

## CUTTING DOWN THE GROVE IN LUCAN, VALERIUS MAXIMUS AND DIO CASSIUS\*

In Lucan's *De Bello Civili*, Caesar's deforestation of the sacred Druidic grove (3.399–452) has attracted much attention in recent years. The poet draws from a little note in Caesar's own account, in which there is mention of the supplies of timber for the Caesarian party from a place near Massilia (Caes. *B Civ.* 2.1.4). While scholars have traced the literary indebtedness of this episode to Vergil, Ovid and other authors,<sup>1</sup> some critics have interpreted the cutting down of the trees as an authorial comment on Caesar's villainy and as prefigurative of Pompey's impending defeat and dismemberment.<sup>2</sup> Others view the episode of the committed *nefas* as an act of acculturation on the part of Caesar, who is taming nature and replacing an age of faith with one of civilization and skepticism.<sup>3</sup> I shall approach the episode by considering a heretofore unnoticed parallel scene from the Caesarian tradition as reported by Valerius Maximus and Dio Cassius. I argue that Lucan draws on and alludes to the tradition preserved in Valerius' and Dio's accounts of the death of one of Caesar's own assassins, Turullius. Lucan indirectly attributes a role to divine retribution by foreshadowing Caesar's own death, thus pointing to the inescapable punishment following a sacrilege; at the same time, however, by reminding his readers of other similar episodes in the tradition the poet underscores that religion is often manipulated to suit one's political agenda, whether Caesar's or his successor's, Octavian's.

\* I should like to thank the CQ's editors and anonymous referee for much helpful suggestions. My warm thanks go to Julia Dyson and Eleni Manolaraki for reading earlier drafts of this paper and offering insightful criticism.

<sup>1</sup> V. Hunink, *M. Annaeus Lucanus Bellum Civile Book III. A Commentary* (Amsterdam, 1992), at 168–9 offers details on the historical material and antecedents for this episode. For Vergil and Lucan on the felling of trees see R. Thomas, 'Tree violation and ambivalence in Virgil', *TAPhA* 118 (1988), 261–73 and V. Panoussi, 'Virgil and epic topoi in Lucan's Massilia', in P. Thibodeau and H. Haskell (edd.), *Being There Together: Essays in Honor of Michael C. J. Putnam on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Minnesota, 2003), 222–39; for Ovid see O. C. Phillips, 'Lucan's grove', *CPh* 63 (1968), 296–300 and P. Esposito, 'Il bosco disabitato (*Phars.* 3, 402–403 e i suoi modelli)', *Orpheus* 9 (1988), 306–11. S. L. Dyson, 'Caepio, Tacitus, and Lucan's sacred grove', *CPh* 65 (1970), 36–8 compares other instances of grove deforestation in the historical record (Tacitus and Pompeius Trogus) but does not consider Valerius Maximus or Dio Cassius. J. Radicke, *Lucans poetische Technik. Studien zum historischen Epos* (Leiden, 2004), at 253 mentions another parallel, namely Alexander's attack on the sacred forest of the Branchidae, as reported by Curtius Rufus (7.5.34). J. Masters, *Poetry and Civil War in Lucan's Bellum Civile* (Cambridge, 1992), at 27 observes that here 'deforestation becomes a metaphor for the plundering of poetic material from another source'.

<sup>2</sup> Since Pompey is compared to an oak in Luc. 1.135–43, the grove becomes symbolic of his annihilation; see R. J. Rowland, 'The significance of Massilia in Lucan', *Hermes* 97 (1969), 204–8; F. Ahl, *Lucan: An Introduction* (Cornell, 1976), at 199; E. Narducci, *La provvidenza crudele: Lucano e la distruzione dei miti augustei* (Pisa, 1979), at 110; J. A. Rosner-Siegel, 'The oak and the lightning: Lucan *Bellum Civile* 1.135–157', *Athenaeum* 61 (1983), 165–77; Masters (n. 1), 27; A. Loupiac, *La poésie des éléments dans 'La Pharsale' de Lucain* (Brussels, 1998), at 48.

<sup>3</sup> See M. Leigh, 'Lucan's Caesar and the sacred grove: deforestation and enlightenment in antiquity', in P. Esposito and L. Nicastrì (edd.), *Interpretare Lucano: miscellanea di studi* (Naples, 1999), 167–205. C. M. Green, '“The necessary murder”: myth, ritual, and civil war in Lucan, Book 3', *Classical Antiquity* 13 (1994), 203–33 interprets the cutting of the grove as a necessary action within the context of the cult of the *rex nemorensis*, whose duties Caesar seems to fulfill.

In Lucan's description of the grove, the reader comes across contradictory statements concerning its sacredness. It is a place never violated by human hand (*lucus erat longo numquam violatus ab aeuo*, 3.399), and yet at the same time, it is a place where an inhumane, barbaric ritual takes place:

hunc non ruricolae Panes nemorumque potentes  
 Siluani Nymphaeque tenent, sed barbara ritu  
 sacra deum; structae diris altaribus arae  
 omnisque humanis lustrata cruoribus arbor.<sup>4</sup> (Luc. 3.402–5)

It is no wonder that an unconventional poet like Lucan presents a passage that invites no easy interpretation. This is the anti-grove *par excellence*, in which any form of life, for humans and animals alike, proves not viable:

non illum cultu populi propiore frequentant  
 sed cessere deis. medio cum Phoebus in axe est  
 aut caelum nox atra tenet, pavet ipse sacerdos  
 accessus dominumque timet dendrere luci. (Luc. 3.422–5)

Why does Lucan, however, focus on Caesar's act in stripping the place of its trees and foliage? Why does he emphasize the violation and Caesar's audacity? Why does he summon the gods' vengeance on the sacrilege? Caesar assumes the perspective of the soldiers who are reluctant to commit a *nefas* and takes any religious guilt onto himself:

'iam nequis vestrum dubitet subvertere silvam  
 credite me fecisse nefas.' tum paruit omnis  
 imperiis non sublato secreta pavore  
 turba, sed expensa superiorum et Caesaris ira.  
 . . . gemuere uidentes  
 Gallorum populi, muris sed clausa iuventus  
 exultat; quis enim laesos impune putaret  
 esse deos? servat multos fortuna nocentes  
 et tantum miseris irasci numina possunt. (Luc. 3.436–9, 445–9)

In a poem where the absence of gods is highlighted from the beginning, a possible answer lies in construing Caesar's actions as a complete victory over barbarian, uncivilized territory, the imposition of *Romanitas* on untrodden places, while at the same time the aged, grove-like qualities of Pompey's (the Republic's) character are doomed to wither away and be cut down in the course of the action.<sup>5</sup> The lack of divine protection and intervention is due to a reality: traditional gods, such as the Pans and the Silvani, protectors of such groves, were not inhabitants of this forsaken place.

*Quis enim laesos impune putaret esse deos?* The question concerning the gods' vengeance invites more than one reaction: is it a sarcastic comment the authorial voice makes concerning the Olympians' inability to influence worldly affairs and even

<sup>4</sup> All citations of Lucan are from D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *M. Annaei Lucani De Bello Civili Libri X* (Stuttgart, 1988); all citations of Valerius Maximus are from D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Valerius Maximus Memorable Doings and Sayings* (Cambridge, MA, 2000); Dio's text comes from E. Cary, *Dio's Roman History* (Cambridge, MA, 1917); and finally the passage of Suetonius comes from M. Ihm, *Suetonius De Vita Caesarum Libri* (Stuttgart, 1908).

<sup>5</sup> C. Saylor, 'Open and shut: the battle for Massilia in Lucan, *Pharsalia* III', *Latomus* 62 (2003), 381–6, at 382 aptly identifies the act as a 'cut in the cosmos extending through the worlds of man, nature and the gods'.

the randomness by which the *mundus* operates, or is it the expression of a deeper anxiety concerning Caesar's unbounded impetus that will bring about the downfall of a state crumbling to pieces? I would like to shed more light on our enquiry by pursuing this matter in another direction and examining one of Valerius Maximus' *exempla*.<sup>6</sup> In his review of neglected worship, Valerius reports the fate of Turullius, M. Antony's prefect and one of Caesar's own assassins. When Turullius cuts down the grove of Aesculapius in Cos for timber, the god's punitive reaction entails Turullius' death in the same grove, ordered by Octavian after Actium:

Nec minus efficax ultor contemptae religionis filius quoque eius Aesculapius, qui consecratum templo suo lucum a Turullio praefecto Antonii ad naves ei faciendas magna ex parte succisum <indignatus>, inter ipsum nefarium ministerium devictis partibus Antonii, imperio Caesaris morti destinatum Turullium manifestis numinis sui viribus in eum locum quem violauerat traxit effecitque ut ibi potissimum a militibus Caesarianis occisus eodem exitio et eversis iam arboribus poenas lueret et adhuc superantibus immunitatem consimilis iniuriae pareret, suamque venerationem, quam apud colentes maximam semper habuerat, bis multiplicavit.

(Val. Max. 1.1.19)

Turullius' punishment compensates for his Erysichthonian irreverence towards the sacred grove. The party guilty of the cutting of the *lucus* returns to the *locus* of the original, haunting, sacrilege to pay the penalty.<sup>7</sup> In Valerius' language, Turullius is killed *inter nefarium ministerium*, in the same manner he had previously destroyed the living grove of the god (*eodem exitio*); surely Valerius' synchronicity of Turullius' death with the 'murder' of the grove is a result of exaggeration, since the actual death takes place after Actium, according to Dio Cassius.<sup>8</sup> Although Valerius places some emphasis on Octavian and his orders (*imperio Caesaris, a militibus Caesarianis*),<sup>9</sup> he does not, nevertheless, exploit Turullius' role in the murder of Caesar himself: the real focus remains on the god's punitive actions. After all, Octavian's decision to put him to death has a deeper cause than solely Turullius' support of Antony's cause: the revenge of his father's death.<sup>10</sup>

Let us look at another source on Turullius' death. Dio's historiographical perspective elucidates Valerius' moralizing account:

<sup>6</sup> The use of *exempla* becomes a fashionable exercise in the rhetorical schools of Lucan's time (cf. M. P. O. Morford, *The Poet Lucan: Studies in Rhetorical Epic* (Oxford, 1967), 1–12). The relationship of the two authors, however, remains uncertain, although perhaps both of them may be drawing on a common source, possibly Livy.

<sup>7</sup> For paronomastic plays such as *lucus* and *locus*, see S. Hinds, *The Metamorphosis of Persephone* (Cambridge, 1987), at 38 and n. 45.

<sup>8</sup> C. Skidmore, *Practical Ethics for Roman Gentlemen: The Work of Valerius Maximus* (Exeter, 1996), at 68 observes that 'the identification of the good of the state with the morality of the individual is fundamental to Valerius's moral scheme and combines patriotic traditionalism with self-interest. The role of the gods in dealing out to men the just rewards of their moral conduct serves to unify the religious content of Book I with the moralistic content of Books II–IX.'

<sup>9</sup> W. M. Bloomer, *Valerius Maximus and the Rhetoric of the New Nobility* (Chapel Hill, 1992), at 226 notices that in Valerius' work 'Octavian's historical rivals have been thoroughly maligned, and the agents in the final struggles of the Republic have been reduced to one. Octavian does not emerge so much triumphant as alone, with the conflict downplayed and his opponents belittled.'

<sup>10</sup> See R. Syme, 'Mendacity in Velleius', *AJPh* 99 (1978), 45–63, at 51–2. As Wardle puts it, 'Turullius' execution was a political decision manipulated for Octavian's advantage' to secure the goodwill of the island of Cos, especially since the island was governed by the pro-Antonian Nicias; see D. Wardle, *Valerius Maximus Memorable Deeds and Sayings Book I* (Oxford, 1998), at 122.

καὶ τέλος Πούπλιον Τουρούλλιον βουλευτὴν τε ὄντα καὶ σφαγέα τοῦ Καίσαρος γεγονότα τότε τε φιλικῶς οἱ συνόντα ἐξέδωκεν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἑαυτὸν, ἂν γε καὶ διὰ τοῦθ' ἢ Κλεοπάτρα σωθῆ, καταχρήσεσθαι ἐπηγγέλιτο. Καίσαρ δὲ τὸν μὲν Τουρούλλιον ἀπέκτεινε (καὶ ἔτυχε γὰρ ἐκ τῆς ἐν Κῶ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ ὕλης φύλα ἐς ναυτικὸν κεκοφῶς, δίκην τινα καὶ τῷ θεῷ, οἶ ἐκεῖ ἐδικαιώθη, δοῦναι ἐδοξε) . . . (Dio 51.8.2–3)

It is uncertain whether Dio's and Valerius' accounts come from the same source, yet Dio's is complementary to Valerius' account in terms of linking Turullius to Caesar's murder. It is because of political motivation that Turullius is put to death, and coincidentally, only parenthetically in Dio's account, the prefect makes some amends to the god as well.<sup>11</sup>

What Lucan achieves in his account is that he assumes the reader implicitly recognizes the sequence of deaths, preserved in the Caesarian tradition. This series of punishments points to the return of divine order: both Caesar and his future murderer show no reverence towards the divine and are subsequently penalized for their actions. Is their irreverence, however, the main cause of their deaths? Religion and politics seem to complement one another well in this circumstance. Turullius receives a punishment for his partisanship after Actium, as Antony's prefect, a paradigmatic death related to the closure desired by the Caesarians in 31 B.C.E., just as Julius pays the price for becoming a *dictator perpetuus*, a sole ruler. Although Lucan never mentions Turullius by name, the poet seems to exploit the intertwining of religion and politics by implying that the gods' vengeance will manifest itself in due course, as Nemesis never misses her target. Although the motivation for his assassination is political, one cannot disregard Caesar's lack of religious scruples, underscored in the historical sources. For instance, Caesar's continual spurning of religion, even of the sacrifices performed on the Ides of March, according to Suetonius, bodes ill for the leader:

dein pluribus hostiis caesis, cum litare non posset, introiit curiam spreta religione Spurinamque irridens et ut falsum arguens, quod sine ulla sua noxa Idus Martiae adessent: quamquam is unisse quidem eas diceret, sed non praeterisse. (Jul. 81.4)

Valerius' interest in religion seems to have influenced Lucan's comments in the *De Bello Civili*, in a different direction than one may have expected. The poet wonders how the gods did not react to the sacrilege, while simultaneously he drives his point home by inviting the reader to supply the intertextual contexts of both Turullius' death and Caesar's own.

What is more, Valerius describes Caesar's death by stabbing as a violation on the man's body:

quam praecipuam in C. quoque Caesare fuisse et saepenumero apparuit et ultimus eius dies significavit: conpluribus enim parricidarum violatus mucronibus, inter ipsum illud tempus quo divinus spiritus mortali discernabatur a corpore, ne tribus quidem et viginti vulneribus quin verecundiae obsequeretur absterreri potuit, si quidem utraque togam manu demisit, ut inferior

<sup>11</sup> According to Wardle (n. 10), 121, it is uncertain whether Dio and Valerius tell an identical story. As Manuwald observes, Dio reports that Turullius is handed down to Octavian by Antony himself, a detail missing from Valerius' account; see B. Manuwald, *Cassius Dio und Augustus. Philologische Untersuchungen zu den Büchern 45–56 des dionischen Geschichtswerkes* (Wiesbaden, 1979), at 231, n. 401. E. Schwartz (*RE* 3.1705, 18) and F. Blumenthal, 'Die Autobiographie des Augustus III', *WS* 36 (1914), 84–103, at 92 name Livy as Dio's source for this account. While Valerius gives no *praenomen* to Turullius, Dio gives him the wrong one, Publius instead of Decimus (see Wardle [n. 10], 121–2).

pars corporis tecta conlaberetur. in hunc modum non homines expirant sed di immortales sedes suas repetunt. (Val. Max. 4.5.6)<sup>12</sup>

Although his effort to portray Julius' *verecundia* lays bare Valerius' own political convictions and attachment to Tiberius,<sup>13</sup> the manner of death imposed on Caesar's body seems to resurface in the way Lucan portrays the violation perpetrated on the sacred grove, through repetition of forms of the verb *violare* (*numquam violatus*, 399; *violata in robora*, 435; cf. *violaverat* with regard to Turullius' action and *violatus* for Caesar's body in Valerius). To take this a step further, one may notice the identification of the grove with Caesar in Lucan, of nature with human beings, inasmuch as both the *lucus* and Julius are depicted as reluctant in conceding any role to the gods, and yet they are both equally violated at the end, the grove by Caesar, Caesar by his murderers—in the same manner as Aesculapius' grove is desecrated by Turullius, and the latter in turn by Octavian.

To be sure, there is an ambivalence concerning divine retribution, especially when it is portrayed as coupled with the manipulation of religion for the promotion of certain political ideas. In Valerius' account, Octavian seeks to gain back alliances (with the island of Cos in particular) after Antony's defeat, in this case under the pretext of religion. Octavian's punishment of Turullius, one of the few ordered, points to the return of the religious and political order after Caesar's murder. Valerius' work, addressed and dedicated to Tiberius, approves and abets such politically calculated acts. In Lucan, Caesar is fashioned as a civilizer when he dares to cut down the barbarians' grove, an act that can also be construed as one of the reasons that will contribute to the leader's own demise. Julius may defy the traditional role of *religio* as superstition by taking all religious guilt onto himself, but he nevertheless does not escape Nemesis for ever, perhaps with a grin on Lucan's face.<sup>14</sup> The ambiguity and irony are pervasive, as the poet himself, in a cynical manner, acknowledges the injustice of *fortuna*: *servat multos fortuna nocentis / et tantum miseris irasci numina possunt* (3.448–9). Ultimately, Lucan leaves up to the reader to supply the missing parts of the story, knowing that retribution may miss for the moment but will sooner or later catch up with her target: *ἦν ὀπόταν Ζεὺς / πέμψη τεισομένην, ἄλλοτε ἄλλος ἔχει*.<sup>15</sup>

Baylor University

ANTONY AUGOUSTAKIS  
 Antonios\_Augoustakis@baylor.edu  
 doi:10.1017/S0009838806000711

<sup>12</sup> The same reaction of moving his gown to cover his face is attributed to Pompey (Luc. 8.613–17).

<sup>13</sup> For a brief discussion on *verecundia* in Valerius Maximus 4.5.6 see H.-F. Mueller, *Roman Religion in Valerius Maximus* (Routledge, 2002), at 171–2. D. Wardle, '“The sainted Julius“: Valerius Maximus and the dictator', *CPh* 92 (1997), 323–45 discusses the figure of Julius Caesar in Valerius and its importance for the writer under Tiberius' rule. As he concludes at 336, 'in addition to parricide Valerius introduces the idea of sacrilege to Caesar's death'.

<sup>14</sup> As E. Fantham, 'Religio . . . *dira loci*: two passages in Lucan *de Bello Civili* 3 and their relation to Virgil's Rome and Latium', *MD* 37 (1996), 137–53 notes at 153, 'Lucan's Rome has lost its capacity for *religio*, while the *religio* of the free world resisting Rome is tainted with a quite unhistorical barbarism.'

<sup>15</sup> Solon fr. 13.75–6 W.