

PRUDENTIUS PSYCHOMACHIA 310—311

BY

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*Venerat occiduis mundi de finibus hostis:
Luxuria..*

The translator of Prudentius in the Budé series, M. Lavarenne, says in a footnote: « On s'étonne que Prudence fasse venir la Sensualité de l'Occident, plutôt que de l'Orient, pays du luxe et de la mollesse pour les anciens. Songeait-il au luxe de Rome, capitale de l'empire d'Occident? Peut-être plaçait-il, comme semblent l'avoir fait les premiers chrétiens, le domaine du Diable à l'Occident, et celui du Christ à l'Orient ».

I find it hard to accept the view, which was also held by T. R. Glover, that Prudentius had Rome in mind. Writing as he was in Spain, conventional rhetoric must have deadened his sense of reality if he could place Rome at the western boundaries of the world. Can any parallel be cited from an author who lived further west than Italy?

The city of the Papes, and of earnest pagans like Symmachus, was not specially notorious for sensuality. It seems likely to me that Prudentius was thinking of his native Spain. A moralist is usually a stern critic of his own country, and Spain, rich at that time in mineral wealth, may have presented to the strict eyes of Prudentius more than one glaring example of riotous living.

Statius (*Thebaid* 10,84 f.) describes the abode of Sleep which lies in a grove *super occiduae nebulosa cubilia noctis*. His description bears little resemblance to anything in the *Psychomachia*; yet Voluptas makes an appearance in line 101, and it is perhaps just possible that Prudentius, in choosing a place of origin for Luxuria, was influenced by this passage of Statius. His choice would in any case be more likely to fall on the west than on the east, which was the birthplace of Christianity and still its most flourishing home.