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The message of martyrdom: Saint Vincent in late-antique sermons

Abstract: This article focuses on analyzing the changes that the text of the passion of Saint Vincent Martyr underwent when it was used in some sermons delivered from the 4th century onwards. It is thus shown that authors such as Prudentius, Augustine and Justus of Urgell took the data that most interested their objectives and omitted or substantially altered others. In this way we can see the importance of martyrdom literature as a form of delivering a message, of the communication of new values to Christians and also as a pretext for addressing controversial issues of that time.

Keywords: hagiography, early Christianity, Augustine, Prudentius, martyrs, textual transmission.

Introduction

Martyrdom processes were mainly passed down through the acts of the martyrs, documents that collected information following the model of official Roman records, so that these processes would be set down in writing as totally true facts. However, at the same time, these processes were not very understandable or accessible to many of the faithful. This is why other literary resources emerged in parallel to explain these occurrences and make them more easily available to a wider audience. Hagiography flourished in a spectacular way due to the success it achieved among readers and listeners, expanding the literary typologies related to these occurrences: the lives of saints, martyrologies and calendars, hymns, legends and passions¹. Sermons were one of the most commonly used forms that, whether they accompanied the reading of the acts or passion of the martyr or not, interpreted the words of the texts and took the points that best suited the message being communicated, even omitting or modifying other points, in accordance with the interests of the authors. The number of alterations that a story underwent became greater with time, and they reflected the moment in which the work was composed, thus having a decisive influence on later iconography and literature. Oral expression -through sermons- and artistic representation would be the fundamental tools used to convey ideas to those who could not receive such ideas through texts, especially from the 4th century onwards, a phenomenon that lasted until the Middle Ages². In this paper we will focus on one specific case, that of Saint

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¹ Delehay, 1921; Lazzati, 1956; Hamman, 1998; Barnes, 2010.

² It is not our purpose to create an exhaustive compilation of all the literary works generated around the figure of St. Vincent (which would require a much longer piece of work), but rather to show the most significant testimonies in reference to the sermons delivered in his honour in order to establish the

Vincent, which will present evidence to illustrate all of these elements. V. Saxer published a work in 1989 which, by collecting and analyzing these testimonies, sought to find common ground between these testimonies and the discovery of what could have been the original text of the Passion of St. Vincent from which all these traditions derived³. Our objective is the complete opposite; to see precisely how these texts differ in order to discover in what way the ideas were transformed and adapted to the later periods and to the objectives of these later authors.

Textual testimonies

The original document on our character, which contains the story of the martyrdom process, as well as various details of his life and the events after his death, are the *Acts of St. Vincent Martyr*, dated to around the 4th century⁴. Along with this text there are others, also from ancient times, catalogued as passions⁵. None of these preserved testimonies are considered to be the first to be written, as they are the result of later editions, but hagiographers believe that they would have all been quite similar. Even so, many of the authors question the historicity of their testimonies. Studies, such as Delehaye's, affirm that the documents on St. Vincent are part of the category of epic passions⁶. However, we will use both the version of the acts and, the passion published by Saxer, which has been established as the text that is closest to the original, since what interests us in this case is not so much establishing the reality of the facts but discovering the information that circulated among the early Christians, which these authors could have used to compose their later works.

The passion was widely known, as it was read in many churches during the celebration of the Vincentian feast, on January 22, as Augustine himself passes down to us in several of his sermons. References to it exist in other testimonies such as the Hispanic liturgical books, which all contain indications on the validity and clamour of the event of St Vincent's anniversary, which is conceptualized as one of the most solemn festivals. Although these books are somewhat later, this information is valuable for the verification of the scope of the cult of the martyr and its importance in the mass. However, some calendars and martyrologies that also include such information are older. St. Vincent appears in the *Philocalian Calendar* of Rome (ca. 354), in that of Polemius Silvius⁷ (5th century) and in that of St. Catherine of Sinai (7th century); as well as in many other local calendars of Roman and Visigothic Hispania, especially those from Valencia and Zaragoza. He also appears in the *Hieronymian Martyrology* (mid-5th century), from which the rest of the later martyrologies draw⁸. He even

differences between them and the text of the original passion. For information on all the texts available, we highlight the work of Saxer (2002).

³ Saxer, 1989.

⁴ Aigrain, 1953; Rordorf, 2007. It should be noted that this is not a single and homogeneous testimony since there are different versions. Thus, in the *Analecta Bollandiana* journal, we can find the edition of the acts in two forms: one shorter version and a more extensive one (Ludovici – Senechal – Platel, 1882).

⁵ It is important to highlight the edition appeared in AB 2 (1883), 299-301, and another one mentioned in the work "Catalogus Codicum Hagiographicum Latinorum", AB 28 (1909), 426, from the *Codex F. II. 10* (Ottino, n. 12, fol. 27-29). A study of Fábrega (1953), considered the text of C. Narbey, *Supplement aux Acta Sanctorum II*, Paris 1903, 224-228 (*BHL Suppl. Editio altera*, p. 306) the closest to the original. The latest analysis of Saxer established the critical text from the common version of the passions: *BHL* 8628-8631 (Saxer, 2002).

⁶ Delehaye, 1921.

⁷ Bishop of Octodurum (Switzerland); CIL I/2, p. 259: *XI. Kal. Febr. Natalis sancti Vincentii martyris*.

⁸ AASS. Nov. II/2, 55, 1: *XI. Kalendas Februarias, (in Hi)spania, civitate Valentia, (passio) sancti Valeri episcopi et Vincenti diaconi (martyrum)*.

appears in the *Synaxarion of Constantinople* (10th-11th centuries), the most important work of martyrology in the East, in which he is the only Spanish saint mentioned. The information these texts provide is very limited, just the date and some information about the martyr, such as his origin, but they confirm the annual periodicity of his remembrance and his presence in community rites and, therefore, in preaching.

Several authors of the texts that interests us pay attention to St. Vincent in their speeches. The first is Prudentius who, in his well-known work *Peristephanon*, dedicated 24 verses of hymn IV and the whole of V to the saint⁹. Augustine is the writer who provides us with the greatest number of testimonies on the saint, since he composed five sermons on the subject¹⁰, and it is possible that this set could include a sixth, a sermon which is attributed to him although we cannot be entirely certain of its provenance (the Caillau¹¹). The sermon *Cunctorum*¹², whose name is derived from the words at the beginning, presents a major problem, since its authorship is widely debated and there are several potential candidates: Pope Leo I (Leo the Great, 440-461), Justinian († 548), Leander of Seville († 600), Braulius of Zaragoza († 651) and Justus, Bishop of Urgell (6th century), although it seems that it is a text that was rewritten in the 7th century. The last of these authors also has another sermon that is undoubtedly his¹³. The last references to the saint in this period come from Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers¹⁴ († 601), and Eugenius, Archbishop of Toledo († 657), both from the 7th century; after these dates we do not find any other mentions until the 10th century, so we have established the 7th century as the limit to our study. We will use as much of the information from these texts as possible, as some of them only contain simple mentions of the saint. There are three fundamental points that we will focus on: the figure of St. Vincent, the process suffered by him and other parallel themes from the texts.

The figure of Saint Vincent

As soon as we start to consider an aspect which is as fundamental as the description of the person of St. Vincent and his circumstances, we find the first major difference between the documents. The original passion is prolific in details about the context of the martyr's life, such as his family situation and his education in ecclesiastical studies. It mentions the nobility of his lineage (*generis ipsius nobilitas*, I), that he was the grandson of a consul (I) and that since childhood he had devoted himself to studies, excelling in all the sciences. He was soon associated with the Bishop of Zaragoza (I), something that is undoubtedly important when forming an idea about his social context and the opportunities that were available to him. However, later documents tend to omit all these data and focus on the qualities that Vincent developed as an adult and those that made him worthy of the combat he waged and the reward he obtained. In this sense, Prudentius is one of the first to give the saint his two most recurring descriptions: a soldier, to which he equates his victory to military successes: "bless this your

⁹ *Perist.* IV, 77-108; V. Paulinus of Nola († 431), in his celebrated hagiographic hymns, also remembers St. Vincent, but only does so in one verse: *Vincentius extat Hiberis* (Paul. Nol. *carm.* XIX, 155).

¹⁰ *Sermo* 274 (*PL* XXXVIII, col. 1252-53); *sermo* 275 (*PL* XXXVIII, col. 1254-55); *sermo* 276 (*PL* XXXVIII, col. 1255-57); *sermo* 277 (*PL* XXXVIII, col. 1257-68), dated January 22 of the year 410, 411, 412 and 413 respectively; and *sermo* 4 (*PL* XXXVIII, col. 33-52), with a chronology that oscillates between 410 and 419.

¹¹ Caillau, 1836, 67. Dated between 410 and 412.

¹² *PL* XXXIX, col. 2095-2098.

¹³ Villanueva, 1821, 216-221; García Villada, 1934, 432-434.

¹⁴ In his poem *De virginitate* (*carm.* VIII, 8, 154) made a reference to the saint, but it is very brief: *Vincentii hispana surgit ab arce decus*.

triumphant festal day, on which you purchased with your blood the glorious crown of victory” (*Perist.* V, 3-4); and an athlete, using the terminology already established in the passion (8), but expanding this with similes with physical exercise and prizes: “he knew that in this blessed sanctuary eighteen famous martyrs had won their trophies, and stirred by these laurels he soon competed for the same glory” (IV, 106-107); “Thou alone, O twice renowned, thou alone hast won the glory of a double prize, thou hast gained two laurels together” (V, 539-541). The only comment that is specifically related to the saint's childhood also accompanies these comparisons: “he was, a boy in our palaestra, where he, with the chrism of faith anointed, learned the art of wrestling with powers of evil prompted by Satan” (IV, 102-104). The parsimony in the description of the character forces us to discover his personality through the words put into his mouth by this author. We see that he is presented as a strong, threatening figure (he even violently insults Daciano), something that contrasts with the attitude visible in the passion that, although firm and courageous, is calmer. For Prudentius, the most important thing is not to provide a historical account with as much data as possible, but to use St. Vincent as an example and, therefore, the author focuses completely on the moment of the punishment of the martyr, emphasizing the speeches that, according to him, the saint delivered, and the strength of the saint's spirit.

Augustine also omits the references to the vital information on the martyr, but in this case, this is justified because his sermons were composed not to be read, but to be proclaimed to the faithful after the reading of the passion, so that they would have been well aware of all those essential details. However, Augustine focuses on highlighting the qualities that made St. Vincent strong and then transfers these qualities to the practicality of the listeners' daily lives. In Sermon 274, Augustine insists on the virtue of patience: *Quisquis putat sanctum Vincentium viribus suis ista potuisse, nimis errat* (2); *Quis istam patientiam militi suo donavit?* (1); *christiana patientia donum Dei est* (1). In sermon 275, however, he emphasizes the saint's temperance to a greater extent, while also mentioning the serenity of the tortured (*tranquillitatem tormenta patientis*, 2) and *tanta securitas in verbis, tamquam alius torqueretur, alius loqueretur* (1). These aspects are also repeated in sermon 276: *habebat in sermone fiduciam, habebat in passione tolerantiam* (1); *tanta tranquillitas proferebatur in voce [...] et tanta securitas sonabat in verbis* (2), as well as in the Caillau, which shares the same chronology (*constantibus et veracibus responsionibus; sed Deo se subiciebat anima eius, ab ipso enim patientia eius*, 2). However, number 277, which is the longest and last of all the sermons, is dedicated to faith, so Augustine abandons the previous argument and goes into greater detail about the “beauty of soul that he would have had” (*decoris habebat spiritum*, 1) and the faith and absolute trust in God needed to overcome any difficulties. De Gaiffier believes that the need to show that Christ gave the martyr the strength to resist suffering goes beyond simple preaching, and this insistence is due to Augustine's confrontation with the Pelagians¹⁵. Moreover, in Augustine's work, St. Vincent is described as a soldier and recourse to combat is continuously present in sermon 274, and also in the

¹⁵ Gaiffier, 1949, 269. Pelagius and his followers considered the strength of human will to be sufficient to overcome any difficulty and achieve virtue, relegating the role of the grace of Christ to a mere example to be followed, through the doctrine given, and to external help. This theory was understood by the most orthodox Christian authors as an approximation to the pagan ideal, especially the one advocated by the Stoic philosophers, which had to be corrected (Grossi, 2007). Augustine was one of the fiercest combatants, as shown by the number of works composed to refute Julian of Eclanum: *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, *De correptione et gratia*, *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, *De dono perseverantiae*. Hence, he took advantage of every opportunity in his writings, as in this case, to further his position on the subject. On this controversy, it is interesting to consult: Bonner, 1972; Burns, 1979.

276: *Duplicem mundus aciem producit contra milites Christi. Advertite, fratres. Duplicem, dixi, aciem producit mundus contra milites Christi* (276, 2).

The theme of the martyr as an athlete and as a soldier is very important in early Christian narrative. The terminology had already appeared in the acts and passions of many martyrs, but it was in the texts of the Fathers of the Church where its development would be most extensive¹⁶. These two models of courage and robustness that were very present in Roman society were taken and adapted to the vicissitudes suffered by the first condemned people to show that the audience could achieve the same prestige by behaving totally differently in accordance with the new Christian values. This vision of the martyr was also insisted on in sermons, which were the most direct form of communicating with the faithful. Despite the fact that both the attributes of the martyr and the settings –military and sports- associated with him are repeated by both of the previously mentioned authors, there is a clear distinction in the purpose of each one. Prudentius treats the subject in a more general and grandiose way, exalting the martyr, as if this distinction were exclusively his, while Augustine strives to bring the martyr closer to the audience, resorting to everyday examples so that the faithful could better understand the message and apply it to their lives, thus showing how the figure of the athlete extended to all Christians. The other two sermons, both the *Cunctorum* and that written by Justus of Urgell, do not make any reference to the personality of Saint Vincent.

The process suffered by the martyr

Both the interrogation and the torture inflicted are exhaustively described in the passion, in fact, this description is one of the defining characteristics of this literary genre. But what ideas do the rest of the authors take from all this? To begin with, Augustine describes the entire process as a combat between cruelty and piety: *crudelitatis pietatisque certamen* (Caillau 1), thus continuing with the idea of the struggle seen in the characterization of the protagonist. Daciano appears as the antagonist, the magistrate whom Prudentius alludes to in the worst terms: *satelles idoli* (V, 13); *persecutor* (V, 20); *maior carnifex* (V, 175, 326); *hostis* (V, 84); *tyrannus* (V, 168, 255, 429), some of which Augustine repeats, referring to him by using the appellation of “evil judge” (*iudex iniquus*, Caillau 1) and clarifying that the persecutor is the devil (*Diabolus persecutor est*, sermon 4, 33). Prudentius indicates that the judge urged the saint to carry out the imperial orders with the following exclamation: “You stubborn Nazarenes, attend! Renounce your rude, unseemly rites; these gods of stone our prince adores appease with smoke of sacrifice” (V, 20-29). The stone vocabulary appears later in the passion, but it comes from the mouth of St. Vincent, when he answers Daciano: *Nam quos iubes deos confiteri, idola sunt lignea et lapidea* (5); a Roman authority would hardly have referred to the gods as stones and to the sacrifices as smoke, in fact, the passion says: *Iusserunt domini orbis et principes, ut diis libamina persolvatis, nolentes dignitatem veteris culturae novis et inauditis legibus profanari* (3). We see, then, how the passion collects the interventions of each figure faithfully, while Prudentius alters them with his own language and according to his own vision. These alterations are also verified during the interrogation, since the speeches offered by the martyr in the

¹⁶ Other referencies in Ignatius (Ignat., *Ad Polycarp.* 6, 2; *Ad Smyrn.* 1), Eusebius of Caesarea (Eus., *HE.* VI, 1; VIII, 4) and Tertullian (Tert., *mart.* III, 3; *coron.*), but it is, above all, the Byzantine Church that most used this metaphor in its homilies: John Chrysostom, the Cappadocian Fathers, Severus of Antioch, John of Damascus (Bandura, 1994; Benoît, 1994).

Peristephanon verses are much simpler, shorter and more direct, which contrasts with the long exhortations that can be read in the passion. A very interesting fact is that only in the hymns is there a reference to the fact that the judge requested the Scriptures from the martyr so that they could be burned, to be executed by fire (V, 99-100). It is a loan that the author took from other passions and acts in which this request is made quite frequently, but which in the case of St. Vincent did not take place.

The part referring to torture is where the authors, especially Prudentius, go into the most detail. In the list of the martyr's sufferings we find iron and shackles (V, 14-16); stretching, although he does not use the specific vocabulary of the instrument (which would have probably been a rack); and various incisions to strip the ribs and expose the organs (V, 110-116). Later, he speaks of fire, using the pallet (*grabatus*) and the red-hot metal plates (V, 205-207), as well as "a gridiron with its cruel spikes, set far apart, a rough bed makes, and under it the glowing coals breathe forth the fumes of torturing heat" (V, 219-221). This is the torture of the gridiron, but, in the passion, it is named the iron bed (*lectum cum ferreis [...] et addita subter carbonum congerie*, 7). The tortures end with the spiked tiles on the ground, a punishment which he states was unknown until that moment. Contrary to other descriptions, in this case, the information is quite complete. We can appreciate something similar in Augustine's work, although he provides less details. He confirms that the martyr overcame these trials (*vicit exustus ignibus [...] in poenis*, 274, 1); and in sermon 275, he says that these torments were gruesome and refined (2), and he speaks directly of the rack (2), which he calls the *machinatione tormenti* in the Caillau sermon, and he also mentions hooks (1; 276, 4), which are recognized in 276 when he mentions that the martyr's body was in tatters (1). In addition, Augustine adds that St. Vincent had wounds of all kinds (3) and that flames were applied to him (3), without investigating how this action was carried out. The Cuncorum sermon is even more explicit, and it names all the tortures: *Ideo hunc non laminae ignitae sartaginis, non equulei, non ungulae ferreaeque manus, non vires pavendae caedentium, nec dolor scissorum membrorum, non foci fragor et strepentis in patentibus visceribus salis iniectio* (col. 2095-96). In fact, this is the first document that mentions nails, although instances of the tearing of the body had already been mentioned. Curiously, all of the texts omit the first of the torments, which was the journey to Valencia taken by the martyr and the bishop, whose necks and hands were loaded with chains (3). There are also no references to the fact that they were deprived of food and drink during their imprisonment. Furthermore, the wooden stock, in which St. Vincent's feet were held at the end of the process when he was locked up in the dungeon, are not mentioned (*ligno pedes eius constringite*, 8). In other words, the most important thing for these authors is their suffering. The punishments that are explained are those that entail the greatest severity, the less serious ones go unnoticed. Furthermore, the exact names of the tortures and the mechanism of application are not even mentioned, and neither is the order in which they took place. What remains is the result, the wounds the tortures produced. Again, the intention was not to faithfully collect historical data, but to convey as powerful a message as possible. In fact, no one questioned the veracity of the information, which was certainly considered valid at the time, but a more careful examination would have dismissed it as not being a reflection reality¹⁷.

¹⁷ The Roman system of torture was tightly regulated, so that it would not be used arbitrarily, except in exceptional cases. To go into greater depth on this topic, you can consult: Bauman, 1996; Arce, 1996; and for its application to the Christian martyrs: Mateo, 2016. The most reliable acts respect this structure, but those of a secondary nature and the passions are more prolific in terms of the inclusion of all kinds of torture and for accused individuals of any social category. On the resources used in the different types of

After a brief indication, only given by Prudentius, of the nature of the crime: “with crude speech to have violated this power of gods and emperors, law sacred and political, law mankind yields to every day” (V, 43-46) and of the expectation that St. Vincent’s death caused: “From the whole town a throng of the faithful might be seen gathering, making a soft bed furnished with supports, and wiping dry the bleeding wounds. One covers with kisses the double cuts made by the claws, another eagerly licks the red gore on the body. Many wet a linen garment with the drops of blood, to lay it up at home as a holy safeguard for their descendants” (V, 334-44), which are data that also appear in the passion (9), the text continues with the role played by punishments, in this case, *post mortem*.

The author of the *Peristephanon* states that St. Vincent’s corpse was abandoned to the dogs, which would devour it. He takes this fact from the passion, although this original text speaks of beasts in general and the closest animal to the description is a wolf approaching the corpse (8). However, the main purpose of this action is to avoid burial and worship: “his very bones I shall destroy, lest in an honored tomb they rest, where vulgar crowds may worship him and name of martyr there inscribe” (V, 390-92), which is information that is also stated in the passion: *ut cadaver exanime sepulturae carens honore, a feris et avibus penitus consumptum, non compareat; ne forte Christiani eius tollentes reliquias, martyris sibi vindicent dignitatem* (10). It was important to keep these words because they made direct reference to the fervour that the martyr aroused in his day and also in the time of Prudentius. Next, Prudentius focuses on the punishment of immersion, but unlike the original passion, which explains the ordinary procedure of the penalty of the sack for parricides¹⁸, Prudentius simplifies this punishment into one with an esparto basket and, moreover, with another objective: to be dragged to a shore where animals devour the corpse or where it can be destroyed when hitting the rocks (V, 442-447). In the passion, it is clear that the purpose of this punishment is for him to disappear and drown: “may the seas conceal his victory” (11), indeed, the stone is tied “lest, the corpse carried by the mobile wave to unknown shore, reaches there the here denied burial” (11), which is consistent with this type of punishment and its preparation. Nevertheless, since the purpose described by Prudentius is not the drowning, a certain amount of dramatic licence can be allowed, and it can be considered that the form of transport is not a sack, but a basket of esparto, which would have surely floated. Here, Prudentius considered that it was important to cite the name of the soldier who carried out such a heinous action, Eumorphion. However, it is striking that Prudentius did not describe all the complexity that the penalty of the sack required. Salvation finally occurred because the stone tied to the bundle floated, and the basket became the martyr’s form of transport, evoking Moses. Augustine also refers to the fact that the saint was “thrown from a small boat into the sea” (*de navicula mittebatur in mare*) and adds that St. Vincent quietly said, “It is thrown at us, but we will not perish” (*Deicimur, sed non perimus*, 274, 1), therefore, he was given him the ability of speaking after

martyrdom narratives in relation to the incorporation of torture and punishment, we recommend the work: Aigrain, 1953, which follows in the footsteps of the first studies of H. Delehaye.

¹⁸ The penalty of the sack or *culleus* had very specific characteristics that referred to the type of container, the animals that were used, and the way in which the punishment was carried out. This penalty consisted of gagging the accused, putting on wooden clogs and a wolf skin cap, beating him with lashes of the colour of blood and finally putting him in a leather sack, the mouth of which was sewn up; then he was carried on a chariot drawn by black bulls and thrown into the sea or into a river to be drowned. From the *Lex Pompeia de parricidiis*, that is to say in 55-52 BC, to aggravate the penalty, there was an order to put a dog, a monkey, a rooster and a snake into the sack (*Dig.* 48, 9, 1 y 9; *Inst. Iust.* 4, 18, 6). This torture was intended for very specific crimes (Briquel, 1980). On certain occasions it was carried out on Christians, although the references are not exactly from first-rate acts (Collinet, 1950).

death, as occurred in many cases in ancient literature. In sermon 275, Augustine clarifies that the purpose of this action was to totally hide the body, but *mortuus maria transnavit. Sed ipse inter undas gubernavit cadaver exstinctum [...] non mersit aqua maris corpus eius* (276, 4). As we can see, Augustine continues to give clear prominence to God's intervention in the fate of the martyr in his speech. The *Cunctorum* also states that the body was abandoned to the beasts and defended by a raven until it was finally thrown into the sea and transported miraculously to the beach, but it does not provide any further details. Obviously, this part would have been present in the stories, as it contributes to reaffirming the evil that characterized Roman authority, which carried out one of the worst tortures that existed, the deprivation of burial, and, at the same time, it reinforces the idea of the power of God, who always manages to save his faithful no matter what difficulties they face. It also reinforces the charisma of the martyr by showing the devotion that was aroused in Christians by the discovery of his relics.

Finally, in the last scene, Prudentius allows himself greater literary licence and incorporates the presence of John the Baptist, whom he says came to accompany St. Vincent on his march (V, 374-76), an element that is not reflected in the passion or in the rest of the sermons¹⁹, but that gives importance and notoriety to the narrative.

Discussions included in the words of the sermons

Augustine is, without a doubt, the author who most frequently used the text of the passion of St. Vincent to deal with issues debated at his time and thus reinforce his position and arguments. One of the issues that is given preferential treatment in these writings is that of victory over evil. The process is presented as a fight between the martyr and the executioner, of which the former is the winner, as his own name would suggest (*Vincentius*). The verb “overcome” had already been used in the passion, Daciano himself exclaims “we are defeated” (*vincimur*, 8), but it is the rest of the authors who are constantly influenced by this idea. In the first of his sermons, Augustine had already indicated the full scope of this victory: *ubique vincentem. Vicit in verbis, vicit in poenis; vicit in confessione, vicit in tribulatione; vicit exustus ignibus, vicit submersus fluctibus: postremo vicit tortus, vicit mortuus* (274, 1); in another later work he continues: *Vicit ergo Dacianum vivens Vincentius, vicit et mortuus* (276, 4); and this is reiterated in the other texts. The allusion to the contrast between good and evil, materialized in the persecutions against Christians and personified here in St. Vincent and Daciano, is evident, as is the exhortation to always stay on the path of religion because it is the only one that leads to success, to a correct life full of benefits. Prudentius agrees with this opinion and, trying to communicate the martyr's words, explains that pagan gods exist, as well as other spirits, but they are evil and push people to commit evil acts. He advises people to disassociate themselves from these figures in order to fight against evil (V, 80 -92). At a time when the danger of paganism still lurked, priests had to preach about which direction to follow and the ideal model of behaviour so as not to take the wrong path. For this reason, Augustine was so insistent that the only option for victory was to remain faithful to the beliefs that had been instilled. In this case, the pretext of the martyr's name was enough to exploit this idea,

¹⁹ In the passion, the appearance of angels is mentioned, but they are not recognizable and, moreover, this takes place when the martyr is locked up in prison, not after all the vicissitudes after his death. Perhaps Prudentius used the essence of this information, modifying the details. The rest of the sermons do not mention either possibility.

and especially the terminology derived from it, much more abundantly than in other testimonies related to other characters.

That said, we have seen how this victory was associated with the military world, with all the references to triumph and the soldiers of Christ, but it is possible that Augustine relates it to the gladiatorial sphere, since he constantly says: *Magnum spectaculum spectavimus oculis fidei* (274, 1); *ante oculos nostros mirandum spectaculum constitutum est* (Caillau 1); *Magnum et multum mirandum spectaculum noster animus cepit [...] Erat videre invictam Martyris animam contra insidias antiqui hostis, acerrima conflictatione certantem* (275, 1); *Magnum certamen magnam comparat gloriam [...] caro eius, in qua erat tropaeum Christi victoris* (274, 1); *Illi et in victoria corona* (277, 1). They are expressions that take us back to ancient popular entertainment, even explicitly comparing the process with an example of one of these performances: *Magnum et multum mirandum spectaculum noster animus cepit: nec inanissimam et perniciosissimam, sicut solet in theatris quarumque nugarum, sed plane utilissimam et fructuosissimam voluptatem oculis interioribus hausimus* (275, 1). In other words, the author shows the faithful that they can obtain the same sensations by listening to these stories as by going to see a show at the theatre, the circus or the amphitheatre, and that the former activity is also more gratifying because it is pleasing to God. Here, the hard fight that the Church waged on the public's deep-rooted preference for games, of which Augustine is a fierce combatant, is combined²⁰. Let us remember the sermon in which he expresses his gratitude to those who have attended the liturgical celebration instead of the amphitheatre on a day when both events coincided. The Fathers of the Church tried to substitute pagan festivities and entertainment for the commemorations of the martyrs' anniversaries, organizing different acts that would make up for depriving the public of the other celebrations. This Augustine sermon, delivered as part of one of these celebrations, is a practical example of this endeavour. The Hypponense uses the Vincentian text as a pretext to obtain another argument in his favour and tries to convince the public, rather than impose a norm, because he knows that, in this way, he can achieve a more effective result. However, we must not forget that, in many of the martyrial acts and passions, the executions take place within the framework of the amphitheatre shows²¹, with the case of Perpetua and Felicity being the most famous, in which all the characterization and symbolism associated with the spectacles passes into the realm of martyrdom in general.

In addition to the spectacles, in their fight against paganism, Christian authors were in charge of eliminating certain practices related to magic as they were considered totally inappropriate²². In Sermon 4, Augustine compares St. Vincent's fight with torture to the resistance to the temptations that the devil continually sends in the form of consulting fortune-tellers and magicians and the application of physical remedies: *Quibus*

²⁰ Authors such as Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, John Chrysostom and Cyprian qualify the shows as idolatrous, immoral and useless, since, in addition to being totally linked to the pagan world, they consider that contemplating the execution of a person is like performing it oneself. Augustine joins these authors and calls the gladiators "public sinners" (Aug., *fid. et op.* 18, 33).

²¹ Carfora, 2009. And not only did the condemned to the beasts die here, the cremations, and sometimes the crucifixions, were also carried out publicly in these facilities, constituting a spectacle demanded by the ancient citizens.

²² Although Constantine was in charge of distinguishing between harmful magic and that which simply sought the remedy for certain ailments (CTh. 9, 16, 3), Christian authors soon took a position against all of these practices. This was basically due to the rejection of these practices that had served as an accusation against them by the Romans centuries before and that they had to deny. Justin, Tertullian, Cyprian, John Chrysostom and also Augustine (Aug., *doctr. christ.* II, 35) were some of the authors who were most deeply involved in this endeavour. On Augustine, the article of Dolbeau (2003) is interesting.

illecebris persuadet ut eas ad sortilegos, ad mathematicos, quando dolet caput. Qui dimittunt Deum et eunt ad ligamenta diabolica, victi sunt a diabolo (36). In this way, Augustine re-adapts the model of perseverance and strength of the martyrs to everyday situations in which the faithful could develop such qualities. For Augustine, the story has a clear exemplary function of resistance to the temptations of the world, and, for this reason, he uses it to exhort Christians to follow the straight path of goodness, not to attend shows and not to resort to magical arts to solve mundane problems. Whether this was done with the intention of making the message of martyrdom more understandable for the audience (speaking to them in terms that were more recognizable) or with the intention of eliminating all of those actions, we do not know. But, in any case, the will to go beyond what was presented in the passion is evident.

The last topic that arouses the interest of the author from Hippo is found in Sermon 277, dedicated to the body-soul binomial, to the senses and sufferings that constantly affect a person, and the resurrection. It establishes a simile between the different torments that Vincent endured and all the disadvantages that the materiality of the body causes for everybody else, showing that impassiveness is the best remedy. He insists that a person should not despise the body, because it is part of the being, but learn how to cope with it without considering it as a burden: *Sed Vincentio quid fecit, qui etiam sentienti nihil fecit? Ergo non sic non sentire, ut non sentit lapis, ut non sentit arbor, ut non sentit cadaver; sed vivere in corpore, et nihil ex eius onere sentire, hoc est sanum esse* (277, 6). Certainly, the debate about the body was very present in these early centuries, and it was an important field of discussion among Christian authors²³. Augustine makes his position clear and justifies it with well-known and accepted texts²⁴. And in this case, Augustine makes a direct reference to the fact that he used the reading as a pretext to start these arguments: *Nata nobis occasio est de corpore spiritali aliquid disputandi ex passione Martyris, a quo sic vidimus et mirati sumus corpus inter tormenta contemni [...] Hinc ergo hortari vos cupiens, et me ipsum ad praesentia contemnenda, futura speranda* (277, 8).

Augustine was more focused on the issues, but if one topic existed that really aroused interests in the other authors, it was the origins and appropriation of the martyr. After the stage of the persecutions, the possession of relics or the association with one of those holy characters gave a community unparalleled prestige in Christian antiquity. This led to many churches promoting actions to include such illustrious testimonials in their treasures. This happened to such an extent that the debate that arose around the relevance of these practices, which in some cases became abusive, is well known²⁵. Focusing on the more local scope of this paper, Prudentius is the first author to claim an exclusive link with St. Vincent for his church. To do this, he uses the reference to the birth of the saint in the city of Zaragoza to praise the city and give it inordinate

²³ Opinions about the body were very diverse and extremely complex. However, in practice, the authors were aware of two imperatives: it is necessary to combat temptation, the demon that inhabits the body, but at the same time spiritualize the body itself and, through it, the entire visible cosmos (Bellini, 1980; Brown, 1993; Martin, 1995).

²⁴ Specifically on the conception of the body by Augustine, you can consult: Musatto, 1990.

²⁵ In the West, at least until the 7th century, the official position of the Church was to exclude the possibility of touching the holy bodies and, above all, to divide these bodies in order to distribute the relics. However, the regulations issued by the authorities and some preserved references indicate that this had become a fairly widespread practice. For example, Ambrose the Bishop of Milan was the promoter of the transportation of saints to his see and also to Bologna (Ambr., *epist.* 22; *exhort. virg.* 1, 2; Paul. Med., *vita Ambr.* 29). In the East, on the other hand, the opinion of certain ecclesiastics, such as Basil of Caesarea, Theodoret and Gregory of Nazianzus, seemed to consider this type of action more favourably (Heinzelmann, 1979; Bozoky – Helvetius, 1999).

importance compared to Valencia, the town where St. Vincent suffered his martyrdom and was supposedly buried. Let us read Prudentius' own words: "Did you not, O Vincent, heroic witness, destined to meet death in a strange arena, presage your ordeal by blood that moistened streets of this city? These drops the saint's townsmen preserve and cherish as though their soil sheltered his very body and his sacred relics were resting in the tomb of his fathers" (IV, 90-96). In fact, he does not even name the city, he says that it is unknown and claims ownership of the martyr, emphatically repeating that the saint belongs to them: "Ours he is, although in a foreign city he endured the pangs of his cruel passion, favoring with his shrine on the seashore near by Lofty Saguntum" (IV, 98-101). He recognizes that the burial was in another place, but he identifies it with a different population and explains that it was a chance event. Faced with these resounding and daring statements, Justus of Urgell's reaction was to be expected. His family was of Valencian origin and his brother was the bishop of the city, Justinian²⁶, who was the person who ordered the remains of St. Vincent to be moved from the basilica in which they were initially deposited, to the cathedral and to build a mausoleum a few metres away, so that he could be buried as close to the saint as possible. For this reason, in the sermon he dedicated to the martyr, he could do little else but confront Prudentius and claim the prominence that the Valencians had been denied. When Justinian refers to St. Vincent, he always does so in terms of *noster est: noster ex genere, noster ex fide, noster in stola, noster in gloria, noster in officio, noster in tumulto, noster in patrocinio [...] hunc urbs nostra protulit*. He even contradicts Prudentius, and this is important, inventing the fact that the martyr was born in Valencia and not in Zaragoza, a substantial alteration to the original passion. However, as he did not wish to generate hostilities, he concludes by saying that the saint belongs to the universal Church. In this sense, both Augustine and the author of the Cunctorum sermon are much more conciliatory and recognize the universality of martyrdom cults, indicating that everyone has the right to honor these figures. Augustine states: *Quae hodie regio, quae provincia transmarina, quo usque vel Romanum imperium, vel christianum nomen extenditur, natalem non gaudet celebrare Vincentii?* (276, 4). It is noted that Augustine had no direct relationship with the territory. Moreover, the Cunctorum sermon, despite the fact that the exordium clearly indicates the Hispanic origin of its author, which makes him a compatriot of the martyr: *Hunc ergo amplius proper venerentur, quem etiam peregrina mirantur* (col. 2095)²⁷, says that all martyrs belong to the patrimony of the universal Church and that the only thing that could be of note is that the regions that were the locations of their torture could celebrate them with greater impetus. In addition to the clear implication for the issue of the relevance of the relics and the notoriety of having a local martyr, the debate constitutes a faithful reflection of the diffusion of the cult of St. Vincent reached in Hispania, Gaul and North Africa, especially from the 5th century.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the martyrdom texts were an inexhaustible source of information and inspiration for subsequent writings and speeches. On the one hand, the sermons, tried to make those documents understandable to the majority of the population and, on the other, the authors also used these texts as a pretext to instill new values and ideas in citizens who were torn between Christian beliefs and the pagan way of life that surrounded them and that they had always known. This was done to such an extent that

²⁶ Orlandis, 1995; Linage, 1972.

²⁷ Gaiffier, 1949, 281.

some data was considerably adulterated to suit the authors' objectives. There are several conclusions of a more specific type that we can draw from this whole process. In the first place, the character of the testimonies is more moralizing than historical, and, therefore, the way in which the real data loses relevance compared to testimonies that extol qualities or key moments of an event can be clearly appreciated. This lack of interest in facts is denoted by the context of the martyr, as well as by the rest of the characters: Bishop Valerio is nonexistent, and Daciano is reduced to being a mere dispenser of torture. The judge's words and repeated efforts to get St. Vincent to change his mind and save himself are totally ignored. On the other hand, a good allusion is made to torments (with descriptions and terminology that sometimes differ between the texts) and the qualities that the saint possessed to withstand them.

Secondly, the information that is considered important is used, rather than to explain the passion or to recall it, to deal with other topics that do not appear in it but that may have been indirectly related, making the passions part of debates or controversies which were relevant at that moment. In this sense, Augustine focuses more on general aspects that affect Christianity (the prohibition of spectacles, the inappropriateness of magical practices, the resurrection, etc.), while the rest of the authors are more concerned with specific, local matters, such as the ownership of the saint and his relics. There is a great quantitative difference between how Augustine and the rest of the authors used the passion. This is not surprising, since as the sources clearly state, the bishop was a tireless preacher (there is mention of a minimum of two weekly sermons, but they some times took place several consecutive days, even reaching two sermons on the same day, and these sermons were extremely long, as he himself recognizes in some of his texts). It is normal that in his desire to interact with the faithful, he took advantage of these moments to transmit Christian values to them through as many topics and areas as possible. In addition, it is clear that the sermon was his preferred medium, since we do not find a similar number of references to these types of more mundane subject in the rest of the theological works by the Hippoense.

Thirdly, Prudentius is the author who presents the greatest number of alterations to the original passion, not only in terms of data, such as the types of torture, which is something that may have been due to confusion or ignorance of such mechanisms, but above all in terms of fundamental information, such as the locations or the intervention of certain biblical characters and also in the dialogues of the martyr. The words that he puts into the mouth of St. Vincent are completely in line with his own interests, they are not faithful to the record that exists in the martyrdom document. He dedicates himself to attributing his own opinions to the saint in order to capture the attention of the audience and give greater legitimacy to his ideas. In the work of Augustine, on the other hand, there are omissions rather than alterations. But this is understandable considering that his words came after reading the passion, which meant that repeating certain parts was unnecessary. Of course, he emphasized those aspects that could help him start discourse on any important point, which was always related to the faithful. In other words, although, of course, theological questions are dealt within his work, they are always discussed using common language and full of examples and comparisons to direct the message to the group of faithful followers (especially those who could not read or understand such thoughts).

Finally, it is important to highlight a few words expressed by Augustine to show that on occasions Christians also showed a lack of modesty: *in hoc mundo martyrum gloriam demonstramus [...] Quis autem hodie Daciani vel nomen audisset, nisi Vincentii passionem legisset?* (276, 4). As well as the anecdotal nature of the phrase, we must recognize the importance of the passion, because if it had not existed, neither would the

rest of the documents that we have analyzed in this work, and they also deserve recognition, since, at that time, they would have constituted the only source of information for a large part of the population (many would have only known what the priest preached to them), and, in posterity, they would become the source for other sermons or literary works, taking the information that appeared in them as fact.

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