Echoes of Lucan's *Bellum Civile* in Erasmus Lætus' *Margaretica* (1573)

By Karen Skovgaard-Petersen

Margaretica *is the title of a Latin epic poem written by the Danish poet Erasmus Lætus and published in Frankfurt am Main in 1573. Its protagonist is the Danish Queen Margrete (1353-1412), and it tells of a Danish victory over Sweden in 1389. This victory paved the way for the Nordic Union of Kalmar, which lasted from 1397 until 1523 and was ruled by Danish kings. Written in the wake of another Danish-Swedish war, The Nordic Seven Years War in 1563-1570,* Margaretica *is a piece of fierce anti-Swedish polemic, painting Swedes and Danes in black and white and hinting at the inferior position of Sweden in the Union of Kalmar.*

While the principal literary model of the Margaretica *is Virgil's* Aeneid, *Lucan's* Bellum Civile *also has an interesting role to play as hypotext, and these echoes of Lucan form the subject of the article. It is shown that Lætus was able to enroll the* Bellum Civile *as an instrument in his anti-Swedish polemic. Furthermore, it is argued that Lucan's epic with its strong condemnation of civil warfare and its moralizing interpretation of history occupied a place in Philipp Melanchthon's and Joachim Camerarius' historical thought, and that this Protestant reading of the* Bellum Civile *has left its mark on the* Margaretica.

The *Bellum Civile* and its reception

Since the 1970s Lucan's epic about the civil war between Cesar and Pompey, *Bellum Civile* or *Pharsalia*, has been object of increasing attention in classical scholarship. No longer dismissed as grotesque and mannerist rhetoric, it is now commonly seen as an 'anti-Aeneid', a bitter protest against imperial power, written as it was in the first half of the 60s AD, the late tumultuous years of Nero's rule. In the words of Philip Hardie, Lucan's epic is recognized, as "a major expression of Neronian politics and aesthetics", "whose anticlassical, antirealist mode of narrating is reclaimed as a use of

paradox and hyperbole that is only appropriate for the narration of a world turned upside down by civil war."[1]

Along with this rise of interest, scholars have in recent years also been studying the reception of Lucan's epic in the early modern period. An important inspiration has been David Quint's *Epic and Empire* 1993, which discerns two strands of epic narrative in Western tradition, Virgilian and Lucanian, the winner and the loser, as Quint describes it, painting by his own admission with a broad brush. As we shall see, Lucan might also be enrolled in a 'winner's' cause.

In the Middle Ages the *Bellum Civile* enjoyed considerable popularity – Dante famously placed Lucan among the greatest Roman poets in the *Divina Commedia* – and its proper classification as poetry, historiography or both was a recurrent theme in medieval commentaries.[2] The *editio princeps* appeared as early as 1469, and by the end of the sixteenth century the poem had been printed around 125 times. This figure surely testifies to a stable readership, but as pointed out by Edward Paleit, it is significantly lower than the number of editions of Virgil, Terence, Horace, and Ovid in the same period, and it is probably true to say, again with Paleit, that Lucan occupied a relatively marginal position in humanist education.[3] His Latin language was regarded as 'impure' and not suitable for imitation; as an example of this disdain Paleit draws attention to an essay on Lucan written by the German Protestant humanist Joachim Camerarius (ca. 1500-1574).[4] However, as we shall see, Camerarius' text – critical as it is towards Lucan's sententious style and personal cowardice – also recognizes its moral and historical value.

In the last half of the sixteenth century the popularity of Lucan's epic appears to have grown considerably. Indeed, the late sixteenth to early eighteenth century has been termed an *aetas lucanea*.[5] Scholars have long stressed how the *Bellum Civile* was intensively studied, translated, and imitated in Renaissance England, and in a recent article Yanick Maes has drawn attention to the upsurge of Lucan's influence on the continent, especially in the Dutch Republic in the early seventeenth century.[6]

[1] Hardie 2013, 225 & Hardie 2011, 491. On the negative attitude towards Lucan in the 19th and early 20th century see also Braund 2013 and Ahl 1976, a monograph that has been one of the key inspirations in the modern reevaluation of Lucan.

[2] Moos 1976.

[3] Paleit 2013, 31-52.

[4] Camerarius' essay on Lucan was first published in Bersmannus' edition of the *Bellum Civile*, Leipzig 1589, p. 359-395.

[5] Maes 2013, 405.

[6] Maes 2013. On the English reception, see Paleit 2013 with further references.

Stylistical and political aspects were intertwined in this renewed admiration for Lucan's epic. It seems reasonable, as suggested by Maes, to include it in the contemporary intellectual current known as Tacitism which combined an insistence on moral realism, or even cynicism, with aesthetic appraisal of Roman writers of the first century AD.[7] Paleit observes that also in England Lucan's stylistic peculiarities were met with growing enthusiasm from around 1600 onwards, the same period in which he was associated with republican oppositional currents.[8] But the *Bellum Civile* also had a more general appeal as a warning against civil war.[9] A case in point is the dedicatory letter of the Plantin edition of Lucan of 1564, in which the editor, Theodor Poelman, draws attention to the relevance of Lucan's depiction of the horrors of civil war in the light of contemporary civil conflicts such as the Münster Rebellion of 1535 and the recent outbreak of religious strifes in France.[10]

Erasmus Lætus' *Margaretica* – Latin epic as anti-Swedish polemics

It seems, then, that we are gradually gaining a fuller and more nuanced picture of the early modern reception of Lucan's passionate epic. On the following pages I shall just add a small piece to this picture by discussing the role played by *Bellum Civile* as model, or hypotext, of a Danish epic poem, entitled *Margaretica*. It was written by the prolific Danish Latin poet Erasmus Lætus (1526-1582) and published in Frankfurt am Main in 1573.

To be sure, Virgil's *Aeneid* is the dominating model for *Margaretica*, which is full of verbal echoes and other Virgilian loans such as similes and catalogues. The protagonist, Queen Margrete (1352-1412), is portrayed as a female, and Christian, Aeneas, pious and deeply concerned for her people. In a dream whose setting is modelled upon the prophetic dreams of Aeneas, she receives a message about the future status of her realm from her deceased husband – the message itself recalling, also verbally, Anchises' vision of future Rome presented to his son, Aeneas, in the underworld.

---

[7] Maes 2013, 411.

[8] Paleit 2013, 51-52.

[9] Hardie 2011 495, also underlined by Maes 2013.

[10] "EXITIALE, & execrabile malum Reipublicæ ciuile bellum esse, vir clarissime, omnes omnium sæculorum historiæ palàm testantur. Est enim mare, Ilias, & Lerna malorum … Quid nostræ etatis recentem Monasteriensium factionem, & motum commemorem … num florentissimum Galliæ regnum, intestinis odiis, & mutua ciuium cæde flagrare tuti, securique spectauimus? … hanc meam opellam, quam … in restituendo Lucano impendi, qui varium & incertum belli euentum eleganti hypotyposi descripsit, tibi vir clarissime, dedico …", Theodorus Pulmannus' dedicatory letter, Antwerpen January 1st, 1564, to Nicolaus Rococcius (Nicolas Rococx), Lucan, Antwerpen: Plantin 1564. Cf. Maes 2013, 412.

The *Aeneid*'s continuous presence in *Margaretica* is not at all surprising. Virgil's epic enjoyed a status as the ultimate expression of imperial power, and it served as model for countless early modern poems written in praise of local and national princes. Lætus himself held a position as court poet to King Frederik II, and he was fond of presenting himself as the Danish Virgil, alluding to Virgil's close bond to the Roman emperor Augustus.[11]

Which role, then, can the *Bellum Civile* – the 'anti-*Aeneid*', with its angry protest against Caesar and his establishment of Roman imperial power – play in Lætus' eulogy of the Danish monarchy? In order to answer this question, let me first give a brief presentation of the *Margaretica*.

The poem tells of a battle in 1389, the battle of Falköping, when a Swedish army, led by King Albrecht, suffered defeat to the Danes ruled by Queen Margrete. This victory paved the way for the Union of Kalmar between Denmark, Norway, and Sweden which lasted from 1397 until 1523 and was ruled by Danish kings. After 1523 the Swedes were eager to distance themselves from their former dependence in the Union of Kalmar, and relations between Denmark (still united with Norway) and Sweden were tense. The emergence of the three crowns in the Danish king's coat of arms in the 1540s spurred Swedish suspicions that the Danes had ambitions to recreate the Union of Kalmar.[12] The mutual animosity was further stimulated when Johannes Magnus' Latin history of Sweden was published in Rome in 1554, imbued with hatred against the Danish neighbour as it was. Nine years later it came to open war – the Nordic Seven Years' War – which ended without any territorial changes in 1570.

After the war, Frederik II strove to promote the image of the Danish monarchy as an age-old institution firmly placed in the Lutheran world. In 1536 the Protestant Reformation had been carried through by his father Christian III. The entire educational and administrative system was now reorganised, and in the following decades talented young academics were sent to Wittenberg to study with Philipp Melanchthon.

Among these young men was Erasmus Lætus (1526-1582) who was in Wittenberg in 1559. Back in Denmark he became professor of theology in 1560, and nine years later he was ennobled by Frederik II, an honour that seems in effect to have been an engagement as court poet. In the years 1572-1574 he travelled in Europe and published no less than five long Latin poems

[11] On Lætus' use of the *Aeneid* in the *Margaretica*, see Skovgaard-Petersen 1988 (and briefly, in English, Skovgaard-Petersen 1991). The basic biography of Lætus is Rørdam 1869-72.

[12] See Norris 2020 with further references.

in which he directly or indirectly praised Denmark under its present monarch and emphasized the close bonds to Wittenberg.

One of these poems was the epic *Margaretica*. It is characterized not only by its close adherence to classical epic norms but also by its aggressive attitude against the Swedish neighbour. The very choice of the battle of Falköping in 1389 as subject of the poem was clearly intended as a provocative reminder of the Swedes' previous subordination to Denmark in the Union of Kalmar. And by depicting this previous Danish victory Lætus managed to allude to the recent Seven Years' War, which was thereby represented as a much clearer Danish triumph than in fact it was.

Moreover, tags from Johannes Magnus' history were put into the mouths of the Swedish king and his men in the epic. It is reasonable to regard Lætus' *Margaretica* as a response in kind to Johannes Magnus' history of Sweden. Interestingly, defamatory writings between Denmark and Sweden had been prohibited in the peace treaty of 1570. Such writings were regarded to have contributed significantly to the growing hostility between the two countries in the years up to the outbreak of the war in 1563. On this background it is noteworthy that Lætus dared to publish the *Margaratica*, a decision, moreover, that must have involved the Danish government. There can be no doubt that the poem was a transgression of the prohibition, but apparently it did not cause the Swedes to react.[13]

Lætus paints the Swedes and Danes in black and white, Swedish aggression, braggery, and stupidity as opposed to Danish piety, courage, justice, and concern for peace. It is a simple dichotomy far from the subtle nuances of the dominant model of the *Margaretica*, Virgil's *Aeneid*. Still, that leaves us with the question as to how Lucan's bitter outburst against autocracy fits in with Lætus' praise of Queen Margrete's wise exercise of princely power.

A Lucanian beginning

Like the *Bellum Civile*, the *Margaretica* is divided into 10 books, not 12 as in the *Aeneid*.[14] This formal indication that the *Bellum Civile* served as a model to the *Margaretica* is matched by their general similarity in terms of content: Both poems are historical epics centered around one battle that took place in a not too distant past (100-200 years earlier), a battle that is claimed to have had decisive influence on the history of the nation, Rome and Denmark, respectively.

[13] On these aspects of the *Margaretica*, see Skovgaard-Petersen 1987.

[14] Comprising altogether 6666 hexametres, Lætus' poem is a little shorter than the *Bellum Civile* (8060 hexametres) and the *Aeneid* (9896 hexametres)

The first page of the *Margaretica* is remarkably full of echoes from Lucan's introduction. In the tradition from classical epics the introductory lines resume the entire story to be told in the poem. We learn that the subject will be the Swedish king Albrecht's empty bragging (*fremitus*) that led to a dramatic war involving a cruel people, a war that had as its result that Denmark managed to put the fierce Goths in chains – the 'cruel people' thus to be identified with these Goths, i.e. Swedes.

Bellum Civile I, 1-8	*Margaretica* I, 1-7
Bella per Emathios plus quam ciuilia campos iusque datum sceleri **canimus**, **populumque** potent**em** in sua uictrici conuersum uiscera dextra cognatasque acies, et rupto foedere regni certatum totis concussi uiribus orbis in commune nefas, infestisque obuia signis signa, pares aquilas et pila minantia pilis. quis furor, o ciues, quae tanta licentia ferri?[15]	Alberti Sueonum fremitusque ac praelia Regis, Magnanimosque Duces, excitaque gentibus arma Fortunaeque dolos **canimus**, **populumque** feroc**em** Consertamque manu pugnam, quo Dania bello Imposuit rigidis haud mollia vincula Gotthis. Musa mihi causas tantique exordia belli, Fatorumque vices memora …
Of civil wars and worse waged on Emathian fields, of crime made law we sing, how a powerful people turned on its own heart its conquering hand, of ranks of relatives, and a broken pact of rule that dragged a shaken world with all its strength into contention to win a common guilt, of standards opposite hostile standards, partisan eagles and spears shaking at spears. What *fury*, citizens, what anarchy of iron?	Of Albrecht, King of the Swedes, his braggery and battles, of noble leaders and weapons raised among nations, of Fortune's deceit we sing, of an aggressive people and of close combat whereby Denmark put the fierce Goths in hard chains. Muse, tell me the causes and the origins of this huge war and of the vicissitudes of fate …[16]

[15] Quotations from Lucan follow Housmann's edition (Lucan 1970).

[16] Translations from Lucan are by Matthew Fox (Lucan, transl. Fox 2012), whereas translations from Lætus are my own.

The recapitulation alludes to both the *Aeneid* and the *Bellum Civile*. From the latter we recognize the plural of *canimus* placed in the same position in the hexameter and followed by *populumque* and an adjective describing this people (*potentem* and *ferocem*, respectively). As in the *Bellum Civile*, Lætus' *canimus* takes several objects (nouns with participles) connected with 'and'. But whereas Lucan does not name the persons involved, the first word in *Margaretica* is *Alberti*, 'Albrecht's'. Only indirectly, by naming Roman weapons and standards, does Lucan make clear that this is about Rome, about Romans opposing each other. And where he keeps varying this theme in paratactic syntagms suggesting a sort of frozen stand still, Lætus interrupts the enumeration of objects by a relative clause in which the result of the war is stated: The Danes managed to defeat their Swedish enemies.

In this respect Lætus is closer to the *Aeneid*, whose introduction similarly ends with a relative clause of one and a half hexameter foreseeing the result of the events accounted – the foundation of Rome. And Lætus now takes over Virgil's invocation of the Muse: *Musa, mihi causas memora* (*Aen*. I, 8). However, his questions to her are modelled upon Lucan. Addressing not the Muse but the citizens of Rome, Lucan complains of the *furor* that made them fight each other instead of external enemies – in particular the Parthian empire (*Babylon*) against which the Roman military commander Crassus had suffered defeat in 53 BC. – wars that would have no victor.

Lætus follows suit. What led the strong Nordic people to conduct this war, he asks, a war that would have no rewards, when instead the infernal Turkish enemy should have been conquered? Here Lætus creates an ambiguity. Which war is he talking about? The complaint that the Turks should have been defeated and not fellow Christians was common in his own day, often used to deplore wars between Protestants and Catholics. The Turks played a much more prominent role as a common European enemy in the sixteenth century than back in the time of Albrecht's and Margrete's battle in 1389. Lætus, then, here moves his focus from this war to the recent war between Denmark and Sweden, the Nordic Seven Years' War, 1563-70. This possibility is underpinned by his close verbal allusion to the corresponding verses in the *Bellum Civile*:

Bellum Civile I, 8-12 & 68-69	*Margaretica* I, 7-17
quis furor, o ciues, quae tanta licentia ferri?	**quid in arma** pote**ntem**
gentibus inuisis Latium praebere cruorem	Arctoi lateris, fortissima pectora, gentem
cumque superba foret Babylon spoli**anda** tropaeis	**Impulit**, ac meritis immersit cladibus vrbes?

Ausoniis umbraque erraret Crassus inulta **bella geri placuit** nullos **habitura** triumphos? … **quid in arma** fur**entem** **inpulerit** populum …	Scilicet audaci **cum** iam super**anda** Gradiuo Aut delenda fuit Stygio gens aedita partu, Ottomani soboles: quae circum ditia ponti Littora crudeles populis immittere dextras Certat, et immani cumulare cadauera bello: **Bella geri placuit**: quae nec sua praemia facto Sint **habitura**: nec optatos inferre nepotes Imperijsue queant, firmisue adiungere regnis.
What fury, citizens, what anarchy of iron? Did it seem good to display Latin carnage before hateful nations – when proud Babylon should have been spoiled of its Italian trophies and Crassus' ghost still wandered unavenged – good to wage wars that held no hope for triumphs? … what drove a people to arms, raving …	what drove a mighty people of the North to arms, brave men indeed, and affected cities with well-deserved disaster? When Ottoman's offspring, a people of infernal origin, should have been either conquered or destroyed in bold warfare, striving as they do to inflict cruel attacks on other peoples at the shores of the Black Sea and to heap corpses in savage hostilities – then it seemed good to wage wars that hold no hope for due rewards and cannot bring power to future generations and unite them in strong realms

As it can be seen, the entire syntactical construction – *cum*-clause with gerundive followed by the emphatic statement *Bella geri placuit* and the future participle *habitura* followed by a negation (*nullos, nec*) – is borrowed from Lucan. In addition, Lætus has replaced a number of Lucan's words with close synonyms, also taking advantage of the geographical similarity between the Roman external enemy, Babylon (the Parthians) and the contemporary arch-enemy of Christian Europe, the Turkish (or Ottoman) empire.

This massive reference to Lucan suggests that the Danish-Swedish war was indeed a civil war – like the Roman war between Caesar and Pompey. By implication Lætus here suggests a parallel between the united Denmark and Sweden and the Roman empire.

Both regret that the outcome of the wars would inevitably be negative, but the difference is significant. Where Lucan complains that there could be no

triumphs (since Rome was at war with herself), Lætus deplores that the war would not have its due results (*sua præmia*) in terms of uniting the following generations. In other words, he speaks of one Nordic people conducting an internal war that did not end as it should, with their reunification. This can only be about the Nordic Seven Years' war seen as a civil war between countries that form part of the same empire, or rather ought to form part of the same empire, the Union of Kalmar.

I think it can be argued that the allusions to Lucan in themselves help to move focus from the late 14th century to Lætus' own time. Among the characteristic narrative features of Lucan's epic is the narrator's distinct and passionate presence, often in the form of direct addresses to the characters of the narrative. One effect of the apostrophes is to blur the chronological distance between the narrator, together with the audience, and the figures of the poem, making them so to speak contemporary.[17] This is apparent from the very beginning. Lucan's first apostrophe is directed towards *cives*, 'citizens', in line 8. It follows upon the introductory setting of the topic, a civil war, Romans fighting against Romans described as a lack of development, a standstill apparently without an end. The ensuing appeal to the citizens, then, asking them to explain this madness (*quis furor, o ciues*) ambiguously refers at one and the same time to Romans at the time of the civil war in the 40s BC and to Lucan's compatriots at the time of Nero around 90 years later. Lucan goes on to point out the decay and misery in his own time caused by the civil war: "such gaping wounds belong to civic hands" ("alta sedent ciuilis uolnera dextrae"), he gloomily concludes (I, 32).

It is this oscillation between then and now, between the subject of the epic and the narrator's own day, that Lætus has recreated and adjusted to his polemical purpose. Beginning in the past with Albrecht's bragging and the ensuing Danish triumph over the Swedes, he moves from the 14th century to his own day through the references to the Turks and to the rightfully deserved but, alas, now no longer possible reunification of the Nordic realms. The tragedy of the Nordic Seven Years' war was that it did not result in a renewal of the Union of Kalmar.

The moralising historian

Lucan not only provides ideological fuel to the *Margaretica*. The observation that both texts, in the lines following the initial resume, switch from the historical subject to the narrator's present points to a similarity on a narratological level. In both poems, the narrator, the 'I', is a prominent presence, a

[17] This aspect of Lucan's apostrophes is also emphasized in Asso 2008. The most comprehensive discussion of Lucan's apostrophes is Behr 2007.

moral judge supporting its judgments with historical examples. Admittedly, the two epics also differ considerably in this respect. The bitter and disillusioned narrator of Lucan's epic has no counterpart in the *Margaretica*, whose narrator throughout describes a world governed by divine justice. Nevertheless, I would like to suggest that the prominent narrator's voice in the *Margaretica* is influenced by Lucan, and further that this debt has to do with the *Bellum Civile*'s status as historical epic in the German Protestant humanist circles to which Lætus was attached.

After the initial 17 lines discussed above, Lætus switches into reflections on the instability of human affairs and the inevitable and vehement downfall of all great things. This general truth is then demonstrated by the historical examples offered by the four world monarchies in the tradition from Melanchthon's *Carion's Chronicle*, supplemented by other realms of the Greco-Roman world (Troy, Carthage, and others). The narrator then interrupts himself asking: why look for foreign examples in the distant past when I have an almost domestic case at my disposal?[18] This is, of course, a reference to Albrecht, the Swedish king, whose history is now resumed and presented as yet another instance of the general rule that human vanity is bound to be punished. The narrator here poses as a moral interpreter of history in a world governed by divine justice.

Lucan, as mentioned, goes on to deplore the consequences of the civil war culminating in the enigmatic, and possibly ironic, praise of Nero (I, 33-66).[19] Then follows a discussion of the causes of the civil war which may well have inspired Lætus. Lucan here launches the general rule that all great things must fall:

> fert animus causas tantarum expromere rerum,
> inmensumque aperitur opus, quid in arma furentem
> inpulerit populum, quid pacem excusserit orbi.
> inuida fatorum series summisque negatum
> stare diu nimioque graues sub pondere lapsus
> nec se Roma ferens …
> **in se magna ruunt**: laetis hunc numina rebus
> crescendi **posuere** modum.
>
> I've in mind to reveal the causes of great matters,
> And the deed is immense: to expose what drove
> a people to arms, raving, what struck peace

[18] "Sed quid ego haec tandem calamis externa proculque / Conquisita sequor: mihi pene domestica certas / Suppeditant exempla vices ..." (*Marg*. 1573, p. 4).

[19] "quod si non aliam uenturo fata Neroni / inuenere uiam … iam nihil, o superi, querimur" (*BC* I, 33-4, 37).

from the globe. Fates' hateful sequence: the mighty
don't stand long. A grave downfall, excessive weight:
Rome couldn't bear herself …
Great things rush to ruin: the powers that give bounty
Have set this limit on increase (I, 67-72, 81-82)

We have already seen that Lætus re-uses the first indirect question ("quid in arma furentem inpulerit populum") as a direct question to the Muse (I, p. 1). Lucan's formulation of the general rule echoes in Lætus' much longer exposition of the theme (I, p. 2-4): "Et **se m**ole prem**unt** …" (And they [*even the most stable of human affairs*] press themselves down, p. 2); and later "Limes enim **positus** celsis est fascibus …Iupiter omnes Ordinat ipse gradus" (A limit is set on exalted power … Jupiter himself governs all steps, p. 4).

Later in the *Margaretica* Lucan's phrases appear in various contexts. Twice we learn that Sweden is bound to fall under its own weight: "**Nec se ferre** potest" (It cannot uphold itself, IV, p. 93), "**Nec se pron**a capit" (Leaning downward it cannot contain itself, VIII, p. 220). Before the battle the gods assemble (the only instance of divine machinery in the *Margaretica*), and Jupiter here makes clear that Albrecht is going to suffer defeat. Human affairs, he explains, are prone to "grave downfall, excessive weight" ("**nimioque graues fert pondere lapsus**", VIII, p. 223).

Thus, Lucan's discussion of the causes of the civil war in the first book (I, 67-97) is present in the *Margaretica*. My point here, however, is that Lucan, as exemplified in these lines, offers a model for Lætus' moralist narrator's voice, a voice that pronounces timeless truths about the fragility of human affairs, and a voice, moreover, that refers to persons and events of other periods. Lucan, for instance, mentions Crassus and Nero in the passages quoted, and later we find him comparing Caesar to Hannibal (VII, 799-800). Lætus, we have seen, refers to the four world monarchies, and later he compares the Swedish king to Hannibal and the Danish general to Scipio – just to mention a few examples. This appeal to a historical reality shared by the reader makes the narrative voice of both epics resemble the narrative voice of prosaic historical writing. Notwithstanding their different attitudes to historical justice, the narrator of both epics may be described as a moralising historian.

Lætus, Lucan and the early Protestants' interpretation of history

Lætus, as we saw, presents Albrecht as an example of the general rule that power when abused inevitably is doomed. He fits this observation into the overall pattern of world history offered by Melanchthon's handbook of universal history, *Carion's Chronicle*: God has arranged that order should be upheld by empires, and the change from one empire to the next (*translatio*

imperii) is caused by moral decline.[20] Melanchthon identifies four world monarchies which in the course of history succeed each other according to God's plan: First the Assyrian, then the Persian which is followed by the Macedonian, and finally the Roman (which lived on as the German Habsburg empire). As part of his argument Lætus succinctly formulates this chain:

> Assyrio rapuit Moedus diademata: Moedum
> Afflixit Perses: Macedum rex moenia Persis
> Strauit, & huic rursus frænum imposuere Quirites
>
> From the Assyrians the Medes seized the diadems. The Persians overthrew the Medes. The Macedonian king tore down the Persian walls and he in turn was curbed by the Romans, p. 4.

Lætus in other words interprets Albrecht's downfall – and hence Margrete's victory – as an instance of this divine plan whose basic elements are the four world empires. Interestingly also Lucan appears to have been fitted into this pattern by the early Protestant theologians. Edward Paleit, as we saw, has drawn attention to an essay on Lucan written by the Protestant pedagogue and close friend of Melanchthon, Joachim Camerarius, and published posthumously in an edition of the *Bellum Civile* in 1589. Alluding as it seems to the old discussion on whether Lucan should be regarded as a poet or a historian, Camerarius here insists that the aim, *finis*, of Lucan's poem is historical since he instructs his readers in the general historical laws that cause the downfall of well-ordered societies.[21] God may allow gradual moral deterioration, Camerarius goes on, only to let his wrath finally fall hard upon an entire society, and this insight may inspire men to greater caution or at least give them comfort in their own miseries; as Christ admonishes his disciples to be attentive to small signs, so all men should take lessons from history.

Lucan's narrative, then, in Camerarius' exegesis, is given its place in an overall Christian frame where the fall of great empires is seen as God's punishment of human sins. Lucan fulfills the didactic purpose of historical

[20] "Hic ordo imperiorum et causae mutationis considerandae sunt, quae comprehenduntur in dicto Siracidae, capite decimo: Regnum a gente in gentem transfertur, propter iniusticiam," Melanchthon 1844, col. 740. In its first German version (1532) *Carion's Chronicle* was written in some sort of collaboration between Melanchthon and the mathematician Johann Carion. In 1558-60 Melanchthon's own Latin version covering the period up to Charlemagne was published. Based on Melanchthon's notes, Caspar Peucer wrote the remaining part and had the entire history printed in 1572. I here quote from the edition in *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 12 (1844).

[21] "Itaque plane est historicus quidam finis huius poëseos, quippe cum instruat & doceat, quæ res communitates bene fundatas & stabilitas impellendo concutiant, & dissipando subuertant", Lucan, 1589, p. 363.

writing to provide its readers with moral lessons. Later, in the commentary to Lucan's account of the causes of the civil war ("Hæ ducibus causæ suberant", *BC* I, 158), Camerarius further develops the historical rule that moral corruption and lack of discipline will lead to downfall (p. 378-379).

Camerarius' reading of Lucan fits in with the dominating Protestant understanding of history as set out in Melanchthon's *Carion's Chronicle*. Melanchthon like Camerarius emphasizes the lessons to be learned from history. We should read historical accounts to learn about the divine laws that govern historical development.

Lucan's forceful sentences on the nature of power are also present in Melanchthon's account of the devastating catastrophe of the Roman civil wars. As a comment on the conflicts between Antonius and Octavian Melanchthon re-uses Lucan's bitter statement that power cannot be shared: "nulla fides regni sociis, omnisque potestas / inpatiens consortis erit" (no pledge to reign as peers will hold. All power is impatient of equals, *BC* I, 92-92, *CR* 12, col. 897), a statement that rounds off the passage from Lucan quoted above. Describing the plans conceived at the Egyptian court to murder Pompey Melanchthon quotes from the cynical speech of one of the courtiers in Lucan's narrative: "exeat aula qui uolt esse pius" (If being devout is what one wants, let him leave the court, BC VIII, 493-94), "nulla fides umquam miseros elegit amicos" (No loyalty ever chooses wretched friends, BC VIII, 535). Earlier on, dealing with the Achaean war in 146 BC Melanchthon regrets that the reckless ambitions of the Greek led to their defeat, and quotes Lucan to confirm this moral observation. This reflection is taken from the beginning of Book 7, where Lucan again adopts the point of view of general humanity.[22]

The *Bellum Civile*, in short, clearly occupied a place in the early Protestants' historical thought. Melanchthon and Camerarius shared Lucan's profound condemnation of civil warfare and his moralizing interpretation of history. Camerarius' remarks on Lucan suggest that they were able to adapt the *Bellum Civile* to the overall Protestant view of history as set out in *Carion's Chronicle*.

To be sure, there is a fundamental difference in historical outlook. Lucan's epic is pervaded by pessimism: History has ended with the introduction of imperial rule, and no justice is to be expected any more. By contrast, the overall message of the Protestant *Carion's Chronicle* is that history unfolds

[22] "hoc placet, o superi, cum uobis uertere cuncta / propositum, nostris erroribus addere crimen? /cladibus inruimus nocituraque poscimus arma" (Does this please you, gods above, when you've determined to topple all things, to add crime to our errors? We rush into disaster, pleading for perilous arms, *BC* VII, 50-60).

according to God's plan and that everything is governed by divine justice. Contrary to Lucan, Melanchthon regarded Caesar's cause as just, as he emphatically states.[23]

Interestingly, also Lætus wrote about Caesar. His portrait of Caesar forms part of his collection of biographies of 36 Roman emperors, *Romanorum Cæsares Italici* (Frankfurt am Main 1574). As Trine Hass has recently shown, Lætus here makes use of Lucan while portraying Caesar as a sympathetic hero.[24] Like Melanchthon Lætus thus at one and the same time drew inspiration from Lucan and distanced himself from his bitter criticism of Caesar and imperial power.

Summing up

In the *Margaretica*, Lætus fits the history of Albrecht's well-deserved defeat and the pious queen Margrete's victory into the pattern of the Four Monarchies. He shares the fundamentally just outlook of Melanchthon and describes a world governed by divine justice. This was a world view that fitted well with the *Aeneid*. As Quint has emphasized, Virgil's epic celebrating power and empire as it does, was readily adaptable to later triumphalistic epic narratives. Among them is also the *Margaretica*.

But Lucan's *Bellum Civile* has a role to play as well in Lætus' poem. In spite of his distinctly pessimist outlook and severe criticism of Caesar, Lucan with his condemnation of civil war and strong moralising appears to have enjoyed considerable popularity in the Protestant world of Melancththon to which Lætus – and the entire Danish academic establishment – belonged. Lætus, like Lucan, wrote an historical epic on a decisive battle in the history of the nation, a war that took place in the fairly recent past, and he signalled the relationship to Lucan by dividing his poem into 10 books. In my view, it is likely that the prominent and moralising narrator's voice in Lætus' epic, what we could call his merging of an epic and a historical narrator's voice, was inspired by Lucan.

Drawing, moreover, on the theme of civil war, Lætus was able to enroll the *Bellum Civile* as an instrument in his anti-Swedish polemic. Through the allusions to *Bellum Civile*'s beginning in the first 17 verses of the poem,

[23] "Hic exitus tanti viri inter insignia exempla est, non solum instabilitatis fortunae sed etiam ingratitudinis humanae et perfidiae … Etsi fecit quaedam insolentius, tamen multo moderatior fuit Sylla et Mario et aliis, qui antea in civilibus bellis Rempublicam oppresserunt … iniustum fuit eum interficere. De initio belli etiam iudico, eum in casu legitimae defensionis arma cepisse", Melanchthon 1844, col. 896.

[24] "In a passage clearly based on Lucan's text, Lætus takes over one of Lucan's favourite tools for creating pathos, the apostrophe, and uses it in a passage to narrate the same event as Lucan but with a 180-degree shift in the verdict on Caesar", Hass 2020, 121.

Lætus implied that the Danish-Swedish wars – the one in 1389 as well as the recent war in the 1560s – were civil wars and as such to be particularly deplored, and he could express his regret that a union between the two nations was not re-established after the Nordic Seven Years' War in 1570. This was clearly meant as an insult, a provocation of the Swedish neighbour, a reminder of the Union of Kalmar from which the Swedes were eager to distance themselves.

Bibliography

Ahl, Frederik M. 1976, *Lucan: An introduction*, Ithaka, N.Y.

Asso, Paolo 2008, "The intrusive Trope – Apostrophe in Lucan", *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 61 (Special issue in honour of R. Elaine Fantham), eds.: R. Ferri, J.M. Seo & K. Volk, 161-73.

Behr, Francesca D'Alessandro 2007, *Feeling History: Lucan, Stoicism, and the Poetics of Passion*, Columbus.

Braund, Susanna 2011, "Violence in translation", *Brill's Companion to Lucan*, ed.: Paolo Asso, Leiden – Boston, 507-524.

Hardie, Philip 2011, "Lucan in the English Renaissance", *Brill's Companion to Lucan*, ed.: Paolo Asso, Leiden – Boston 491-506.

Hardie, Philip 2013, "Lucan's Bellum Civile", *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, eds.: Emma Buckley and Martin T. Dinter, Chichester (*Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World*), 225-240.

Hass, Trine Arlund 2020, "Remembering Caesar: Mnemonic aspects of intertextuality in Erasmus Lætus' Romanorum Cæsares Italici", *Meaningful Memories*, *NJRS* 17, 2020,107-123. www.njrs.dk.

Lucan, Marcus Annaeus 1564, *De bello civili X libri*, ed. Theodor Pulmannus, Antwerpen.

Lucan, Marcus Annaeus 1589, *De bello civili*, ed. Gregorius Bersmannus, Leipzig (With an essay on Lucan by Joachim Camerarius, p. 359-395).

Lucan, Marcus Annaeus 1970, *Belli Ciuilis Libri Decem*, ed. A. Housmann, Oxford (1st ed. 1926).

Lucan, Marcus Annaeus 2012, *Civil War*, transl. Matthew Fox, London *(Penguin Classics*).

Maes, Yanick 2013, "Haec Monstra Edidit. Translating Lucan in the Early Seventeenth Century", *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, eds.: Emma Buckley and Martin T. Dinter, Chichester (*Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World*), 405-424.

Melanchthon, Philipp 1844, *Chronicon Carionis*, ed. C. G. Bretschneider, *Corpus Reformatorum* XII, Halis Saxonum, cols. 712-1094.

Moos, Peter von 1976 "Poeta und historicus im Mittelalter. Zum Mimesis-Problem am Beispiel einiger Urteile über Lucan", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 98, 93-130.

Norris, Matthew 2020, "In Search of the Three Crowns. Conserving, Restoring, and Reproducing Cultural Memory in Early Modern Sweden", *Meaningful Memories*, NJRS 17, 125-151. www.njrs.dk

Paleit, Edward 2013, War, *Liberty, and Caesar: Responses to Lucan's Bellum Ciuile, ca. 1580-1650*, Oxford.

Quint, David 1993, *Epic and Empire. Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton*, Princeton.

Rørdam, H.F. 1869-72, "Rasmus Glad", *Kjøbenhavns Universitets Historie fra 1536 til 1621*, vol. 2, København, 462-486.

Skovgaard-Petersen, Karen 1987, "Erasmus Lætus' Margaretica — et bidrag til den dansk-svenske pennefejde i det 16. årh.", *Historisk Tidsskrift*, 209-237.

Skovgaard-Petersen, Karen 1988, *Erasmus Lætus' Margaretica. Klassisk epos og dansk propaganda*, København (Studier fra Sprog og oldtidsforskning 312).

Skovgaard-Petersen, Karen 1991, "Danish Neo-Latin Epic as anti-Swedish Propaganda", *Acta conventus Neo-Latini Torontonensis*, eds. A. Dalzell & al., Binghamton, NY (*Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies* 86), 721-727.