing to ultimate defeat.

Prudentius' unique combination of Christianity and classical culture resulted in him becoming one of the most popular authors of the medieval period, who was regarded as among the likes of Horace and Statius as late as the fourteenth century.





*Solidus depicting Theodosius I, c. 379*

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*Probable representation of Q. Aurelius Symmachus from an ivory diptych of his Apotheosis*



*'Psychomachia' portrayed as the "battle between good and evil" on a Romanesque capital, Monastery of Sant Cugat, Catalonia, Spain, c. 1400*

## PREFACE



FULL FIFTY YEARS, if I err not, have I lived, and beyond that it is the seventh time that the heaven is wheeling the year and I have the benefit of the circling sun. The end is close upon me, and by now what God is adding to my days is on the border of old age. What profitable thing have I done in all this length of time? My first years wept under the crack of the rod; after that the toga corrupted me and taught me to utter sinful falsehoods; then lewd sauciness and wanton indulgence, to my shame and sorrow now, marred my youth with the filthy dirt of wickedness. Next disputings armed my vehement spirit, and a perversely stubborn passion for victory laid itself open to cruel falls. Twice with the law's controlling curb I governed famed cities, rendering civil justice to good men and striking terror into evil-doers. Finally His Grace the Emperor advanced me in his service and raised me up, attaching me closer to him and bidding me stand in the nearest rank. While fleeting life thus busied itself, of a sudden the hoar of age has stolen upon me, convicting me of having forgotten Salia's consulship of long ago. Under him my time began, and how many winters it has seen roll on, how often seen the roses given back to the meadows after the frost, the snow on my head proves. Will such things, good or bad, be of any profit after my flesh is dead, when death shall have wiped out all that I was? It must be said to me: "Whosoever thou art, thy soul hath lost the world it cherished; not to God, who will claim thee as His, belong the things for which it was zealous." 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. 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. 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.

# **The Daily Round**



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