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Preferred Panel: Greek and Roman Epic

Title of the paper: *Africa in Lucan*

The Roman poets saw Africa as a source of anti-Roman energy (Fantham 1992 on Lucan 2.93). Africa's symbolism, however, can also be associated with positive aspects. The Africans, for example, are praised by Romans for their valor in battle, but the Romano-centric bias inevitably surfaces in the depiction of the nomadic, 'uncivil', savage Africans as the antithesis of the Roman settler (*ciuis Romanus*). Africa's wealth (crops, timber, etc.) is appreciated but also criticized as fueling the Romans' appetite for luxury, and as an indirect cause of the Romans' moral decline. Such aspects of Africa in the Roman literary imagination have been consistently neglected and implicitly deemphasized in the scholarly analyses of ancient sources.

I propose to examine the idea of Africa in Lucan's *Civil War*. Africa in Lucan embraces not only the familiar geographical concept but also the complex historical and literary-historical associations with the memories of the wars against Hannibal and Jugurtha. Far from being a mere repertoire of historical memory that recalls the glories of past conquest, along with the aggrandizing victories of such prominent players as Scipio Africanus and Marius, Africa in Lucan is praised also for her own qualities, for her wealth of crops and precious timber, and for her strong inhabitants, rough men able to endure tough weather and the most strenuous combat. The wild side of Africa is exploited most successfully, perhaps, in one of Lucan's rare incursions into myth, when in Book IV Hercules defeats Antaeus, the giant born from Mother Africa. In exposing Africa's complexity and embedded contradictions as a continent, a Roman province, and a hypostasis of Mother Earth, Lucan not only unveils the Romans' ethnic biases, but on geographic and geo-political bases also questions the concept itself of Roman identity through his poetics of civil war.