Lucan’s Bellum Civile as A Historical Source

• Is the Bellum Civile an accurate record of the Civil War?
  o Episodic, rather than narrative
  o Exclusion of details and a-historic additions

• Detail indicates familiarity with the sources:
  o Marc Antony’s escape from the Pompeian Fleet
    ▪ Nymphaeumque tenet: nudas Aquilonibus undas succedens Boreae iam portum fecerat Auster. (BC 5.720-21)
      (“They reach Nymphaeum: Auster succeeding the bare waves of Boreas from the North had granted harborage.”)
  o Caesar’s battle plan at Pharsalia:
    ▪ cum Caesar, metuens ne frons sibi prima labaret incursu, tenet obliquas post signa cohorts… (BC 7.521-2).
      (“When Caesar, fearing lest his front line collapse at the onslaught, held cohorts at an angle under his standards …”)
    ▪ (Plutarch, Life of Caesar 44); (Caesar, BC 3.88)

• Which sources did he use?
  o Candidates: Lost books of Livy, Caesar’s Bellum Civile
  o Details lifted directly from Caesar (see above)

• Lucan read the sources. All aberrations are deliberate.
  o Julia the vengeful ghost (BC 3.8-34)
    ▪ “She is the figure of the mutable past in a volatile present.”
      (Chiu 2010: 358).
  o Cicero’s presence at Pharsalia (BC 7.62-101)

• Caesar, Pompey, and Cato reduced to archetypes
  o Caesar: The lightning bolt (BC 1.151-54)
  o Pompey: The old oak who wants to be adored (BC 1.131-36)
  o Cato:
    ▪ The stoic hero. (BC 9.566-8)
      • quid quaeri, Labiene, iubes? an liber in armis occubuisse uelium potius quam regna uidere?
        an sit uita nihil sed longa an differat aetas?
        (“What do you command to be asked, Labienus? Whether I prefer to die freely in battle rather than to see tyranny? Whether life may be long but pointless or age matters?”)
- Ideal of the Republic
- Opposed to the idea of Civil War. (2.286-7)
  - summum, Brute, nefas ciulia bella fatemur,
    sed quo fata trahunt uirtus secura sequetur.
  - (“Brutus, I admit that Civil Wars are the greatest evil, but
    wherever the fates drag us, virtue will follow steadfastly.”)

- Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* not a historically accurate account
  - No pretense of accuracy
  - Literary work about the nature of Civil War

**Bibliography**


