

## Varied *Vestigia*: Following Footsteps in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

The narrative of Lucan's epic poem *Bellum Civile* is driven by movement through both space (Caesar's travel into Rome, from Rome to Pharsalus, and on to Egypt in pursuit of Pompey) and time (the transition from Rome's pre-civil war past to the future forged out of the violence of civil war). Left in the wake of this movement are traces: both the footprints created by advancing and retreating steps, and remnants of the past, often manifested in the form of decaying landscapes and ruins of monuments and cities, as scholars such as Spencer (2005) and Zientek (2021) have noted. Taking as its focus Lucan's use of the Latin word *vestigia*, a noun whose meaning ranges from literal "footprints" and "footsteps" to figurative "remains," this paper identifies the concept of the "trace" as a key for understanding the poem's relationship with Rome's historical, material, and literary past.

Beginning with a brief survey of the word *vestigia* in Lucan's poem, this paper devotes the body of its investigation to two complementary uses of *vestigia* in one of the poem's best-known passages, Caesar's visit to Troy in Book 9 (lines 950-99). In this passage, as Caesar halts his pursuit of Pompey in flight towards Egypt and surveys the site of Troy, the reader encounters the poem's final instances of the word *vestigia*. Lucan uses the word twice across an interval of only 12 lines, showcasing its varied meaning: first in reference to the tracks left by Pompey in his frenzied retreat from Pharsalus (*vestigia / terris sparsa legens* 9.952-3) and then to describe the ruins of the walls of Troy (*magnaue Phoebei quaerit vestigia muri*, 9.965). Both sets of *vestigia* are sought out by Caesar (modified by *legens* and subject of *quaerit*). Lucan's repetition of this critical word here further underscores the scene's relevance as a pivotal moment in the

poem's self-conscious reflection upon the memory of the Trojan war as it haunts the poem's Roman present.

In his seminal treatment of Caesar's visit to Troy, Otto Zwierlein identifies Lucan's characterization of Caesar as a new Alexander in this scene. Using the language of *vestigia*, he writes that, "Caesar ... follows in the footsteps of Alexander," (2010 [1986]: 420. Caesar's tracking of his predecessor's path is both literal and figurative: Caesar is treading the same ground that Alexander had and, in so doing, is modeling himself on his arrogant predecessor as a new ruler for Rome. Zwierlein also posits a connection between Caesar surveying Troy and Aeneas walking through Rome with Evander in *Aeneid* 8, thus intertwining a literary parallel with the historical precedent.

More recently, Gellérfi Gergö (2012) and Stephen S. McRoberts (2018) have understood Caesar's visit to Troy as a recasting of another of Aeneas' famous walking journeys: his *katabasis* in *Aeneid* 6. If we accept their interpretations, we can say that Caesar, as he tours the "memorable name of burnt-out Troy" (*circumit exustae nomen memorabile Troiae*, 9.964), also follows Aeneas' footsteps through the infernal landscape. In his treatment of Vergil's *katabasis* scene, Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui (2020) argues for the under-appreciated significance of walking in the context of Aeneas' underworld journey, in particular the contrast between the footsteps of the living and those of the dead. Herrero analyzes the references to Aeneas' movement and gait in terms of "the specifically Roman...clear self-consciousness of walking as a fundamental descriptive trait" (2020: 95). Following Herrero's lead, I analyze the references to walking in Caesar's Trojan "*katabasis*" in conjunction with their accompanying *vestigia*, and thus reread Caesar's interaction with the material remains of Troy in terms of the poem's

persistent tension between progress and decay via the related phenomena of movement and its trace.

### Bibliography

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