THE CLASSICAL IMAGE OF AFRICA: THE EVIDENCE FROM CLAUDIAN

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ABSTRACT

Claudian’s poetry contains frequent allusions to Africa. His concept of the land, people, animals and products reflects literary stereotypes that do not suggest a personal knowledge of the continent. Two long passages of allegory describe the personified Africa with Rome and other provinces. These do not prove that Claudian visualized Africa as Black, Negroid, or wearing an elephant-scalp headdress. Nor does he provide evidence for a dea Africa. Instead he describes her as a vassal, willingly subjected, by divine decree, to perpetual domination and exploitation.

The primary concern of this paper is not an appreciation of the poet and his poetry. The intention is somewhat different. Discussions about representations of Africa in Classical art frequently cite Claudian as a literary source that supposedly confirms the traditional iconography. At least as far back as 1644, Oudaans linked the figure of Africa on coinage to the description of Africa in Claudian.\(^1\) This precedes Addison’s *A Dialogue of Medals* cited by Cameron,\(^2\) in which one character finds that the design on three coins clarifies descriptions in Claudian that he had not understood previously, to which his companion replies, ‘I think there is no question but the poet has copied out in his description the figure that Africa made in ancient sculpture and painting.’ There was a firmly established iconography for deities and personifications, followed by both poets and artists, long before Claudian’s day, and as Cameron notes,\(^3\) ‘The reason the poet and the coins give us the same figure is not because either is copying the other. It is simply that this was the accepted figure ... it would perhaps be more worthy of comment if the poet and the coins had given us different pictures.’

What this paper aims to do, therefore, is to consider firstly what the

\(^{1}\) J. Oudaans, *Roomsche Mogentheid* (Amsterdam 1664).
\(^{3}\) Cameron (note 2) 274-75.
‘accepted figure’ of Africa was in Roman literature: what terminology was used when referring to the continent, and what was associated with it and its people? Did Claudian (who mentions Africa or things African fairly frequently in his work) follow the tradition? Secondly, how was Africa depicted in art? Do Claudian’s verbal descriptions correspond with the iconography used in the visual arts, or does he in fact give us a different picture? Two passages in particular present Africa as a personification. These occur in the first book of the De Bello Gildonicus, written to celebrate the suppression of Gildo’s revolt in Africa in 398 AD, and in the second book of the De Consulatu Stichonis of 399 or 400 AD. Both passages have been used as evidence for the way Romans viewed Africa and Africans. Is this justified?

Claudian inherited a long and ambiguous tradition as far as the term ‘Africa’ was concerned. ‘Africa’ and ‘Libya’ were used as synonyms for the continent, and also in the narrower sense of a province, giving rise to expressions like ‘inter Libyam et Africam’ (Serv. Aen. 6.794). There were also other names used for Africa, or part of it. ‘Africa propria’ was sometimes used to distinguish the Roman province around Carthage, variously demarcated at different periods, but the single word ‘Africa’ is also used of this area, in

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4 It is therefore concerned with what Claudian writes, rather than with how or why he does so; literary analysis of his use of, for example, allegory, personification or epheprosis to achieve his poetic, political or panegyrical aims, or discussion of the historical data that form the background of his poetry, would be subjects for a different paper.

5 J.M.C. Toynbee, The Hadrianic School of Greek Art (Cambridge 1934); F.M. Snowden, Blacks in Antiquity (Cambridge, Mass. 1970); L.A. Thompson, Romans and Blacks (Norman, Oklahoma 1989).

6 Pliny, HN 5.1.1; Agrippa, in A. Riese (ed.), Geographi Latini Minores (hereafter GLM) (Hildesheim 1964) 1-2; Divisio Orbis Terrarum 1, GLM 15; Julius Honorius, Cosmographia 46, GLM 51. One could therefore argue that everything said about ‘Libya’ applied to ‘Africa’. It was one of the three continents into which the earth was divided, with the Nile being the boundary between Asia and Africa: Hdt. 2.16-17, 4.41-45; F. Bücheler & A. Riese, Anthologia Latina, Vol. 1 (Amsterdam 1964) 403; App. Mund. 7; Luc. 9.411; 9.871; Marcianus Heracleensis 1.4-6 in GGM 519-20; Mart. 6.622; 6.667; Paulus Orosius 1.1 in GLM 56; Pind. P. 9.8; Plin. 2.173; 3.1.3; 28.24; Polyb. 3.37; Mela 1.8; Sall. Jug. 17.3; Str. 1.4.7-8; Vell. 2.40.4.

7 Although for the Greeks ‘Libya’ (named after a native woman, Hdt. 4.45) often had the connotation Cyrenaica and the indigenous people around Cyrene were called Libyans (Hdt. 4.45, 159), Polybius used the term ‘Libya’ for the area around Carthage, called ‘Africa’ by the Romans. In particular, ‘Africa’ referred to the Roman province established after the defeat of Carthage in 146 BC, Africa Nova formed in 46 BC by Julius Caesar, or the later demarcation Africa Proconsularis. Polybius differentiated between Carthaginians, Libyans and Numidians (9.19).

8 Alexander Polyhistor (fl. c. 60 BC) calls ‘Libya’ a region that rejoices in many names, among
conjunction with other provinces. It was ‘rich in everything, adorned with all good things’, crops, cattle and particularly oil, glorious, beautiful, with great public buildings and safe sailing; it had everything except men that could be trusted.

The Carthaginians, called Poeni to indicate their Phoenician origin, were also at times known as Africans or Libyans (cf. Lucan 7.799-800). Adjacent kingdoms, later annexed as provinces, had different names (Numidia, Mauretania), but might still be considered part of ‘Africa’ the continent; consequently various indigenous (non-Carthaginian) tribes on the continent might be referred to as ‘Libyan’ or ‘African’ and individual tribes could be used pars pro toto to mean ‘African’. So Seneca (Dial. 9.12) could call Ptolemy of Mauretania ‘king of Africa’. Similarly geographical features, flora and fauna, and human characteristics were likely to be applied to the whole continent; Lucan (9.369) could speak of ‘Garamantian’ waves, although the Garamantes were in the Sahara, not at the coast. The most relevant comments in this regard are those of Servius, who specifically recognises a parte totum use of Gaetuli, Mauri, Massyli and Africana (Serv. Aen. 5.192; 6.60).

However, ‘Libya’ and ‘Africa’ were not always synonymous. The Cosmographia of Julius Honorius (GLM 47) lists ‘Africa’ and ‘Libya’ as two separate provinces, and Orosius (43 GLM 66-67) calls Libya ‘Cyrenaica part of Africa that borders Egypt’. By the time of the Nomina Provinciarum Omnium (GLM 127-28) the diocese of ‘Africa’ had seven provinces, none of which was called ‘Africa’.

Roman writers were clearly more concerned with synecdoche and metonymy, and rhetorical effect, than with exact topographical terminology.
Often too, references to various parts of Africa were used simply to indicate a far-off place or the ends of the earth, and coupled with other equally exotic (to the Romans) localities like India; Arabia, Meroc, the Rhine and Rhone; Tyre; and Gaul. Plautus links Libya not only with far-off places like Persia and Arabia, but with farcical imaginary lands: Peredia, Peribesia, Classia Vunomamnia, Centauromachia and Conterebromnia.

All the above uses were current several centuries before Claudian. However, since the Romanisation of the North African provinces was at its peak in the 3rd and early 4th centuries, one might expect a late writer such as Claudian to have a greater general knowledge of the area than the authors quoted above. A poem which dealt with a revolt on the continent of Africa might then include more precise distinctions of geographic terminology or new descriptive details. Is this the case?

In B. Gild. 1.4 Claudian speaks of joining ‘Libya’ to Europe, presumably implying the continents. Likewise, in lines 135-62 when ‘Africa’ complains that Gildo possesses her as if she were a private farm (privato iure tenemur exigui specie fundi), the area she mentions is that bounded by the Nile, Atlas, Gades (Cadiz), Barce, Tingi (Tangiers) and the ‘Paraetonian shore’, a third of the world (pars tertia mundi unius praedonis ager), i.e. ‘Africa’ here would seem to be the continent, not the province, and synonymous with ‘Libya’.

However, the personified ‘Africa’ is made to say that the torrid part of ‘Libya’ is more blessed than the speaker:

Felicior illa perustae
pars Libyae, nимio quae se munita calore
defendit tantique vacat secura tyranni.
(B. Gild. 1.145-47)

quid me temperies iuvit?
(B. Gild. 1.152)

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13 See Luc. 4.669-70; Prop. 4.9.46.
14 Cat. 45.6-7; Ov. Fast. 4.570; Sen. Her. Oet. 41; Tib. 2.3.55.
15 Ov. Fast. 4.570.
16 Tib. 2.3.58.
17 Juv. 3.149.
18 Plaut. Curc. 442-43.
— which certainly suggests that ‘Africa’ and at least part of ‘Libya’ are not synonymous. Is one to understand ‘Africa’ in this sense as the province? Yet ‘Libya’ is also used for the province:

\[
\textit{cui placet, australes Gildo condonat habenas tantaque mutatos sequitur provincia mores. quaslibet ad partes animus mutaverit anceps transfundit secum Libyam refluimque malignus commodat imperium. Mauri fuit Africa munus. (B. Gild. 1.279-83)}
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The two terms are used interchangeably:

\[
\textit{si dedita Mauris regibus Illyricis accesserit Africa damnis? (B. Gild. 1.452-53)}
\]

\[
\textit{uno Libyam defendite bello. (B. Gild. 1.462)}
\]

So, however, are other terms. \textit{Et Numidae Gildonis erunt?} (B. Gild. 1.93) presumably implies the same territory as that intended in \textit{Libyam Gildo tenet} (B. Gild. 1.113) and that referred to by the personified ‘Africa’. The triumph envisaged over Mauretania (\textit{exornet geminos Maurusia laurea currus, B. Gild. 1.344}) would also have to refer to the same territory. Similarly, when the personified Rome claims to have filled her granaries with the harvests of Gaetulia (\textit{Gaetulis messibus, B. Gild. 1.57}), Claudian is not accurate, but uses \textit{pars pro toto} purely to avoid being repetitive; Gaetulia in the interior of the continent did not produce rich harvests. His other reference to Gaetulia is Honorius’ dream of hunting lion in the Libyan glades and Gaetulian mountains:

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\textit{namque procul Libycos venatu cingere saltus et iuga rimari canibus Gaetula videbar (B. Gild. 1. 356-57)}
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where no real geographic distinction is made between Gaetula (sic) and Libya.

The desire for variation leads to his using any term that his readers will recognise from literature or history as meaning ‘African’. Libyan, Gaetulian,
Punic occur in the same sentence as virtual synonyms to contrast Africa with Egypt, represented by the words Nilus, Memphis, and Pharius (B. Gild. 1.49-50). Cinyps recalls Herodotus’ description of the extremely fertile soil around that river (Hdt. 4.199-200), also mentioned in Vergil (Georg. 3.312); there is no need to take Claudian literally when he speaks of the army landing on the shores of the Cinyps (necdum Cinyphis exercitus attigit oras, B. Gild. 1.9)\(^{19}\) any more than when he speaks of the two Scipios sweating for Bocchus’ kingdom:

\[ \text{in Bocchi regnum sudavit uterque} \]
\[ \text{Scipio ...} \]
\[ (B. Gild. 1.94-95) \]

or the palace of Bocchus fearing the progeny of Theodosius:

\[ \text{dum sanguis in orbe} \]
\[ \text{noster erit, semper pallebit regia Bocchi} \]
\[ (B. Gild. 1.341-42) \]

– anachronistically, as Bocchus dates to the 1st century BC.\(^{20}\)

Often Claudian refers to Africa (in whatever form) in conjunction with other far-off lands — Libya and Sarmatia, Meroe and the Danube;\(^{21}\) Gaetulia and Hyrca;\(^{22}\) Thule, Libya, India, the Red Sea, Hydaspes,\(^{23}\) Mauri

\(^{19}\) It is, in fact, translated as ‘Africa’s coasts’ by Platnauer in the Loeb edition of Claudian. Platnauer frequently translates ‘Libya’ as ‘Africa’ and ‘Libyam Nilumque’ (i.e. B. Gild. 1.52) as ‘Africa and Egypt’. In addition, he translates Poenus as ‘African’ (Cons. Stil. 3.71); Gaetulis messibus (B. Gild. 1.57) as ‘African supply’; Numidae as ‘Africa’ (B. Gild. 1.93); generix Massyla as ‘African lioness’ (In Eutr. 1.389). Similar substitutions are found in other translations. Compare the Loeb translation of Polybius where in expressions like ‘secure Africa’, ‘cross to Africa’ and ‘in Libya’ the terms ‘Libya’ and ‘Africa’ are used synonymously although Polybius uses one term (‘Libya’) consistently. Such translations presumably are intended to make it easier for the modern reader, but obscure the variety, and even ambiguity, of the terms in the original. This tendency towards conflation has been continued and aggravated by the lack of precision also found in many archaeological reports and publications.

\(^{20}\) The footnote in the Loeb edition reads: ‘Bocchus, properly a king of Mauretania, here stands typically for any native monarch.’

\(^{21}\) Cons. Olyb. et Prob. 131-35.

\(^{22}\) In Rufin. 1.226-27.

\(^{23}\) In Rufin. 2.240-44.
and Saxon, Sabaea, China, Sidon, Lydia and India; Gaul, Farthest Tethys, Britain, Spain and Africa and Italy.

Claudian’s work gives no indication that greater Romanisation of Africa led to more specific knowledge of Africa in Rome. Rather, it suggests that in the 4th century AD, as since the 2nd century BC, stylistic concerns still outweighed those of topographical accuracy. Nor can this be attributed to the panegyric or propagandistic nature of his work, since his use of supposed synonyms and his coupling of Africa with other lands, have parallels in comedy, lyric, elegiac, and indeed in history and philosophy. Similarly his descriptions of the land, its flora and fauna, for the most part repeat traditional stereotypes.

Antiquity’s view of Africa was ambiguous, recognising both the extreme desert conditions and great fertility. Strabo, quoting Gnaeus Piso who was once prefect of Africa, compared it to a leopard’s skin, spotted with inhabited places that are surrounded by waterless and desert land (Str. 2.5.33); these contrasts are remarked upon by other writers as well (Mela 1.21). The fertility of Libya/Africa is a recurring theme, highlighted in literature since the time of Homer, so are drought, deserts, sand, sand storms and heat.

For Claudian, the most important aspect of Africa is the fertility of the land. This was not merely a literary trope, but of topical, indeed crucial, significance, since in his day Rome was dependent on grain imported from Africa. Rome’s food-supply had been cut off, and much of Claudian’s poetry vilified those who had done so (Gildo) or praised those who had restored it (Stilicho). There are repeated references to the harvest, and ways in which other provinces had to make good the lost harvests of Africa (e.g. *In Eutr.* 1.401-11).

Other literary stereotypes linked Africa with heat, snakes, wild animals and ‘monsters’. Libya was the parent and nurse of wild beasts; these were considered a plague. Lions and panthers were often referred to merely as Libyan or African beasts. Other animals specifically called ‘African’/

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24 *Epith.* 210-19.
25 *In Rufin.* 2.147-56.
26 *Od.* 4.85; see also Hdt. 4.199; Str. 1.1.16; Diod. Sic. 3.50; Enn. Sat. 17 (in *TLL*).
27 Hdt. 4.181-85; 192; Luc. 9.620-21; Manil. *Astron.* 4.728; Sall. *Jug.* 79; *GLM* 124.
28 The origin of the word ‘Africa’ was explained in late Antiquity as a derivation of the Greek α-φριτον, ‘without shivering’, ‘without cold’ – *Africa quod est callidior* (Paul Fest. 2; Serv. *Aen.* 5.128; 6.312).
29 Liv. 8.3.24; Polybiostor, Müller, *FHG* 3.239.135.
30 Manil. *Astron.* 4.664-71; see also Luc. 9.854-55; Hdt. 4.192; Mela 1.21; Str. 2.5.33.
31 Cat. 45.6-7; Manil. *Astron.* 4.666; Ov. *Fast.* 5.178; Sil. 3.459; Varr. 3.13.3; August. 4.40;
‘Libyan’ include mice, (guinea fowl, monkeys, oryx, leopards, bear and elephant. Africa was also the parent and nurse of serpents.

Claudian continues the tradition. His epithets are well-worn; there is nothing that suggests a personal rather than a literary experience of the continent. Like his predecessors, he emphasises the heat. His reference to the innumerable grains of Libya’s sand (In Eutr. 1.32) is reminiscent of Catullus (7.3). Both the land of Maurusia’ and ‘Libya’ are the home of wild animals (Cons. Stil. 3. 278, 280); Gaetulia bears and nourishes monsters (Cons. Manl. 307). The country is full of snakes (B. Gild. 1.316-17). He refers to elephants and monkeys. He uses ‘Libyan breed’ (fetus Libycos) in conjunction with a lion (Cons. Stil. 3.356-58); a lioness is called generetrix Massyla (In Eutr. 1.389) or associated with Gaetulia (In Rufin. 1.226). Only once does Claudian use the cliché of the African/Libyan beast in a new, relevant metaphor. In Honorius’ dream, a ravaging lion in the Gaetulan mountains, which has caused great bloodshed, is humbled in fetters and chains; the dream is prophetic and the lion becomes a symbol of Gildo (B. Gild. 1.354-66).

Cic. Fam. 8.8.10; Liv. 44.18.8; Plin. 8.64; Plin. Ep. 6.34.3.
32 Plin. 10.201; Plaut. Poen. 1011.
33 Varr. RR 3.9.18; Col. 2.2.11; Mart. 13.45.1.
34 Manil. Astron. 4.668.
35 Plin. 10.201.
36 Plin. 10.201.
37 Verg. Aen. 5.37.
38 Liv. 37.39.13; Plin. 18.66; Manil. Astron. 4.666.
39 Liv. 8.3.24; see also Cic. ND 1.101; Manil. Astron. 4.664; Luc. 9.628; 855-56; Flor. 1.18.17.
40 There is, for example, nothing like his description of Sardinia (B. Gild. 1.507-26). However, even here, although Claudian sounds as if he is speaking with the confidence of experience, there is nothing that he could not have learned at second-hand; the plague-bearing air, in particular, sounds suspiciously like a legend. As regards the tradition that he was born in Egypt, one has to bear in mind that, in Antiquity, Egypt was not considered part of Africa (see note 1 above); even if the tradition were true, Claudian would not have considered himself ‘African’. He may have married a girl from Africa (R. Browning, ‘Poetry,’ in: E.J. Kenney [ed.], The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, Vol. 2 [Cambridge 1982] 705), but she probably died soon after, perhaps on honeymoon (M. Platnauer, Claudian, Vols. 1-2. Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge, Mass. 1956] xvi); he would have had little time to profit from her knowledge.
41 Ill Cons. Hon. 52-53, 206; B. Gild. 1.317; Cons. Stil. 3.333; In Rufin. 2.41, 241.
There were also literary stereotypes for the people of Africa. These included legendary monsters like dog-headed men and headless men with eyes in their chests. More credibly, specific ethnic features were ascribed to them. Specifically the Aethio-
pians were dark-skinned with ‘the woolliest hair of all men’ (Hdt. 7.70); dark skin colour was also ascribed to the ‘Mauri’, ‘Libyci’, and ‘Afri’. However, Libyans did not inevitably look the same; Herodotus does not mention skin colour for the ‘Libyans’ (only for ‘Aethiopians’) and Lucan (10.129-33) speaks of some Libyces burnt black with curly hair growing back from their faces, but others so fair that Caesar said he had not seen such red hair even on the Rhine. However, skin colour and features were mentioned comparatively rarely; freaks like dog-heads, unsettled or strange abodes, un-Roman diets or dress attracted more attention. Of these there were many; no one ‘image’ was dominant.

Inhabitants of Africa were also thought to possess specific moral characteristics. They were considered warlike, cruel and untrustworthy. Their languages were unpronounceable; they were barbarians. Their customs were uncivilized; they did not follow marriage customs, but had wives and children in common; they lived in huts; and they practised no arts.

Claudian says much the same (B. Gild. 1.279-85). Gildo is fickle, Africa

42 Hdt. 4.191; Plin. 5.45-46; Mela 1.23. In spite of Roman occupation from Mauretania to Egypt and greatly increased knowledge of distances, Pliny’s concept of the people of the continent was still very much that of Herodotus some six centuries earlier — the further they were from Greece or Rome, the more fantastic they became. Europe in 1544 was still repeating as fact the stories of dog-headed men, men with no heads and one big foot (Cosmographica Universalis by Sebastian Münster).

43 Strictly speaking, ‘Aethiopians’ were not thought to live in ‘Libya’.

44 Sil. 2.438-40.

45 Luc. 10.129-43.

46 Verg. Mor. 31-35; see also Prop. 4.9.46; Manil. Astron. 4.728; Diod. Sic. 20.57.

47 Enn. Ann. 358, quoted by Cic. Epist. 9.7; Cic. Or. 93; Varr. Men. 225; Verg. Aen. 1.37, 339; Sil. 16.1797.

48 Carthaginians were proverbially deceitful, but Afri, Mauri, Numidae and unspecified tribes were also described as untrustworthy and deceitful (Polyb. 14.2; Sall. fr. dub. 3 TLL; Liv. 29.23; 28.42.7, 8; 28.44.5; Diod. Sic. 3.49; Expositio 61, GLM 123), as was Alexandria (Prop. 3.11.3). Silius Italicus refers to the Libyans as people of two tongues (16.156), which suggests bilingualism, but could also imply deceit. Diodorus suggests it was unfair to doubt the word of the Ethiopians or assume that their reports were false (3.37), but only the Expositio calls the inhabitants of Libya (in a very limited sense) pious, wise and good (GLM 124).

49 Aristotele, Müller, FHG 2.180.249.

50 Müller, FHG 5.87-88.
likewise; trickery and treachery are associated with the Massyphae:

Tollite Massyphas fraudes, removete bilingues
insidias ...

Gildo is cruel, killing his nephews and denying them burial; he knows snakes and their venom (B. Gild. 1.172-74; 392-98). The Mauri are not properly armed (but the Gaetuli have spears); have no discipline; have thousands of wives (coniubia mille) but no family ties; practise incest; ride bareback (B. Gild. 1.390-98; 433-43), live in huts (Cons. Stil. 3.344); are enervated and decadent.  

In fact, Claudian’s description of the African continent and its people is largely a re-hash of clichéd stereotypes. If this seems to be stating the obvious, one should ask why poets, and indeed prose writers, should have remained content, up to c. 400 AD, to regurgitate hackneyed phrases. Presumably their readers, too, were content with depictions that implied that nothing had changed on the African continent since the Punic wars or perhaps the time of Bocchus – as if England should remain unchanged since the time of Chaucer. The constants emphasise those aspects that interest Rome: Africa’s fertility to supply Rome with food, Africa’s animals to supply Rome’s amphitheatres, Africa’s arms that may turn against Rome. Details (tribes, areas) did not have immediate relevance; inaccuracy was tolerated, or not noticed. 

What sets Claudian apart from most writers is his use of extended allegory using the personifications of Rome and the provinces. Personifications of

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51 The picture of uncivilized barbarism is somewhat spoilt by the description of the chief arriving drunk and drenched in perfume, more often considered a luxury article used by decadent cultures. Claudian is obviously following a rhetorical precept of running down the enemy rather than giving a sociological study.

52 This is also true of other geographical areas. Claudian often refers to provinces, rivers, mountains, plains, cities, etc., but descriptions of them, their people and their products are inclined to be hackneyed, for example: the seven mouths of the Nile (In Rufin. 1.185), the frozen Tanais (In Rufin. 1.324), the jewels of India, spices of Arabia, silk of China, dyes of Tyre (In Eutr. 1.225-26; IV Cons. Hon. 600-01), Gaetulian spear and Hyrcan tiger (In Rufin. 1.226); flaxen-haired Germans (Cons. Stil. 1.203).

53 My thanks to the anonymous reader whose comment forced me to enlarge on this point.

54 As is probably true today. How many people could complete a map of ethnic groupings on a different continent?

55 He also uses many personifications of non-geographical type, for example: Discord, Hun-
geographical areas were, of course, not new in literature or art, occurring in Greece at least as far back as the 5th century BC;56 in Rome personifications of provinces on coinage were already used during the Republic: e.g. Spain is identified by legend on a Roman coin of Albinus in 81 BC. The best-known representations of the provinces are probably those on the Province, Restitutor, and Adventus series of coinage issued by Hadrian (134-138 AD), followed by those of Antoninus Pius. The use of several personifications together in one composition was not new either. A series of simulacra gentium adorned Augustus’ Porticus ad Nationes (Serv. Aen. 7.721); the Basilica of Neptune in Rome and the Sebastion in Aphrodisias provide other examples of statuary.57 A 1st century AD mosaic pavement at Ostia probably depicts Spain, Sicily, Africa and Egypt,58 and a mosaic at El Djem (probably 3rd century AD) shows Rome in the centre surrounded by i.a. Africa, Egypt, Asia, Spain, Sicily.59 Claudian’s conceit of a meeting of the provinces was not without precedent.

However, it is exceptional in Latin literature. By giving them long speeches, Claudian imparts a specific character to each personification; his descriptions of their appearance are also detailed. As a result his work has been used as evidence for Classical iconography when identifying personifications in the visual arts. Two passages in particular deserve attention.

In one (B. Gild. 1.17-212), Rome, gaunt, feeble from hunger, with sunken cheeks and eyes, grey hair, ill-fitting helmet and rusty sword, struggles to Olympus to beg Jupiter for food, that Gildo be defeated and that the corn-supply from Africa to Rome be restored.60 Her appearance suggests her

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56 For example, ‘Hellas’ and ‘Asia’ appear on a red-figure Apulian vase; see Red-Figure Vases of Apulia, Vol. 2 (Oxford 1982) 495, no. 18/38; Toynbee (note 5) pl. XXI.4; XXIV.2. For personifications of places in the pre-Hellenistic Greek world, see F.W. Hamdorf, Griechische Kultpersonifikation der Vorhellenistischen Zeit (Mainz 1964).


60 This contrasts with her appearance in the Panegeyric on Probinus and Olybrius where Rome flies in a chariot to visit Theodosius and is called goddess (numen amicum, diva, 126, 165),
desperate plight. Her appeal, in a dramatic speech of some 100 lines (28-127), is based on two claims: the promise of Jupiter and the unalterable prophesy of the Sibyl that Rome’s power will be eternal (cf. Vergil, Aen. 1.277-78), and the right of conquest over Carthage and Jugurtha, i.e. five centuries earlier. The affronted disbelief of Claudian’s personified Rome may well echo that of the Senate and People of Rome when their food-supply from Africa was cut off.

As Rome ends her speech, Africa rushes in, shaking Heaven with her cries and in effect asks to be defeated so that Gildo can be vanquished. Her appearance is scarcely better than that of Rome as she appears among the stars with bruised cheeks, torn clothes, ears of wheat scattered, a broken ivory comb dangling from the top of her head – a battered woman:

\[
\begin{align*}
cum & \ procul \ insanis \ quatiens \ ululatibus \ axem \\
et & \ contusa \ genas \ mediis \ adparet \ in \ astris \\
Africa: & \ rescisae \ vestes \ et \ spicae \ passim \\
serta & \ lacero \ crinales \ vertice \ dentes \\
et & \ fractum \ penaebat \ ebur \ ...
\end{align*}
\]
(B. Gild. 1.134-38)

This is Gildo’s doing. Most of Africa’s speech (162-200) catalogues Gildo’s vices (plunder, rape, murder, rather like Verres). One might argue that by personifying Africa Claudian could let her speak in her own voice, a witness who bursts in just as Jupiter is about to give judgement, to testify to the wrongs she has suffered. It is a dramatic, poetically satisfying scene – but who is ‘Africa’? At one stage she speaks of the whole area from the Nile to Atlas, \textit{tertia pars mundi}, in the first person, yet she distinguishes her own \textit{mitior aether} (152) from \textit{illa perustae pars Libyae} (145-46), Ethiopians and Berbers, client kings and allies of Gildo who, it might be argued, were part of that third. Her concern is for the \textit{veteres coloni} and the \textit{cives}, Roman Africa. Jupiter seemingly acknowledges this when he promises that no force will cut the connection between Rome and Africa (\textit{vestrum vis nulla tenorem separat}, 206-07). Both Africa and Rome are in a bad way because of Gildo. Jupiter recognises the common enemy (\textit{communem ... hostem}) and promises both redress. Rome’s appearance immediately changes as she is restored to her former glory; nothing is said about Africa’s appearance, only that Jupiter replies with a promise: Africa shall serve Rome, and Rome alone.

\textit{queen of the world} (\textit{maxima rerum, regina}, 130, 136).

92
There is, however, a second passage in which the personified Africa speaks; in this her appearance is attractive:

*Tum spicis et dente comas infusiris eburno
et calido rubicunda die sic Africa fatur.*

*(Cons. Stil. 2.256-57)*

In *Cons. Stil. 2.184-207*, Claudian tells of envoys from Gaul, Carthage and Pannonia arriving at the court of Honorius to ask that Stilicho be appointed consul; from line 230 the same idea is allegorically portrayed when Spain, Gaul, Britain, Africa and Italy meet in the temple of Rome on the Palatine addressing the same request to her (Rome). Through the *personae* of the provinces Claudian can refer to Stilicho’s exploits in each province and voice the apparently unanimous desire of the empire.

His description of the women adds colour to his poem; the pictorial qualities have led Toynbee to suggest that Claudian might have been following a painting. Spain is described as wearing a garland of grey-leaved olives and with the tawny Tagus woven into her garment; Gaul as fierce, fair-haired, wearing a torque and holding two javelins; Britain as clad in the skin of a Caledonian beast, cheeks tattooed, and a garment as blue as the sea; Africa as sunburnt (*calido rubicunda die*), her hair bright with ears of wheat and an ivory ‘tooth’ (*Tum spicis et dente comas infusiris eburno*); Italy (‘Oenotria’) as wreathed with ivy and vines. Specific details (the torque, tattoo) call to mind ethnic dress; there is no hint of torn clothes or bad treatment as in the case of Africa above.

These passages might be expected to give the reader some insight into the way Claudian actually visualised Africa, both as far as physical features and attributes are concerned. Did he, for example, think of Africa as Black?

*B. Gild. 1.192-93* has been cited as evidence for the Romans’ concept of mixed races. However, the context does not show that Claudian considered his personification of Africa Black. As argued above, Claudian’s terminology is incredibly confused, using Libya and Africa interchangeably, and ‘African’ names such as Garamantes, Gaetuli, Numidians, Ethiopians and Mauri sometimes as part of Africa and sometimes as her enemy. Claudian refers to Gildo, and presumably therefore his brother Mascezel, whose name sounds distinctly Punic, as ‘Maurus’ (*B. Gild. 1.380*); after the defeat of

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61 Toynbee (note 5) 38.

62 *Athiopes nobis generum, Nasamona maritum / ingerit; exterret cubulae discolor infa.*

Cf. Snowdon (note 5) 4, 262 n. 28.
Gildo, Africa claims that she has forgotten the name of the Mauri (Cons. Stil. 2.259-62), clearly not considering them part of herself. The personified Africa specifically mentions marriage with Mauri, an Aethopian son-in-law, a Nasamonian (Berber) husband and a resulting Coloured (discolor) infant as one of the horrors of war (B. Gild. 1.190-93). ‘Africa’ in this context must be Carthage or the province, rather than the continent; if the father of a discolor infant is black, the mother would have to be white. The logical implication is surely that ‘Africa’ here is white (Phoenician Carthaginian?); this is borne out by the description of her as burnt red by the sun (caído rubicunda die).

Eugenius in Addison’s A Dialogue of Medals (see p. 81 above) claims that Claudian’s descriptions of Africa become clear when compared with the types appearing on coinage: ‘They represent Africa in the shape of a woman, and certainly allude to the corn and headdress that she wears on old coins.’ From the time of the Civil Wars, the numismatic type for the personified Africa was a woman wearing an elephant-scalp headress. The attribute of an elephant-scalp is also used on gems; in sculpture both in the round and in relief, in stone and terra cotta; on mosaics and frescoes, lamps and decorative metalwork throughout the period of the Roman Empire. The scalps were not all ‘the same type’, as is often stated in publications, but for present purposes may be considered together as one common attribute of the personified Africa. Coinage identifies, by legend, both Alexandria and Mauretania wearing a similar elephant-scalp.

Does Claudian allude to this headress? For Toynbee, who does not cite Addison, B. Gild. 1.134-38 and Cons. Stil. 2.256-57 provide literary proof of the use of the elephant-scalp by Africa. This is surely incorrect. The ears of wheat must have formed a garland, unlikely to have been found in conjunction with an elephant-scalp. Dens can be an elephant tusk; in the

63 Cf. Sidon. Apollin., Carm. 5.53-54 where her cheeks are black.
64 Elephant-scalp headdresses occurring on the coinage and seals of the Ptolemies, Seleucids and Bactrian kings are worn by rulers, not personifications. I consider the coin type on the coin of Agathocles a portrait, not a personification of Africa, and that the coinage ascribed to the Numidian and Mauretanian kings Juba I and Bogud was minted for Pompey, using the same type as his ‘imperator’ Q. Metellus Scipio and legate Eppius. The head on the aureus of Pompey should also be re-considered as referring to Pompey himself, not Africa, since the attributes of jug and lituus refer to him personally, not a personification.
66 Other attributes were an ear of corn, basket for corn, etc.
67 Toynbee (note 5) 38.
68 The combination does occur on the bust now at Broadlands, which has been dated to the
later Empire Africa (when wearing an elephant-scalp headdress) was sometimes shown carrying an elephant tusk as well, e.g. on a sarcophagus decorated with scenes from the Aeneid dated to the time of Hadrian (Rome, Museo Nazionale 168186) and on coins of Maximianus Herculius (296-305 AD). However, dens can also be used for the tooth of a comb, and in the light of the crinales dentes in B. Gild. 1.137, fractum ebur should be an ivory hair comb, not tusks on a scalp. Similarly, dente ... eburno (Cons. Stil. 2.256) should be seen as an ivory comb. The significance of the two descriptions is surely the contrast between an unkempt and physically hurt Africa suffering under Gildo, and flourishing in anticipation of Stilicho (as is made clear by Africa’s words on the two occasions). In B. Gild. the ivory comb is broken, in Cons. Stil. it is shining. There is no mention of an elephant-scalp.

More to the point as regards headdress, and never as far as I know mentioned in the publications dealing with iconography, is the description of Gildo’s ‘African’ troops wearing the severed heads of serpents with gaping jaws as helmets (Cons. Stil. 1.262). One need not believe Claudian, but it seems unlikely that he would ascribe serpent-scalp helmets to Gildo’s troops if he visualized Africa wearing an elephant-scalp, especially since this passage is immediately followed by a reference to the Ganges, India and the enormous beasts of Porus (not named as elephants). 59

In archaeological reports and publications, a woman wearing an elephant-scalp headdress is often identified not merely as ‘Africa’, but as the dea Africa. For example, Slim categorically states that Africa was the object of public cult, claiming that this is ‘a fact supported by numerous archaeological and epigraphical discoveries’, adding: ‘The importance of this goddess is verified by the very wide diffusion of her portrait in various media, including coins, sculptures, lamps, terra-cotta’s, paintings and gems.’ 70

The concept of a ‘dea Africa’ rests ultimately on the remark of the Elder Pliny (28.21.1) that no-one in Africa does anything without first calling

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59 Claudian seems to confuse Africa and India when, after talking about Libyan plains, lions, Ethiopia, leopards, the huts of the Mauri, ivory and gold from the south, he adds that all Indians stood amazed to see the elephant shorn of its tusks (Cons. Stil. 3.349).

70 Slim (note 59) 18.
on Africa, and on the account of the dream in which Africa, described as *mulieris figura humana grandior pulchriorque* (Plin. Min. Ep. 7.27.2) and *species muliebris ultra modum humanum* (Tac. Ann. 9.21), appeared to Curtius Rufus. However, attempts to prove both a public and private cult of the 'dea Africa' are not convincing;\(^{71}\) the busts and statuettes cited are considerably later than Pliny, come from a Roman rather than an African context, and are too few to indicate ubiquitous worship.\(^ {72}\) Also, Pliny makes no mention of an elephant-scalp.

Slim's claim is not correct — although a head wearing an elephant-scalp does occur in various media, not all examples of this refer to Africa,\(^ {73}\) and even when they do, there is no indication that it is a 'portrait' of a goddess. In fact, several artefacts make it clear that the elephant-scalp might be the attribute of Africa, but not of a divinity. On a carbuncle in Vienna,\(^ {74}\) a male figure rests his foot on a head which wears an elephant-scalp; on a nicolo in Cambridge, the goddess Roma holds a head that has been interpreted as Africa;\(^ {75}\) on a marble relief in the Villa Belletti, Rome, a woman wearing an elephant-scalp sits dejectedly in the pose of a captive, in front of an armed male;\(^ {76}\) on the famous silver cup from Boscoreale now in the Louvre, Paris, a woman in an elephant-scalp is one of a group of prisoners.\(^ {77}\) It is unlikely that a goddess, even a foreign one, would have been depicted like this; rather, these are representations of a conquered territory or its inhabitants.

These are predecessors of the figure of Africa which is identified by legend on the coinage of Hadrian, not only as regards the attribute of the elephant-scalp, but more importantly, as regards the relationship between


\(^{72}\) The epigraphical evidence that mentions Di Mauri and Di Patrii (masculine plural) does not, as far as I know, specify Dea Africa, nor does the interpretation of the legend GATA on a coin of Q. Metellus Caecilius Scipio as *Genius Terrae Africæ* or *Genius Tutelaris Africæ* (again, masculine), even if correct, prove the existence of a feminine goddess Africa. The more likely parallel is rather the Dea Roma.

\(^{73}\) See p. 91 and 94 above, with notes 59 and 65.

\(^{74}\) See E. Zwierlein-Diehl (ed.), *Antike Gemmen in Deutschen Sammlung (AGD)*, Vol. 2 (Vienna 1991) 127, no. 1089, pl. 83.


\(^{76}\) Toynbee (note 5) 36, pl. XXIII.1.

\(^{77}\) Toynbee (note 5) 36, pl. XXII.4.
‘Africa’ and the emperor. The Restitutor series shows Africa kneeling before Hadrian; the Adventus series has her sacrificing in front of him; both types project the image of a conquered territory which submits to the will of the emperor. Even when Africa is portrayed alone, as on the Province series, her attributes (corn, a modus or cornucopia, a lion) indicate products imported by Rome.\textsuperscript{78} Toynbee may well be correct in her interpretations of policies and events depicted on this coinage,\textsuperscript{79} but the depictions are solely from the Roman point of view, as they continue to be on later coinage of Antoninus Pius – the provinces as vassals of Rome.

What then of Claudian? Since he lived at the close of the 4th century AD, his work cannot be used as evidence for the late Republic or early Empire, as is often done even by scholars like Toynbee and Snowdon. Even for his own period, although wheat and wild animals, specifically lions, are attributes of Africa in both art and Claudian’s poetry, he does not in fact provide literary proof that an elephant-scalp was used for the personification of Africa, nor that it was thought of as black.\textsuperscript{80} Other attributes found in art are not mentioned in Claudian’s description, e.g. the scorpion.

What is indicated is that Claudian’s view of Africa coincided with that shown in many earlier works of art which depicted it not as a goddess, but as a vassal. In fact, the most blatant statement of the relationship between Rome and Africa is found in Claudian: Africa exists to supply Rome with food. Rome’s speech (\textit{B. Gild.} 1.49-115) is surely the pinnacle of imperialist chauvinism; how dare an African keep the produce of Africa for Africa, denying Rome and treating her like a slave? Jupiter’s ‘promise’ is in fact chilling in its threat: Africa shall serve Rome, and Rome alone (\textit{B. Gild.} 1.207).

According to Claudian, Africa, far from being a goddess, is on Olympus in the company of Jupiter as a sycophant of Rome,\textsuperscript{81} begging on her knees that she herself be allowed to be defeated, wanting to be a slave, pleading that her food be taken away – so that Rome can flourish. When Stilicho becomes consul, Rome rejoices because it is he who ensures that produce from Africa (and the other provinces) is available to her (\textit{Cons. Stil.} 2.392-\textsuperscript{78} The exception would be the scorpion.

\textsuperscript{79} Toynbee (note 5).

\textsuperscript{80} There are, however, many excellent depictions of black Africans in Roman art; see F.M. Snowden, ‘Iconographical evidence on the Black populations in Greco-Roman Antiquity’, in L. Bugner (ed.), \textit{The Image of the Black in Western Art} (Cambridge, Mass. 1976) 1.133-245.

\textsuperscript{81} Note, however, that Rome herself is a supplicant in Claudian, a personification rather than a true ‘dea’. See Cameron (note 2) 364-65.
This is the picture Claudian presents of the other provinces as well, abjectly asking to serve Rome, as when Germany pleads to add her troops to those of Rome (Cons. Stil. 1.232-33), or Carthage, Gaul and Pannonia rejoice to be allowed to pay taxes (Cons. Stil. 2.200).

\[\textit{qui non catenas adripiat libens}\
\textit{colloque poscat vincula libero?}\]

'Who will not willingly seize the chains of slavery and demand the yoke for a neck as yet free?' as he expressed it in his Fescennine verses in honour of the marriage of Honorius (1.18-19, Loeb translation). It is this attitude of the province in its relation to the capital or emperor, rather than the attribute of the elephant-scalp or the physical/ethnic characteristics, which is the element common to both the visual iconography of Africa and the poetry of Claudian.

Claudian has little real knowledge of the place or people; there is no reason to believe (even if it were credible) that this is an informed reflection of the real feelings of the inhabitants of the provinces. It is the courtier's panegyric, Emperor-centred and Rome-centred, calling on the aggression of the past as a justification for continued exploitation in the present and future (B. Gild. 1.89 ff.) and arrogant in its belief that the rest of the world was grateful to be included in the Roman Empire (Cons. Stil. 2.150-57, 182 ff.). Unconsciously Claudian, in fact, gives an indication as to why there were revolts in Africa, as elsewhere.

Claudian, far from proving that the Romans knew and described ethnic types, suggests that personifications were recognised by their attributes rather than by their racial features; that attributes were not always constant; that the elephant-scalp was not a \textit{sine qua non} for the personification of Africa; that Africa was not \textit{a dea} (at least for him and his readers); and that confused generalisations and stereotypes were the order of the day, blurring the lines between allegory and geography (whether province or continent), and even mythology. A similar picture emerges from the Cosmographia of Julius Honorius which describes a statue 'of Libya, daughter of Epaphus, in the likeness of Africa, holding corn, a corn measure underfoot and holding a tusk in her left hand' (GLM 51).

To return to the questions at the beginning of this paper: in literature the 'accepted figure' of Africa was one of inconsistent, confused, inexact geographical terminology and stereotyped characteristics. In art this confusion is mirrored by the use of the same attribute (an elephant-scalp) for Africa,
Mauretania and Alexandria. Claudian, too, used inconsistent and confused topographical terminology which does not suggest a personal knowledge of the continent. This confusion is reflected, but also aggravated and perpetuated, by inexact modern translations and paraphrases. The characteristics he ascribes to the land (heat, fertility, wild animals) and its people (treachery, fickleness, immorality) are those his literary predecessors used. What is new is his extended allegorical description of Africa as a woman.

In this he is closer to the 'accepted figure' in art, but his depiction is not the same as those on coins, where Africa was depicted draped and wearing an elephant-scalp, with attributes like wheat, a modus, a lion, a scorpion and sometimes an elephant tusk, to symbolise fertility and wild animals. Claudian’s description of the personified Africa includes wheat but no lion or scorpion; it does not provide evidence for the elephant-scalp or ethnic features, and once shows Africa hurt and in torn clothing, as a suppliant. Claudian’s work parallels the coinage, not in the physical aspect of Africa, but in her attitude: on the Restitutor series Africa kneels before the emperor; in Claudian she is a vassal, willingly subjected, by divine decree, to perpetual domination and exploitation. Claudian cannot therefore provide literary proof for the iconography of a dea Africa, nor even for the earliest iconography of Africa as a place. He does, however, provide evidence that the concept of the physical attributes of the continent of Africa and notions about its inhabitants, as generally perceived by Greece or Rome, had not changed significantly since Herodotus, i.e. for some nine centuries. The same stereotypes also survived the Middle Ages, and the iconography of Africa in an elephant-scalp was continued in the Iconologia of Ripa (1603) which had a profound influence on subsequent European art. In addition, illustrations of the coinage of Hadrian and Claudian’s views were circulated together in 17th and 18th century publications, e.g. Oudaans (1644) and Kuypert (1719), and doubtless echoed, and perpetuated, the view of Africa as a God-ordained servant and source of supply for Europe. However, the context itself, i.e. in a poem about the revolt of Gildo in Africa, is an indication that this was a Roman concept not necessarily shared by all its subjects.

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82 C. Ripa, Iconologia (Rome 1603).
83 Oudaans (note 1); G. Kuypert (Cuperus), De elephantis in nummis aöviis (Hagae Comitum 1719); also in Novus Thesaurus Antiquitatum Romanorum, Vol. 3 (Venice 1735).
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