

## Dueling Memories: Augustus's *Res Gestae* vs. Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

Lucan's *Bellum Civile* is at its heart an epic about death whose narrative arc explicitly portrays for its audience the death of Rome. It furthermore intentionally revives a potentially controversial subject matter, and in so doing invites that audience to remember the Roman Civil War and its legacy in a shocking, new way (Gowing 2005: 82). Taken together, these factors suggest that the *Bellum Civile* can be profitably read as a kind of commemorating literary funeral monument. These commemorative and funereal elements are interestingly shared by the *Res Gestae*, a literal *monumentum* whose aim was also to shape memory of what the civil wars and its legacy—specifically Augustus himself—meant to Rome. In this paper I aim to explore parallels between these works, and I ultimately argue that Lucan sets up his epic funeral monument in part as a conscious counter-memory to what the *Res Gestae* and similar monuments represent as the accepted Augustan version of Rome's "restoration" in the wake of the Principate.

In recounting Republican Rome's catastrophic death by its own hands (1.2-3), Lucan fills his epic with scenes of the dead and dying accompanied by repeated funeral and tomb imagery. For example, we find graves filled with refugees from Sulla's purges (Book 2), Massiliote pyres along the shoreline (Book 3), the graveyard workshop of Erichtho (Book 6), Pompey's humble seaside funeral monument (Book 8), memorial pyres for Pompey and those who died at Pharsalus (Book 9), and even the world-famous tomb of Alexander the Great (Book 10). Rome's self-destruction is fully realized at Pharsalus, which Lucan names the veritable *funus mundi* (7.617). Just as funerals and tombs serve to perpetuate the memory the dead, the *Bellum Civile* acts like a *monumentum* that perpetuates the memory of what Rome used to be before the rise of the Principate. The concept of a literary *monumentum* is not a new one: both Horace (*C.* 3.30.1) and Livy (*Pr.* 10) specifically refer to their texts as functional *monumenta*.

A striking parallel that shares many of these traits is the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Erected by Augustus to provide a carefully-tailored record of his achievements on behalf of the *Respublica*, this literary *monumentum* is often viewed in terms of historiography or biography, but in its original architectural context it also functioned as a literal funeral monument. The text was engraved onto bronze pillars that were erected in front of the Mausoleum Augustum immediately after Augustus's death, and the visual connection between the text and the *tumulus* adjacent to it would have been clear for any passerby (Elsner 1996: 40; Slater 2008: 254). Notably, the *Res Gestae* both begins and ends with references to the civil wars (*bella terra et mari civilia*, 3; *bella ubi civilia exstinxeram*, 34), albeit their final rounds after Julius Caesar's assassination, and these passages focus on the fact that Augustus is the man chiefly responsible for ending them and victoriously restoring the *Respublica* and bringing *libertas* back to the Senate and the Roman people. In other words, his public funeral inscription describes in triumphant detail the beneficial fate of *Roma* at the hands of the heir of Caesar in the aftermath of the civil wars. Lucan, however, presents us with a public literary memorial that describes in anguished detail the death of *Roma* at the hands of the first Caesar because of the civil wars. The *Res Gestae* thus likely offered Lucan a concrete imperial precedent of a public *monumentum* with strong funerary overtones that sought to shape the culture's memory regarding the legacy of the civil wars and the rise of the Principate in their wake. A comparison of the two can shed helpful light on what I argue is Lucan's underlying commemorative program, one that not only seeks to help his audience remember their past in a different way but also in some small measure actually brings that Old Rome back to life through the power of *memoria*.

Works Cited:

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