

## Rivers as Roman Mnemotopes in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*

The Roman poet Lucan wrote his *Bellum Civile* on the topic of the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great near the end of the Roman Republic. Throughout his poem, Lucan interrogates Roman identity as an unstable concept in the context of civil war (Roller 1996) in part through detailed descriptions of landscapes. Nature and humanity are mutually interactive and efficacious agents in Lucan's poetic commentary on morality and the imperial system. This paper examines the catalogue of Italian rivers from *Bellum Civile* 2, wherein the poet describes the landscape of Italy—and the strategic moves of the opponents Caesar and Pompey—through a list of rivers flowing from the Apennine Mountains into the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian Seas. The geographical location of these rivers, rather than being an erroneous portrait of the Italian watershed (Mendell 1942; cf. Campbell 2012, Jones 2005), recalls battles against the Samnites (2.424-25) or against the Carthaginian generals Hasdrubal (2.405) and Hannibal (2.407, 422, 426), road-building (2.406-7), and the slave rebellion led by Spartacus (2.426; cf. Avery 1972: 312), events which all defined the way Romans thought of themselves as a geopolitical entity. These rivers are mnemotopes, “concrete, physical place[s] that [are] traditionally claimed as the location for... significant event[s]” (Van Rookhuijzen 2017: 25; cf. Assmann 2011). In the context of civil war poetry, where the unity of that identity is already in question, Lucan's allusive rivers mark an intersection between landscape and identity through which the poet complicates the idea of Rome.

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