

Title: Prudentius' Contra Symmachum, book II introduction, translation and commentary

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Abstract: Prudentius' Contra Symmachum contains a refutation of Symmachus' plea for the retaining of the altar of Victory in the Senate house at Rome which had been removed in 357 and then, after its restoration, probably under Julian, was removed again in 382. Symmachus made a plea for its return in 384 in his Relatio 3. Ambrose wrote two letters (Ep. 17 and 18) urging the emperor to reject Symmachus plea. It is not certain whether the altar was ever returned to the Senate house. It was this debate with Symmachus which Prudentius sought to portray in verse. This he does in the second book of the poem which is the book to be considered here. The first book while mentioning Symmachus, is a routine attack on the pagan gods of Rome and an account of how paganism was overthrown by the emperor Theodosius resulting in Rome adopting Christianity. There has been much debate over whether the two books were conceived as a single composition. This issue is examined again and the conclusion is reached, by a study of the text, that, while Prudentius had it in mind to produce a work of anti-pagan polemic as part of his compendium covering various aspects of Christian life, the work was produced as a whole in 402. It is argued, following ideas expressed by Dopp, that part of Prudentius aim was to celebrate a Christian concept of victory which would replace the cult that Symmachus had defended. I also examine the relationship between Prudentius and the works of Claudian to show how if not in opposition to him Prudentius was at least attempting an aemulatio which put current events in a Christian perspective.

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Symmachus II.583-591, 608-620. Search. Search. This is the second of the two volumes into which the present translation of the poems of Prudentius has been divided, as was indicated in the Introduction to Volume 1. The previous volume, Volume 43 of this Series, contained the two books of hymns: the Liber Cathemerinon, 'Book of Hymns for Every Day,' and the Liber Peristephanon, 'Book of the Martyrs' Crowns.' These lyric poems are written in a variety of Latin classical meters. The present volume contains the didactic and apologetic works of Prudentius, the Apotheosis, Hamartigenia, Psychomachia, and Contra Symmachum, all long poems written