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Jake Nabel. “Lucan’s Parthians in Nero’s Rome”

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In this paper, Nabel analyses the famous verses in Lucan’s Pharsalia where Pompey, after the defeat by Caesar, contemplated the possibility of fleeing to the Parthian court (8.202–455). He discussed his plans with his lieutenant Lentulus trying to establish whether the Parthians could be trusted. According to Nabel’s point of view, the dialogue mirrors the uncertainties in Roman society, which originated from the agreement between Tiridates and Vologases I and emperor Nero and put an end to the Roman-Parthian war for Armenia (54–63 CE). Pompey’s doubts about Parthian loyalty and Lentulus refusal to accept any collaboration and agreement with them after Crassus’ assassination reflect similar attitudes in Lucan’s contemporary society divided by hardliners and more accommodating personalities. In the poem, Lentulus’ arguments prevail, and he convinces Pompey and the other Republicans to head to Egypt, where they will meet their fate. Therefore, Lentulus’ hard-line attitude and the prevailing of his rhetoric determined the destruction of the entire Republican party. According to Nabel, both Pompey’s and Lentulus’ opinions, none of them is really described as the right and just by Lucan, well express the anxieties and uncertainty of the years following the political agreement in the east.
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