

# Education, Religion, and Literary Culture in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century CE

A Study of the Underworld *Topos* in Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*





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Gabriela Ryser

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*De raptu Proserpinae*

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*amissum ne crede diem: sunt altera nobis  
sidera, sunt orbes alii, lumenque videbis  
purius Elysiumque magis mirabere solem.*

(“Do not believe that you have lost the daylight.  
We have other stars and other worlds, and you will see  
a purer light and wonder rather at the sun of Elysium.”)

Claud. *DRP* 2,282–284



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## Note on Translations and Abbreviations

Unless otherwise indicated, the Latin and Greek texts by the following authors as well as their translations are always taken from the editions listed below. When no translation was available, I have used my own, as indicated in the footnotes.

### Latin Literature

Claud. [œuvre]	Platnauer (1922a, 1922b), <i>with the exception of</i>
Claud. <i>DRP</i>	Gruzelier (1993)
Amm. Marc.	Rolfe (1950)
August. <i>Conf.</i>	Hammond (2014)
August. <i>De civ. D.</i>	W. M. Green (1963)
August. <i>De doct. Christ.</i>	R. P. H. Green (1995)
Cat.	Cornish, Postgate, and Mackail (1913)
Cic. <i>Arch.</i>	Watts (1923)
Cic. <i>Nat. D.</i>	Rackham (1933)
Cic. <i>Verr.</i>	Greenwood (1935)
Hor. <i>Carm.</i>	Rudd (2004)
Hor. <i>Sat.</i>	Fairclough (2005)
Hyg. <i>Fab.</i>	Marshall (1993) [text]
Juv.	Braund (2004)
Lactant. <i>Div. inst.</i>	Heck and Wlosok (2007) [text]
Luc. <i>Phars.</i>	Duff (1988)
Macr. <i>In Somn.</i>	Stahl (1952)
Macr. <i>Sat.</i>	Kaster (1988)
Min. Fel. <i>Oct.</i>	Glover and Rendall (1931)
Oros. <i>Adv. pagan.</i>	Zangemeister (1967) [text], Fear (2010) [translation]
Ov. <i>Am.</i>	Showerman (1971)
Ov. <i>Fast.</i>	Frazer (1959)
Ov. <i>Met.</i>	Miller (1984)
Prudent. <i>Cath.</i>	Thomson (1949)
Quint. <i>Inst.</i>	Russell (2002)
Rut. <i>Namat.</i>	Duff and Duff (1934)
Sall. <i>Ad Caes. sen.</i>	Ramsey (2015)
Sen. <i>Herc. Oet.</i>	Fitch (2018)
Sen. <i>Oed.</i>	Fitch (2018)
Sid. Apoll. <i>Epist.</i>	Anderson (1980, 1984)
Sil. <i>Pun.</i>	Duff (1934)
Stat. <i>Achill.</i>	Shackleton Bailey (2003b)
Stat. <i>Theb.</i>	Shackleton Bailey (2003a, 2003b)
Tert. <i>De idol.</i>	Waszink and Van Winden (1987)
Tert. <i>Adv. Marc.</i>	Evans (1972)
Tib.	Cornish, Postgate, and Mackail (1913)
Val. Fl. <i>Arg. 1</i>	Zissos (2008)
Val. Fl. <i>Arg. 2–8</i>	Mozley (1936)
Verg. <i>Aen.</i>	Fairclough (1934, 1935)
Verg. <i>G.</i>	Fairclough (1935)

### Greek Literature

Aesch. Ag.	Sommerstein (2009)
Ar. <i>Ran.</i>	Sommerstein (1996)
Arist. <i>Poet.</i>	Halliwell, Fyfe, Innes, Roberts, and Russell (1995)
Basil, <i>Ad adolesc.</i>	Deferrari and McGuire (1950)
Clem. Al. <i>Strom.</i>	Stählin (1985) [text], Ferguson (1991) [translation]
Dam. <i>In Parm.</i>	Westerink, Combès, and Segonds (2002)
Diod. Sic.	Oldfather (1939)
Eur. <i>Bac.</i>	Kovacs (2003)
Eur. <i>Hel.</i>	Kovacs (2002)
Hes. <i>Erg.</i>	Most (2007)
Hes. <i>Theog.</i>	Most (2007)
Hipp. <i>Ref.</i>	Marcovich (1986) [text], Litwa (2016) [translation]
Hom. <i>Hymn Dem.</i>	Evelyn-White (1970)
Hom. <i>Il.</i>	Murray (2003)
Hom. <i>Od.</i>	Murray and Dimock (1919)
Julian. <i>Ep.</i>	Wright (1923)
Marinus, <i>Vit. Procl.</i>	Saffrey, Segonds, and Luna (2002)
Men. <i>Rh.</i>	Russell and Wilson (1981)
Mesomedes, <i>Hymn.</i>	Heitsch (1961) [text]
Nemesius, <i>Nat. Hom.</i>	Telfer (1955)
Nonnus, <i>Dion.</i>	Rouse (1940)
OA	Schelske (2011)
OF (Kern)	Kern (1972) [text]
<i>Orph. Hymn</i>	Athanassakis (1977)
Pind.	Race (1997)
Pl. <i>Resp.</i>	Emlyn-Jones and Preddy (2013a, 2013b)
Plut. <i>De fac.</i>	Cherniss and Helmbold (1957)
Plut. <i>Fr.</i>	Sandbach (1969)
Porph. <i>De antr. nymph.</i>	LeLay (1989)
Procl. <i>ET</i>	Dodds (1963)
Procl. <i>In Crat.</i>	Duvick and Tarrant (2007) [translation]
Procl. <i>In R.</i>	Festugière (1970) [translation]
Procl. <i>In Ti.</i>	Festugière (1966–1968) [translation]
Procl. <i>Theo. Plat.</i>	Saffrey and Westerink (1997)
Salutius, <i>De diis</i>	Nock (1926)
Socrates, <i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Hansen (2005) [text]
Theophr. <i>Char.</i>	Diggle (2004)
Xenophanes	Diels and Kranz (2004)
Xen. <i>Symp.</i>	Marchant and Todd (2013)

### Reference Books

CIL	Mommsen, Th. <i>et al.</i> (1862-). <i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., & Scott, R. (1940). <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (9 <sup>th</sup> ed. rev. H. Stuart-Jones). Oxford: Oxford University Press; Suppl. (1968), (1996).

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Gabriela Ryser



# 1. Introduction

In May 394 Theodosius I, the emperor of the East and a Christian, marched towards Italy to face the usurper Eugenius, figurehead of what modern scholarship has often supposed to be a religiously motivated pagan counter-movement, and his troops near the northern Italian river Frigidus.<sup>1</sup> After the Western

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1 In the following pages I will use the term ‘pagan’ and occasionally also ‘paganism’, instead of alternatives such as ‘polytheistic’ and ‘polytheism’, or ‘non-Christian’, as do other recent publications in the field (see, for instance, Cameron (2011), Tanaseanu-Döbler (2012b), Lössl (2014), Schindler (2015), Salzman, Sághy, and Lizzi Testa (2016), Humphries (2018)). Still, in view of the criticism launched at this terminology, a few explanatory remarks shall be made why and how it is used: A lot has been written about the etymology and the pejorative meaning of the word *paganus* in religious contexts (see, for example, Rothaus (1996), 300 (“derogatory term”)), although its original connotations were most probably neutral (see Cameron (2011), 14–25, Jürgasch (2016), 117–120, both with further references). Cameron and Jürgasch argue that the term originally seems to designate ‘the other’ in a particular situation, whether this be country people as opposed to city dwellers (Cameron (2011), 14–15 quotes Ov. *Fast.* 1,669–670, Prop. 4,75–76, Apul. *Met.* 4,3,6; 8,23,1; 9,10,4), civilians as opposed to soldiers (Cameron (2011), 19 refers to legal texts), or—by extension—non-Christians as opposed to Christians in a non-judgemental way, while the proposed alternatives to ‘pagan’ are in fact not entirely unbiased (see Herrero de Jáuregui (2010), 14, Cameron (2011), 25–32). Nobody, however, would contest the fact that the concept of paganism reflects to a great extent a prejudiced, Christocentric viewpoint and is “a construction of apologetics, whereby the term is employed to designate anything that is neither Christian nor Jewish, nor even heretical—in general terms, then, the traditional Greek and Roman religions and the new cults that had arisen in the Hellenistic age”, or in other words, “a variety of cults and trends that seem too heterogeneous to be adequately comprehended under a common term” (Herrero de Jáuregui (2010), 13. See also Rothaus (1996), Kahlos (2011), Jürgasch (2016), 131–135). On the other hand, once the polemic undertones and the excessive implications of unity of their particular Christian construction have been acknowledged, there is, I would concur, “no excessive risk in using the terms “paganism” and “pagans” and qualifying these more precisely where necessary” (Herrero de Jáuregui (2010), 14; see also Cameron (2011), 25: “whatever negative associations “pagan” may once have borne in Christian polemic are surely now confined to the rhetoric of American fundamentalist preachers”). Moreover, despite the diversity of the late antique religious landscape, there also seems to have been a contemporary non-Christian notion of a certain homogeneity of religious movements, so that “some of the later ‘pagans’ we shall consider did, in fact, think of themselves as embracing a religion opposed to Christianity” (Louth (2007), 293 fn 1; see also Stenger (2009), 111, Van Nuffelen (2011), Tanaseanu-Döbler (2012a), 340–341 fn 39 with further bibliography, and Chap. 2.2.3 below). Therefore, I think it is, especially given the aims of this study, not inadequate to reduce the complexity of the religious picture to a certain point and use the term ‘paganism’ as an umbrella term, while ‘pagan’ is employed as a conventional modern shorthand “for various facets of the non- or pre-Christian society of the Graeco-Roman world and its neighbours, excluding (for historical reasons) Judaism” (Cameron (2011), 28; see also Herrero de Jáuregui (2010), 13–14), specifically underlining its restricted reference for classical and Christian scholars as opposed to, for

emperor Valentinian II was found dead, his Frankish *magister militum* Arbogast made the Christian Flavius Eugenius successor to the throne. Despite Eugenius' religious affiliation there seem to have been expressly pagan sympathies and support, which led Christian authors and, along with them, also modern scholars to stylise the battle at the Frigidus as paganism's 'last stand' before the ultimate triumph of Christianity throughout the entire Roman empire.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact (or perhaps because of it?) that this battle must have added to the tensions between the remaining pagan aristocrats in the Roman Senate and Theodosius, the emperor designated the brothers Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius and Anicius Probinus as consuls for the year 395. They were the youngest offspring of a very influential and respected, yet Christian, family in Rome, which made these two inexperienced youngsters eligible to bridge the alleged gap between Senate and emperor.

At the investiture of the consuls in 395 a panegyric on Olybrius and Probinus was recited by a poet hailing from Egypt, Claudius Claudianus. However, despite the fact that the religious affiliation of the people involved was politically decisive, the poet not only lets the opportunity pass by to refer to Christianity, he presents both the emperor as well as the consuls-to-be by using traditional mythological images which in turn could be associated with pagan religion. The goddess Roma hastens to see Theodosius, presented like Mars, after the battle at the Frigidus on urgent business: it is her who proposes Olybrius and Probinus for the consulate. Roma herself had nursed them as babies and the stars shone upon

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instance, scholars of religious studies or anthropology. At the same time, Cameron (2011), 31–32 warns against the “loose use of phrases like ‘pagan literature’ or ‘pagan classics’ which, according to the scholar, “has given rise to the misleading notion that pagans saw the classics as a buffer or even weapon against Christianity”, or that mythological *topoi* “have a “pagan” message.” For Cameron, as he has argued in a vast amount of publications, clearly neither is the case, and he suggests using “terms with no specifically religious association like classical, classicizing, secular”. The present study, however, moves along this exact fault line and asks whether the mythological *topoi* in Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae* are indeed interpreted as merely cultural/secular, or whether they can still be understood as relevant and meaningful in a non-Christian religious context, or even as carrying an anti-Christian message. The term ‘pagan’, then, captures this possible ambiguity and precludes the, at the time, predominant, and perhaps premature, assessment of Claudian and his oeuvre as non-polemical and non-religious (see Chap. 1.3 below).

2 On the historical as well as religio-political background see, for instance, Bloch (1963) in Momigliano's influential *Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, Bonner (1984), Markus (1990), MacMullen (1997) and (2009), Curran (2002), Rüpke (2007), Cameron (2011), for the Frigidus above all 93–131, Gwynn (2011), Maxwell (2012), McEvoy (2013), Merrony (2017), and Humphries (2018). Although clearly rejecting the “religious conflict model”, Lizzi Testa (2016), 403 points out “the political significance of measures emperors took in the field of religion” as well as “that political objectives moved Romans busy with the business of empire”, who “sometimes used religion for their political aims”. Thus, a religious motif should not be *a priori* and fundamentally ruled out for the individual participants at the Frigidus.

these glorious boys the day they were born.<sup>3</sup> Although the festivities took place in the aftermath of the alleged destruction of pagan resistance and surely also as a reinforcement of Christianity in Rome, nothing in these lines would suggest that both Theodosius and the Anicii were Christians, quite on the contrary.

The slight irritation one might experience in the face of these apparently conflicting events, the defeat of paganism and the victory of Christianity presented with traditional pagan *topoi*, is to a great extent owed to two long-lived and tenacious paradigms in scholarship:<sup>4</sup> firstly, the assumption of a dichotomy and violent hostility between Christianity and paganism which culminated in the fateful battle at the Frigidus. Secondly, that this pagan opposition defeated in 394 was taken to be the home and engine of a revival of classical art and literature as displayed in Olybrius and Probinus' panegyric. Both narratives have more and more come to be criticised in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as increasingly evidence of 'neighbourly' competition rather than open and destructive antagonism between pagans and their Christian fellow citizens was found and recognised.<sup>5</sup> Above all in the West the situation was mostly one of co-existence on common ground—literally, as in Rome churches were built next to temples which were still maintained, as well as metaphorically.<sup>6</sup> Christian and pagans shared the same culture, with which they both were familiarised by means of education. Undergoing the same *paideia* they were brought up based on an age-old curriculum of classical texts imparting the same civic values and, apparently, taste in art and literature independent of religious affiliation.<sup>7</sup> Love of classical culture did, thus, not coincide with being either Christian or pagan.<sup>8</sup>

3 See *Prob.* 113–126 and 143–146: *pignora cara Probi, festa quos luce creatos / ipsa meo fovi gremio. cunabula parvis / ipsa dedi, cum matris onus Lucina beatum / solveret et magnos profferrent sidera partus* (“[there are] the dearly loved sons of Probus, born on a festal day and reared in my own bosom. ’Twas I gave the little ones their cradles when the goddess of childbirth freed their mother’s womb from its blessed burden and heaven brought to light her glorious offspring”).

4 The following is based on Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen (2014a), especially 4–7.

5 See, for example, Gemeinhardt (2007), Gwynn and Bangert (2010b), Lavan and Mulryan (2011), and Salzman, Sághy, and Lizzi Testa (2016), who in their introduction (Lizzi Testa, Salzman, and Sághy (2016), 2–3) to some extent also challenge Cameron’s view most recently voiced in his substantial publication in 2011. Above all in her own contribution Lizzi Testa (2016) criticises “the image he has built up of the Roman aristocrats: as not pagan, but simply classical élites, people totally soaked in classical culture [...] There was no real space in their world for religious conflict” (401). The scholar opts for “interpretative historiographic models less narrow” (402) emphasising a coexistence of different social groups (among them pagans and Christians) marked by tensions and competition, which reduced but not entirely eliminated violence and conflict (Lizzi Testa, Salzman, and Sághy (2016), 3).

6 See, for instance, Curran (2002), Mulryan (2011).

7 See Gemeinhardt (2007) and Gemeinhardt, Van Hoof, and Van Nuffelen (2016) as well as Chap. 2.3 below for further references.

8 See the numerous publications by Cameron, for instance (1984) and (1997).



An almost perfect illustration of this complex interplay of religion, literary culture, and pagan education can be found in Claudian. On the one hand, the knowledge of the Latin literary tradition he displays provides some insight in the educational and thus cultural background of himself and late antique Western society at large, as, being Alexandrian, he had to learn Latin at school.<sup>9</sup> On the other, not just the panegyric mentioned above but Claudian's whole *œuvre*, which was destined for a Christian audience at the imperial court, brims with mythological *topoi*.

## 1.1 Life and Works

Claudius Claudianus was born in late 4<sup>th</sup> century Alexandria; the exact date is unknown, as well as his familial background, and most of the Alexandrian's early career path.<sup>10</sup> He must have enjoyed a thorough education both in his mother tongue Greek, and Latin rhetoric, which shows in his vast knowledge and precise quotations of preceding literature in his own *œuvre*.<sup>11</sup> Undergoing classical *paideia* with its reliance on literary, often epic texts as an educational medium, the native Greek speaker learnt Latin most likely by reading Vergil and Cicero, to which he might have added the private study of the Silver epicists.<sup>12</sup> Claudian's Greek poems, which are only extant in fragments, suggest that he first earned his living as a professional "wandering poet" in the East, before making a triumphant entrance on the literary stage of Rome.<sup>13</sup>

In 395, as mentioned above, the allegedly young poet recited a panegyric—probably the first in Latin—on the consulate of the brothers Probinus and Olybrius, offspring of the influential Christian family of the Anicii.<sup>14</sup> Being

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9 In his second language he was most probably more dependent on the educational curriculum than in his mother tongue Greek.

10 This section of the paper relies on the very thorough biographical chapters of Cameron (1970) and the introduction to the edition by Charlet (1991), IX–XXXIII. It must be underlined that virtually all information on Claudian's life is deduced from his own poems and is, thus, scarce and dependent on the dating of his works, which in itself is problematic; see fn 15 below.

11 Despite the decrease of language competence in both parts of the Empire, there is strong evidence for Latin in the East: see Cameron (1965), 494–496 and (1970), 19–20, Criboire (1996) and (2001), Rochette (1997), 25, Geiger (1999), above all 613–614 and 616–617, Hidber (2006) as well as Mulligan (2007), 301–302 and Nesselrath (2013a). On Claudian's linguistic competences see, for instance, Christiansen (1997).

12 See, for instance, Vössing (2002), 249, 262, and Joyal, McDougall, and Yardley (2009), 231 among many other sources on the topic of school curricula in Antiquity referenced in Chap. 2 below.

13 See the comprehensive article by Cameron (1965) with references specifically to Claudian throughout, a revised version of which is published in Cameron (2016), as well as Cameron (2004), 351.

14 On the panegyric see, for instance, Taegert (1988), Wheeler (2007), Schindler (2009).

an instant success, Claudian moved on to Milan where for almost ten years he worked as a court poet writing panegyrics for Honorius, son of Theodosius I and emperor of the Western empire, and his regent Stilicho, but also two invectives, *epithalamia*, as well as other minor poems dedicated to different people associated with the imperial circle. Last but not least the Alexandrian also wrote a mythological epic on the rape of Proserpina, the *De raptu Proserpinae* (henceforth *DRP*).<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, the poem remained incomplete, presumably because of Claudian's death in 404.<sup>16</sup>

The plot of the Proserpina myth was with all possibility well-known to his audience; however, Claudian added a few twists and surprises.<sup>17</sup> In Book 1 Claudian creates a strong narrative focus on the underworld by first depicting the enraged Pluto, who prepares an invasion of the upper world, because he is lonely. Threatened by his brother, Jupiter promises him his own daughter Proserpina as a wife. At the beginning of the second book Venus, after arriving in Sicily, implements Jupiter's stratagem by luring Proserpina out of the house and into the lavishly described flowery meadows of Mount Aetna. Pluto, then, breaks forth and abducts the girl. Back in the underworld preparations are hastily made and the wedding of the ruler of Orcus and his bride is celebrated. Book 3 starts with a council of the gods where Jupiter announces that Proserpina's rape was not only determined by destiny, but is part of a greater plan to provide corn to mankind that must not be revealed to Ceres. Thus, the anxious mother, stirred by a dream of her daughter, is met with silence when she inquires after Proserpina's whereabouts on Olympus. Ceres then returns to Sicily to prepare her search.<sup>18</sup>

15 The controversial issue of dating Claudian's œuvre need not concern us here: see Birt (1892), LXVIII–LXIX, Cremona (1948a), Romano (1958), 5–8; 30–33; 36, Hall (1969), 93–105, Cameron (1970), 452–466, Fo (1979), 386–402, Charlet (1991), XIII–XVI; XX–XXXIII, with regard to the *DRP* summarised by Gruzelier (1993), XVII–XX and fn 1, Duc (1994), 160–171; 181–184, Kellner (1997), 12–14, Felgentreu (1999), 157–160, Onorato (2008), 11–28, Friedrich and Frings (2009), 22–26, Harrison (2017), 242; 245–247. In summary it can be stated that there must have been a certain gap between the recitation of Book 1, which may already have been written before 395 CE, and Books 2 and 3, which were probably composed in the second half of 397 CE. Contrary to the arguments of, for instance, Romano and Charlet, this later dating of the *DRP* is, in my opinion, to be favoured in view of the preface to Book 1: see Chap. 4 fn 1 below.

16 For different theories that, in my view, have been convincingly refuted by Cameron, see Cameron (1970), 415–418; 454–455; 465–466. Contrarily: Charlet (1991), XXXII–XXXIII; Gruzelier (1993), XX (with Hall (1969), 105), Onorato (2008), 28. Other unfinished poems are Claudian's Latin *Gigantomachia* (c.m. 52), and the *Laus Serenae* (c.m. 30).

17 Compared with, for instance, one of Ovid's accounts (*Metamorphoses* 5, 341–661; *Fasti* 4, 395–620); of course, Claudian was with all probability also familiar with Greek renderings of the myth, such as the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (see Chap. 4.1 below). However, this is not likely to be true for his late antique public; for the waning knowledge of Greek in the West see, for instance, Courcelle (1948), Rochette (1997), 343 (above all fn 48), Lafferty (2003), 24–26.

18 On the content of a possible fourth book see Romano (1958), 36, Duc (1994), 103–106. See also the table in Chap. 4.1.5 and Chap. 4. fn 228 below.

With the *DRP*, Claudian created a mythological epic poem with—apparently—a purely literary scope, unlike his commissioned political poems. Although the latter, as noted for the panegyric on Olybrius and Probinus above, displayed mythological *topoi* as well, the *DRP* was often believed to be proof of the poet's own religious affiliation.<sup>19</sup> Because he was labelled a *paganus pervicacissimus*, a very stubborn pagan, by his contemporaries Augustine and Orosius, some modern scholars supposed Claudian's epic to be a militant pagan work which would carry an anti-Christian message glorifying paganism and/or a political message supporting the so-called 'pagan opposition'.<sup>20</sup> These religious notions covertly propagated by the *DRP*—of course in defiance of the Christian court—were even assumed to be the reason for the poet's declaration of his poem as a *cantus audax*.<sup>21</sup> On the opposite side of the argument, however, the traditional *topoi* were denied any function other than the imitation of classical poetry, pointing out the obviously inoffensive use of mythology in the political poems. The resulting verdict that the *DRP* was a mere literary play, a second-rate late antique copy of Vergil's epics, firmly dismissed the poem's image as a pagan 'declaration of war' which had been cherished before.<sup>22</sup> This dichotomy for a long time prevented a differentiated examination of Claudian's knowledge and use of notions developed in the religio-philosophical currents at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, as well as a profound appreciation of the *DRP*, as the following overview of Claudianic scholarship will show.

19 For the discussion of Claudian's religious affiliation, also in the light of his poems with clearly Christian content such as *De Salvatore* (c.m. 32; see the commentary by Ricci (2001), 234–239, as well as Hömke (2015)), see Schmid (1957), 158–165, Cameron (1970), 189–199; 214–219 and (2011), 206–208, Döpp (1980), 24–41, Sebesta (1980), Charlet (1984), Gualandri (1989), 45, Kirsch (1989), 170–174, Moreschini (2004), Schindler (2015), 19–22; 41–42, as well as Daut (1971) and von Stuckrad (2002) for the concept of nominal Christians.

20 Oros. *Adv. pagan.* 7,35,21. See August. *De civ. D.* 5,26,27 ff. The interpretation of the *DRP* as militantly pagan, which was proposed most explicitly by Potz (1985), 19–21; 35–39 and is mirrored in Friedrich and Frings (2009), 116, might also be based on the frequent criticism of the Proserpina myth by Christian apologists: see Foerster (1874), 96 fn 6 for references. Claudian's pagan political agenda is proposed by Fargues (1933) and Romano (1958); see fn 28 below.

21 See Cremona (1948a), 250–253, Potz (1985), 20–21, Charlet (1991), XXXII–XXXIII, Friedrich and Frings (2009), 26. See also Chap. 4 fn 2 below.

22 See Cameron (1970), 199: "The inference that, since Claudian writes as though the Roman state religion were in full bloom, he must have revered the old Roman gods is based on a naïvely unitarian view of the amorphous and many-sided conglomeration of beliefs which went to make up late paganism". See the discussion of Fargues (1933) and Romano (1958) below.

## 1.2 State of Research

In his 1780s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* the historian Gibbon passes (on a couple of pages) a judgement on Claudian which is astonishingly indicative of most of the research on this poet and his œuvre well up into the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in several ways:<sup>23</sup>

We should vainly seek in the poems of Claudian the happy invention and artificial conduct of an interesting fable, or the just and lively representation of the characters and situations of real life. For the service of his patron he published occasional panegyrics and invectives, and the design of these slavish compositions encouraged his propensity to exceed the limits of truth and nature. These imperfections, however, were compensated in some degree by the poetical virtues of Claudian. He was endowed with the rare and precious talent of raising the meanest, of adorning the most barren, and of diversifying the most similar topics; [...] he seldom fails to display, and even abuse, the advantages of a cultivated understanding, a copious fancy, an easy, and sometimes forcible expression and a perpetual flow of harmonious versification. [...] In the decline of arts and of empire, a native of Egypt who had received the education of a Greek [...] soared above the heads of his feeble contemporaries, and placed himself, after an interval of three hundred years, among the poets of Rome.

First, Gibbon's tendency to downplay the writer's artistic independence, missing 'happy invention' when it comes to plot, and discerning only 'slavish compositions', surely underpins the perception of Claudian as a poet of imitation. In the introduction to his 1892 edition Birt collects a vast amount of passages he identifies as instances of intertextuality in Claudian's œuvre. Although it has been subjected to discussion whether all of the listed items should be taken as conscious references by Claudian, and whether the sources of these had been correctly identified, Birt's work remained seminal for publications such as Cremona (1948b), Clarke (1950/51), Dilke (1965), Gualandri (1968) and (2004), Fo (1982), Gruzelier (1989) and (1990), as well as her commentary of the *DRP* in (1993), and still Onorato (2008).<sup>24</sup>

However, other scholars tended to interpret these imitations and reminiscences no longer as due to the lack of originality on Claudian's part; rather, they argued that traditional *topoi* and poetic techniques were attributed new functions in his œuvre.<sup>25</sup> Already Fargues, although he clearly maintains the line of intertextual research in his major monograph on Claudian published in 1933,

23 Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, Chap. 30 [= Gibbon (1993), 245–246].

24 For Gruzelier (1993) see also below.

25 See, for example, Cremona (1948b), 70, Fo (1982), 269.

is careful to underline poetic developments and innovations with regard to the poet's many models.<sup>26</sup> In 1958 Romano distinguishes in his work on Claudian between poems in which the literary culture and intertextuality are mere play, and poems in which these same traits express Claudian's "umanità".<sup>27</sup> Thus, he dismisses the *DRP* as "*lusus letterario*", whereas he emphasises that in the political poems the literary tradition displayed serves a political purpose.<sup>28</sup> The Italian scholar takes into account another prominent focus in research which refers back to Gibbon: the two-fold view of Claudian as, despite being an imitator of traditional literature, a faithful witness of his time, a historical source. It was also another historian, like Gibbon, who wrote what has proved to be the most influential monograph on Claudian to this day.

In his monograph of 1970 Cameron mainly focuses on Claudian's role as a court poet. He expands on his 1965 article in which he introduced Claudian as an exponent of an Egyptian school of professional 'wandering poets' in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, who artfully put poetry to practical use by shaping the public image of his patrons. Thus, Cameron systematically takes the socio-political circumstances of Claudian's literary production into account, concluding that "often his choice of literary techniques happens to suit his political purpose better than other techniques he might have chosen".<sup>29</sup> Yet, contrary to Fargues and Romano, he does not deem the poet a senatorial spokesman, but opines "that Claudian was acting as Stilico's official propagandist [...] with the deliberate intention of publicizing and justifying his policies and actions".<sup>30</sup> Cameron's critical stance, in turn, elicited several scholarly publications reassessing the

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26 Fargues (1933), 295: "Beaucoup de peintures mythologiques de Claudien sont [...] inspirées des meilleurs poètes latins. Mais il s'est efforcé de les renouveler en quelque mesure. [...] Le poète a aussi essayé de donner une certaine originalité à ses descriptions mythologiques en y accumulant les détails caractéristiques"; 330: "[Claudien] s'est assimilé d'ordinaire d'une manière personnelle les idées et les images qu'il devait à ses modèles."

27 Romano (1958), 13.

28 Romano (1958), 6: "[L]a tradizione letteraria e retorica come la tradizione storica e culturale sono in Claudiano al servizio del momento politico attuale"; 52: "La lode [...] non è freddo motivo panegiristico [...], perchè essa è in funzione d'una causa, sia quella per cui Stilicone si batte per l'unità delle due *partes*, sia quella [...] della restaurazione della dignità del senato." However, Fargues (1933) also attests Claudian a certain political impetus (332–333) which is linked to his religious affiliation (163–164): "Mais c'est surtout lorsqu'il parle des anciens cultes de Rome que Claudien montre ses sympathies pour le paganisme, et c'est par là qu'il se rattache le mieux à l'opposition païenne de son temps. [...] Les cultes païens sont dans son esprit étroitement associés à la grandeur de Rome."

29 Cameron (1970), 260.

30 Cameron (1970), 42. Examining *Stil.* 3 the scholar proves that Claudian diligently covers up Stilicho's bypassing of the Senate in the debate on Eutropius' consulate (234–37). In the following pages Cameron discusses Claudian's attitude towards the Victoria altar controversy with the same result (237–41).

poet's historical reliability such as Nolan (1973), Gnllka (1976), Schmidt (1976), and Döpp (1980).<sup>31</sup>

While the rhetorical character of the political poems was, thus, reassessed as serving a defined purpose, the *DRP*, which was apparently written with a different aim, was not valued in the same way.<sup>32</sup> The assessment of Claudian's purely literary merits was still based on the poetical standards of classical literature that the author is simply held unable to reach living in an age of *Decline and Fall*, as publications like Bowen (1953/54) and Dilke (1969) time and again underlined. An important step out of this third shadow cast by Gibbon is taken by research in general when redefining the role of Late Antiquity as a period not only of demise, but of important advancements and transformations that constitute the foundations of the modern world.<sup>33</sup> In literary studies this change of perspective can be perceived in an interest in the development of literary genres as well as aesthetic trends, a line of research which has received new momentum in recent years.<sup>34</sup> A very convincing contribution to the latter line of research is Roberts's influential work in 1989 which examines late antique poetry in its own right and argues for overarching principles of late antique aesthetics which apply to different forms of art. By close analysis of passages by different authors Roberts is able to identify a similar use of rhetorical devices and techniques, which strongly suggest that the often criticised rhetoricity of Claudian was not only expected, but actually appreciated by a late antique audience.<sup>35</sup> Yet, in her commentary in 1993 Gruzelier almost completely ignores Roberts' results and chooses to

31 Cameron also returned to the topic in his articles in (1974) and (2000a), in the latter of which he reacts to criticism and slightly modifies the image of Claudian as a political manipulator. See also the partly revised articles published in Cameron (2016).

32 Fargues (1933), 17–18, and Romano (1958), 30, clearly consider the *DRP* to be subordinate to the political poems; see Romano (1958), 47: "Il panegirico, l'epos storico, l'invettiva politica, saranno le forme esterne a cui si rivolgerà il suo spirito per significare [...] I suoi convincimenti politici, le sue aspirazioni, le sue idealità." Cameron (1970) rejects the idea that the *DRP* might have been dedicated to Stilicho and, therefore, might have included a panegyric trait (453–454).

33 See, for instance, Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar (2001), Rousseau and Papoutsakis (2009), Rousseau and Raithel (2009); contrarily: Ward-Perkins (2005).

34 The former in, for example, Fuhrmann (1967); on the epic genre specifically see Kirsch (1982), and Pollmann (2001a), whereas Charlet (1988) provides an example of the latter discussion. More recently see Greatrex, Elton, and McMahon (2015), Stenger (2015b), McGill and Pucci (2016), Elsner and Hernández Lobato (2017b), McGill and Watts (2018); see also p. 148–151 in Chap. 3.7 below.

35 Roberts (1989a), 36: "Fundamental [...] is a combination of synonymy, enumeration, and antithesis, which endows the text with their characteristic regularity and density." See also more recently the contribution by Hinds (2013), who pleads for an appreciation of Claudian as a late antique poet in his own right, as well as Gauly (2015), Ware (2016), Wheeler (2016), and Harrison (2017) on Claudian's self-aware handling of contemporary poetic standards.

reiterate more or less Gibbon's and, above all, Cameron's rather harsh opinions in her discussion of the poet's literary qualities.

Moreover, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century research on Claudian's works and mostly on the epic poem seems to have completed the emancipation from Gibbon's history-oriented approach. In a renewed interest in the *DRP* scholars examined literary *topoi* as signposts for the public to go beyond the face value of the text, and attempt an allegorical interpretation of the work which led to a number of publications such as Charlet (1987), Fauth (1988), von Albrecht (1989), and Ritoók (1994). Charlet, who most fervently represents this strand of research in the 1991 introduction to his multi-volume edition of Claudian's work and his article summing up this research focus in 2000, rejects the view of the *DRP* as a mere literary game, "une recherche de l'art pour l'art".<sup>36</sup> However, he dismissed both the political reading which was propagated by Duc (1994), who identified allusions to the situation at Honorius' court, as well as the religious interpretation stressing the Eleusinian and Orphic elements of the poem.<sup>37</sup> The latter emphasis in research goes far back and was endorsed by the *Quellenforschung* in the publications by, for instance, Foerster (1874), Cerrato (1881), Zimmermann (1882), Lipari (1936), and Bernert (1938). The possible Orphic sources were now underlined with deeper implications concerning Claudian's poetic intentions by Schwarz (1974/75) and his student Potz (1985), who considered the poem a pagan hymn in opposition to the prevalent Christianity.<sup>38</sup> Charlet, finally, favoured a more global analysis of the *DRP* as a "vision du cosmos et de son équilibre", which was, on the one hand, already proposed by Nolan (1973), who also discerned in Claudian's political works a poetic vision of order and unity that is mirrored in the *DRP*.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Kellner (1997), expanding on Christiansen (1969), who examined the use of images in the Alexandrian's œuvre to mould public opinion, and on the discussion of the *DRP* by Kirsch (1989), interprets the mythological poem as an allegory "of the whole human condition and of the very nature of the universe".<sup>40</sup> This notion of a poetic vision which may underlie Claudian's whole œuvre, an allegorical meaning connecting the political with the

36 Charlet (2000), 182; he then goes on: "[S]ans nier l'écriture artiste de Claudien, il convient d'approfondir la lecture de son épopée pour trouver, sous la surface, un sens plus profond." Of course, not all the scholars working on the *DRP* shared this perspective: see Ahlschweig (1998), who analyses the use of different poetic techniques in Claudian's œuvre.

37 More guarded about possible allusions to contemporary politics is Dutsch (1991); see also Charlet (1999b), 36–37.

38 See Charlet (2000), 182. See also Cremona (1948a), Fo (1979), as well as Onorato (2008), who stresses the Orphic components of the poem, but finds these subjected "ad una rifunzionalizzazione letteraria" (34), and Friedrich and Frings (2009), who, although considering a contemporary political interpretation possible, also emphasise the Eleusinian character of the *DRP*. For a discussion of Claudian's possible sources see Chap. 4.1 below.

39 Charlet (2000), 185; see Nolan (1973), 8; 47; 63.

40 Dewar (2000), 64.

‘purely literary’ poems such as the *DRP* and the *Gigantomachia*, has informed much of the most recent scholarship on the late antique poet. Guipponi-Gineste (2010) seeks to prove unity of Claudian’s literary production by examining his persistent use of *ekphraseis* and motifs which provide coherence to the poetic universe. Coombe (2018), similarly to a line of thought already present in Gnllka (1973), analyses how Claudian uses this poetic universe to propagate a certain political message. The late antique poet creates a story-world made up of “key episodes [...] and, within these, vivid elements (characters, symbolic objects, places, or actions) [...] [which] are not mere decoration but essential signifiers of the poem’s overarching theme”, to construct an alternative version of reality in which people and events can be re-enacted in different, but still plausible ways.<sup>41</sup> Ware (2012), then again, underlines Claudian’s self-image as an epic poet and his interplay with the literary tradition as a unifying element.<sup>42</sup> Repeated *topoi* and recurring characters throughout the diverse poems are to promote a consistent literary and political message of a *carmen* and an *imperium perpetuum*.

The prominence in the Latin epic tradition of one of Claudian’s recurrent *topoi*, the *topos* of the underworld, was already emphasised by Hardie (1993), and in his article in 1995 Wheeler proved its importance in the *DRP* as part of an overall narrative structure which guides the reader to an interpretation of the myth as a cosmological struggle between chaos and order. Onorato (2006) emphasised the importance of the characterisation of Pluto as an important element in the composition of the *DRP*. Like Wheeler the Italian scholar recognised the god’s *ira* as a crucial impetus, and the function of the underworld as a focal point of the plot. Tsai (2007), alternatively, investigates the *DRP* with respect to genre: what sets out to be a traditional epic narrating Pluto’s *ira* is mediated through another genre, the *epithalamium*. Proserpina, then, whose abduction averted an epic battle by reconciling heaven and hell through her marriage to Pluto, becomes for Tsai a unifier of the upper and the underworld, as well as of different genres, an argument which is taken up by Parkes (2015a).

Alongside these more literary issues the question of actual religious and philosophical elements or thoughts underneath the general poetic conception in Claudian’s œuvre was again posed by Moreschini (2004). While the Italian

41 Coombe (2018), 208–209. See Gnllka (1973), 158: “Niemand wird einem Manne wie Claudian unterstellen wollen, er habe allen Ernstes an schlangenhaarige Furien geglaubt. Aber haben wir darum das Recht, solche Gestalten ausschließlich nur als obligate Staffage des literarischen Genos abzutun? [...] [S]ollte es dem Dichter Claudian nicht gelungen sein, Bilder zu schaffen, die—und sei es auch nur für den Augenblick—im Kreise seiner Zuhörer eine gewisse Realität erlangen konnten?”

42 See already Connor (1993) referring to the *DRP*, above all 255: “Claudian has his eye fixed determinedly on producing an epic flavour”. On Claudian’s self-fashioning see also Wheeler (2007), Guipponi-Gineste (2009), Ware (2016), Wheeler (2016), and Harrison (2017).



scholar postulated that, as a *poeta doctus*, Claudian was well versed in and able to represent a ‘philosophical culture’ heavily influenced by rhetoric and literature, which was shared by pagans and Christians alike, Harich-Schwarzbauer (2008) claimed that the poet was well aware of the debates about the divine and its perception between Christians and pagans at the end of the 4th century, often implicitly commenting on them. Hence, although usually defined as such, Claudian was stated not to be mostly indifferent to questions of philosophy and theology.<sup>43</sup> Yet, in her 2009 analysis of Claudian’s importance for the genre of panegyrics in Late Antiquity, Schindler stated that his poems had, above all, the function of defining and demonstrating the social, not the religious affiliation of the addressee.<sup>44</sup> By their ability to grasp the exhibited intricate literary allusions, the audience could identify itself as part of the educated Roman class familiar with Latin literature. Given that *De raptu Proserpinae* was at least partly written in—and for—the same audience, the intertextual play in the poem is, in my opinion, likely to serve similar purposes.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Thesis

In texts of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, such as Claudian’s œuvre, traditional mythology was often interpreted by modern scholarship as merely ‘ornamental’, as a literary play of imitation without further implications or significance.<sup>45</sup> Whereas the mythological *topoi* in the Alexandrian’s political poems were recently vindicated, the *Sitz im Leben* of his purely ‘literary’ epic *DRP* is still an issue.<sup>46</sup> In Claudian’s panegyrics and invectives the scholars have now found, in line with a reassessment of Late Antiquity as a whole and late antique literature in particular, an innovative writer, who was not only shaping the perception of his patron, but creating a social identity across religious affiliations, while the *DRP* still has the image of a piece of intertextuality proving Claudian’s proficiency as an imitator of his literary predecessors, but not as an original poet in his own right. During the past decade, however, the distinction between political and ‘purely literary’ poems has been bridged, identifying both parts of the œuvre as inherent in the Latin epic tradition and as creating a coherent poetic vision of a peaceful and

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43 Moreschini (2004), although conceding that Claudian pays attention to contemporary philosophical and religious aspects, notes that “una patina superficiale di filosofia costituiva una caratteristica fondamentale” of the late antique Latin, as well as Greek, culture without further implications of commitment or sincerity (76–77).

44 See Schindler (2009), 48–58, and (2015), 19–22; 41–42; very similarly also Dorfbauer (2009).

45 See Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen (2014a), 7–12.

46 For the political poems see Schindler (2009) briefly discussed above.

stable cosmic order.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, questions of Claudian's own religious affiliation and possible religio-philosophical notions in the *DRP*, which might imply a comment on the situation of paganism and Christianity in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century West, have disappeared from view despite attempts to reassess the poet's actual learning in this matter.

The aim, then, of this thesis is to link these two approaches and gauge the possible influence of religion—mainly of pagan religio-philosophical concepts that were under discussion by late antique Neoplatonic thinkers in the East and the West—and education, which imparts the knowledge of literary tradition so crucial to Claudian's poetic vision, on the *DRP*. The focus of the analysis will lie on the poem's depiction of the underworld, not just because Pluto and his realm play a central part in the plot. This *topos* is of major importance not only for the epic genre, but also for the religious and philosophical discourses of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, which are concerned with the beyond and the immortal soul's fate after death.<sup>48</sup> The underworld could thus function as a focal point of a potential interaction of literary tradition and religious beliefs.

Moreover, traditional texts describing the afterlife also feature prominently in the educational context. Firstly, Homer and Vergil—and with them the *nekyia* in *Odyssey* 11 and the *catabasis* in *Aeneid* 6—were fundamental in classical *paideia* focused on rhetorical training and its use of *exempla*: “each Greek and Roman author utilized the imagery and pieces of tradition that were most relevant to his rhetorical purpose and audience”, perpetuating the tradition of the underworld *topos*.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, *paideia* was also to provide cultural education allowing the student to become a member of society: not only was knowledge of classic poetry thought to promote the desirable values, the depictions of Hades and Orcus also included explicit instructions.<sup>50</sup> Serving “as an integral component of the broader program of ethical and cultural education”, the descriptions of the afterlife helped in “shaping Greek and Roman society as well as early Christianity”, as both pagan and Christian pupils attended the same schools and were taught the same curriculum.<sup>51</sup>

With regard to Claudian and the *DRP* the question thus needs to be asked whether the underworld *topoi* still carry the religious meaning which was at times accorded to them by contemporary philosophical thought or whether they

47 See Ware (2012) and Coombe (2018) discussed above and the following draws on Moreschini (2004) and Harich-Schwarzbauer (2008).

48 See Chap. 4.2 below.

49 Henning (2014), 68; see also 65–67. On education see also Chap. 2 below.

50 See Henning (2014), 51–53; 77 quoting *Od.* 11,223–244 (instruction regarding afterlife), 440–444 (instruction regarding household); *Ar. Ran.* 1427–1430 and *Aen.* 6,740–755 (instruction regarding civic behaviour). See Chap. 2.2 below.

51 Henning (2014), 82. See also Kellner (2006), 242–247, who interprets the *DRP* as pedagogical programme.