

## **The Regulus Connection: Displacing Lucan between Martial and Pliny**

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My paper will address the relation between Pliny's and Martial's collection as it revolves around the opposing representation they give of Regulus. I have recently treated one aspect of this interaction in an essay focused on the potential allusions to Pliny's first epistle on Regulus in Martial's epigram to Pliny 10.19 (20), which becomes the starting point of Pliny's Epistle 3.21 (Baraz and van den Berg). In my talk at the Rostock conference, I would like to concentrate on one further potential area of friction between the two bodies of writing: the presence of Lucan in Martial's corpus and his absence from Pliny's.

With Lucan's absence from Pliny's corpus, I mean both the non-existent part that the (pro-Neronian?) poem seems to play in the web of poetic intertexts the epistles mobilize and the silence Pliny maintains on the (anti-Neronian?) author, even in the context of letters which were more Stoically colored and which were alluding to Pliny's own Stoic allegiances during the difficult years of Domitian's purges.

Neronian and Domitianic times, one should remember, are for Pliny ideally mediated by (if not united in) the figure of Regulus, whose crimes Pliny pointedly describes as no less grave, but perhaps more covert under Domitian than under Nero (*sub quo non minora flagitia commiserat quam sub Nerone sed tectiora*, as in *Ep. I.5.1*). If Regulus is the signpost for the age of the *delatores* to whose name Pliny apparently insists on

returning, the silence Pliny maintains on Lucan is contrastively more evident and perhaps even connected as well.

The connection may be offered by Martial and by the presence of Lucan in his epigrams. With Lucan's presence, I mean, two distinct but perhaps not unrelated elements, this time most explicitly if allusively connected to Regulus. First, there is some charged language from the proem to the BC, which appears to be allusively redeployed in at least one of the Regulus epigrams. After having concluded the panegyric dedication to Nero, in moving into the historical and aitiological section of the proem, Lucan notes about the fall of the Republic that *stare diu nimioque graues sub pondere lapsus / nec se Roma ferens* (BC I.71-72, reinforced by the sententious conclusion *in se magna ruunt* at I.82). In a moment of encomiastic frenzy for Regulus, who had apparently had a building close call, Martial redeployes some of this language, noting that a *porticus* under which Regulus has just passed, *uicta est pondere cum suo repente* (I.82.6). This note reactivates retrospectively another passage earlier in the book, an epigram on the same theme, in which we read that *nam subito conlapsa ruit, cum mole sub illa / gestatus biuugis Regulus esset equis* (I.12.7-8). In both cases, Martial reinforces the cosmic dimensions of this exercise in epigrammatic *parva-si-licet* rhetoric with the adoption of the appropriate language for ruinous collapses and their physical and metaphysical causes: *nefas, fortuna, ruina, casus, dei*. The delicate allusion to Lucan –and Lucan's potentially ambiguous proem at that– is particularly intriguing. The reuse of the language from the (pro-Neronian?) poem by an (anti-Neronian?) author to a Neronian and post-Neronian friend of the emperors (no question marks about Regulus position) seems to go hand in hand with the presence of decidedly pro-Lucan poems in the same corpus. The same book in

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which we read of the Regulus *porticus* incident also contains a clear poetic endorsement of Lucan's value as a poet –perhaps a politically and socially neutral act, even if by reasons of geography the poet is listed in the company of the two Senecas (1.61.7-8). More pointedly, however, Book Seven of the *Epigrams* contains the triptych of eulogizing poems about Lucan's birthday (7.21-23), composed for the executed poet's widow, which are definitely less timid in making ethical and political considerations part of the praise of Lucan. Yet, there seems to be no sign that their collocation next to those inspired by and dedicated to Regulus in the eventual collection may have been felt in any way inappropriate.

Incidentally, my paper aspires to help reassess (and of course leave open) the question of adjudicating the ultimate tone of Lucan's proem, by trying to gauge the reactions of some of its chronologically close readers (and re-users). The interplay and cross-purpose working of the question marks I associated along the way to the distribution of pro- or anti- Neronian labels from the (opposed?) points of view of Pliny and Martial should be read exactly in this dimmed, nuanced, chiaroscuro light.