

Caesar and Cato in the Footsteps of Aeneas  
Emily E. Batinski (Louisiana State University)

In Book 9 of Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, after the Battle at Pharsalia Pompey has been killed and Cato has escaped to Africa with Caesar in pursuit. The majority of the book focuses on Cato's rallying the armies and leading them through the Libyan desert. Abruptly Caesar reappears near the conclusion of the book. This sharp juxtaposition of Caesar and Cato elicits a contrast between the two remaining leaders (Ahl) and is inevitable since Pompey is now dead, and the contest is now between Caesar and Cato. This disparity is delineated by parallels between Cato's journey through the Libyan desert and Caesar's archaeological tour of Troy as well as echoes to Vergil's *Aeneid*. Allusions to Aeneas' journey from Troy to Italy obviously reinforce the epic world, but more importantly they help to define the disparate political goals of Caesar and Cato.

Verbal repetition occurring in Cato's journey through the desert and Caesar's brief sojourn in Troy invites comparison of these two episodes and reinforces the contrast implied by Caesar's sudden appearance after Cato has successfully led his army through the snake-infested desert. The description of Troy's barren ruins employs the same vocabulary repeatedly employed to depict the desert: *sterilis, putris, siccus, pulvis*. The arid Libyan desert is fertile ground for only the drops of Medusa's blood which produce a catalog of lethal snakes, snakes which Cato's soldiers claim to have assumed the role of Caesar's armies. Both the Libyan desert and Troy are comparably barren. However, Cato's response is to rescue his army from the Libyan wasteland, whereas Caesar vows to return the Romans to lifeless Troy provided his prayer to the Trojan gods and dead is answered and his ambitions succeed. Moreover, Caesar's prayer contrasts with Cato's refusal to consult the oracle of Jupiter Hammon to learn the future. Cato contends that god would not have hidden the truth in this forsaken land; furthermore, neither success nor failure affects *virtus*. The only certainty is death. He refuses to bargain for Rome's future.

Reminiscences of the *Aeneid* are fundamental to the comparison between of Cato and Caesar. The sea storm which drives Cato's fleet to Syrtes on the Libyan coast recalls Vergil's description of a similar storm which also sent Aeneas' ships to the same place (Morford). Moreover, the erroneously identified coast of Palinurus solidifies the connection to Aeneas' quest to found a new city for the Trojan refugees. Although Cato will not succeed, the Vergilian echoes underscore that his labors are comparable to those of Aeneas as he struggles to found a vibrant new city. In contrast, Caesar's tour of Troy evokes Aeneas' visit to Helenus and Andromache in Buthrotum (Hardie). There Aeneas finds an imitation of great Pergamum, a counterfeit Simois, and a dried up stream named Xanthus. This Trojan couple has built a diminutive replica of their former home. However, it replicates a dead past and lacks the vitality of the original Troy. Similarly when Caesar visits Troy, the Xanthus is a tiny stream which he can step over, and even the ruins have disappeared. Caesar vows he will return the Romans to their ancestral home, seemingly a return to ancestral strength and values. Yet the Vergilian echo of Helenus and Andromache's pseudo-Troy belies this. Aeneas uses his encounter with Helenus to learn how to find the new home for the exiled Troy. Caesar's vow belies Aeneas' quest.