

vestigia inritae spei: Tacitus, Lucan and the Fire at Rome

I intend to elucidate a hitherto uncommented upon point of interaction between Tacitus' *Annales* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile*. Although analysis of Tacitus' work as it relates to Latin epic poetry is not entirely novel (e.g., Robbert 1917, O'Gorman 1995, Foucher 2000, Joseph 2012), Tacitus' narrative of Nero's actions during and after the fire of Rome (*Annales* 15.38-42) as it corresponds with Lucan's depiction of Caesar's visit to the ruins of Troy (*Bellum Civile* 9.950-99) has yet to be analyzed. By citing various instances which I assess as points of contact between these two texts, I intend to diagram the force which Tacitus' allusion contributes towards his negative characterization of Nero's interactions with both the burning and ruined Rome. Tacitus concludes his narrative of the fire with a negative depiction of Nero's actions: *effodere proxima Averno iuga conisus est; manentque vestigia inritae spei*, 15.42. During the fire Nero's failure is also attested as he constructs refugee shelters (*subitaria aedificia*) which are described as being ill-received by the people: *popularia in inritum cadebant*, 15.39.

A possible explanation for these failures is elucidated when compared with Lucan's Troy episode. This failure appears to be a result of Nero's intention to claim Rome and its inherent tradition, stretching back to Troy, for himself (Woodman 1992). While Julius Caesar, in spite of his consistent audacity in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, does not attempt to rename his tradition but only to find himself within the tradition of Troy/Rome when visiting the ruins of Troy.

At Troy, Caesar also constructs temporary structures which, perhaps tellingly, are well received: *erexit subitas congestu cespitis aras, /votaque turicremos non irrita fudit in ignes*, 9.998-999). This scene is marked by Caesar's prayer (9.990-99) in which he calls on the *ruina* of Troy and connects these ruins to himself by way of Aeneas. He asserts his intention to maintain (*restituam*) this tradition within which he claims to be the most famous heir (*clarissimus*). Cae-

sar further emphasizes his lineage during his prayer (*Aeneaeque mei, lares, gentis Iuleae ... nepos*) to assert his placement within this tradition of amalgamated Troy/Rome. He appears respectful of his place as a Julian and a ruler of Rome by acknowledging both the genetic and political nature of his inheritance.

It is this same tradition which Tacitus' Nero ignores and seeks to make his own by using the 'fatherland' to build his own home: *Nero usus est patriae ruinis extruxitque domum*, 15.42. Tacitus' Rome is characterized with the same word which marked Lucan's Troy: (*ruina*) and his employment of (*patriae*) hints at this inheritance, ruined or not, which Nero is claiming for himself.

Perhaps Nero's boldest attempt to claim this tradition for himself in this episode concerns the naming of Rome: *videbaturque Nero condendae urbis novae et cognomento suo appellandae gloriam quaerere*, 15.40. The particular weight of this attempted misnomer is potent when set next to Caesar's actions when first approaching the Trojan ruins in Lucan's text: *circumit exustae nomen memorabile Troiae/ magnaue Phoebai quaerit vestigia muri*, 9.964-65. Both Nero and Caesar are described as seeking (*quaero*) the ruined form of Troy/Rome in the form of a name. Caesar is searching for the *memorable nomen* which represents his ancestry and the place of his *nomen* (that is the *nomen* of the Julian clan, *gentis Iuleae*) in the tradition. Nero, on the other hand, seeks the glory of renaming Rome with his very own cognomen (*cognomento suo appellandae*).

Tacitus' Nero appears guilty of greater folly when read as an allusion to Lucan's Caesar. This heir, last of the Julio-Claudians, attempts to rename the tradition leading back through burned out Rome to the Trojan ruins of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and his ancestor's wanderings therein.

Bibliography

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