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Naeivius and Virgil

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There is a collection of J. J. Scaliger's *Obiter Dicta*, written down by his friends and admirers and published under the title of *Scaligerana*, a fascinating book, reprinted many times: fascinating, because it shows the great scholar in a relaxed, often facetious mood, passing judgment — almost always in a final, apodictic manner — on some person, book, or issue. He was obviously expected to come up with an answer to any problem that surfaced in conversation, and in his comments he often switched from Latin to the vernacular, and back to Latin. What Scaliger said about Ennius might serve as a motto to this conference and could easily be applied to other Latin poets of the early period: "Ennius," he said, "an ancient poet of great genius. If only we had all he wrote and had lost Lucan, Statius, Silius Italicus and all those guys..." "*Ennius, poeta antiquus, magnifico ingenio. Utinam hunc haberemus integrum et amissemus Lucanum, Statium, Silium Italicum et tous ces garçons-là....*"¹

Scaliger says nothing about Naeivius, but I am convinced that he would have placed the lost epic on the First Punic War above the preserved epic on the Second Punic War.

Naeivius, as everybody knows, wrote funny plays, serious plays and — late in life — an epic poem in the Saturnian meter, a verse form that is not really understood today and was, it would seem, not completely understood in Virgil's time. The author of a handbook on metrics who lived under Nero² had to admit that he was unable to quote, from the whole epic, one single 'normal' Saturnian line. It looks like a fairly simple scheme, yet there are many variations and, once

¹I am using the Amsterdam edition of 1740, vol. II, p. 85.

²Caesius Bassus (not Atilius Fortunatianus), *Grammatici Latini VI*, ed. H. Keil, pp. 265-66.

allowance is made for textual corruptions, the possibilities are almost endless.

The fragments of Naevius' *Bellum Poenicum* have been rewritten, rearranged and reinterpreted to the point of frustration, and a whole industry has grown up — especially in Italy — around the meager remains of an early Roman epic. Some of this modern work is highly speculative, because the fragments are all quite short and their context is usually obscure.

We should probably distinguish the different ways in which these fragments are quoted. Some simply survive because an ancient grammarian wished to illustrate an unusual form, an archaic usage, a word that had disappeared from literary Latin or whose meaning had changed since the days of Naevius. Thus Priscian I. 351 H (= fr. 12 Morel) quotes two Saturnians and a half to document the genitive plural *marum* for *marium*, or Festus p. 257 M (fr. 15 M) quotes one line to illustrate the use of *quianam* in the sense of *quare, cur*. Many fragments have been transmitted in this way, without regard to their place in the context, their meaning or their beauty. But a few fragments are preserved in and through the learned exegesis of Virgil's *Aeneid*, by scholars who were interested in Virgil's sources and the way in which he used them. Most of them appear in the 'Servius Danielis', a few in Macrobius, one in 'Probus' and one in a scholion. Another tradition is represented by such authors as Varro and Gellius whose interests were partly grammatical, partly historical.

Incidentally, scholiasts sometimes preserve important material but give it a whimsical interpretation. Virgil narrates (*Aen.* VII. 107-47) the fulfilment of an important omen — the Trojans eating their tables — and has it explained by Aeneas: *genitor mihi talia namque / (nunc repeto) Anchises fatorum arcana reliquit* (vv. 120-21). A scholion in an XIth century MS³ says that it was the Harpy Celaeno (*Aen.* III. 245), not Anchises, who made that prophecy. This, of course, is just one of several discrepancies between Book III of the *Aeneid* and other books, but the scholiast prefers to think that Venus left to Anchises a collection of predictions, thus giving him divine status, and he quotes Naevius as his authority.

There is no question that a good deal of solid scholarship is embodied in the ancient commentaries and scholia on Virgil, as well as in Macrobius. On the other hand we should not assume that all the authors who quote Naevius had actually read the whole of the *Bellum*

³Paris. Lat. 7930, on *Aen.* VII. 123.

Poenicum. In fact, H. D. Jocelyn⁴ has shown, as clearly as anything can be shown, that Macrobius, and others who claim to know something about Virgil's sources, actually depend on lists and compilations that were made by various authors, sometimes to accuse Virgil of plagiarism. Hence the phrase, "This whole passage is taken from Naevius," which appears more than once, should not be accepted as readily as many scholars do accept it. How casually Macrobius, for instance, uses this formula can be seen from his comment on Book IV of the *Aeneid* where he says: *...ut de Argonauticorum quarto...librum Aeneidos suae quartum totum paene formauerit ad Didonem uel Aenean amatoriam incontinentiam Medae circa Iasonem transferendo* (*Saturn.* V. 17. 4). In this case we have Virgil's so-called source, and it appears that Macrobius' charge is simply not true. Apart from the love theme which owes something to the story of Medea and Jason, the fourth Book of the *Aeneid* has more Homeric reminiscences, it would seem from Ribbeck's statistics, than direct references to Apollonius of Rhodes. Macrobius evidently never took the trouble of checking his statement; perhaps he never even looked into Apollonius. How valid, then, is his claim that Book II of the *Aeneid* was copied (translated?) almost word by word from Pisander (*paene ad uerbum transcripserit*, *Saturn.* V. 2. 4)? Such sweeping assertions seem to reflect a tradition hostile to Virgil, even though they are no longer used in a polemical way. It had become fashionable, at one point, to dwell on Virgil's lack of originality or inventiveness, and in order to document this claim scholars accumulated much material, not objectively, but in order to make a case against Virgil.

Among the poets and critics of the Augustan Age there had been a lively discussion concerning the respective merits of *ingenium* and *ars* in literary creation (*φύσις* and *τέχνη*). Ennius was the great example of much *ingenium*, little *ars*, while Callimachus represented the other extreme. Virgil apparently was ranked with Callimachus, and soon after his death, his sources were analyzed. This material was then used, in an uncritical manner, by later scholars, even though they no longer were biased.

Keeping this in mind, one still feels that the design of the *Aeneid* owes something to the *Bellum Poenicum*, and this, in turn, suggests that Virgil himself saw something of a design in an early Roman epic which seems so primitive and artless to us, just because some fragments read like prose forced into a rough metrical scheme: *Manius Valerius / consul partem exerciti in expeditionem / ducit* (fr. 32 M). This is the style of a

⁴"Ancient Scholarship and Virgil's Use of Republican Latin Poetry. I," *Classical*

chronicle, not an epic, but there are similar passages in Ennius, and their simplicity does not exclude a certain grandeur and stateliness. After all, Naevius and Ennius were Hellenistic poets, familiar with older and contemporary Greek literature, Hellenistic poets who happened to write in Latin, a language that was just becoming literary, and we can easily believe that the *Bellum Poenicum* had a structure, a theme, an artistic conception meaningful and pleasing to Virgil. Naevius was *poeta doctus*, like his Greek colleagues.⁵

The earlier part of the work apparently described the aftermath of the Trojan War, some of the travels of Aeneas, and probably also his love affair with Dido. The assignment of fragments to books is still controversial. In antiquity there were two editions, we are told: one divided into seven books, the other without any book divisions, and that certainly did not help matters. It would seem that the very beginning of the work and most of its later portions were mainly historical, dealing with the events of the First Punic War. Here, Naevius could draw on his own memories, because he had participated in the war as a soldier. The mythical episodes may have been inserted into the historical framework by a sort of flash-back technique. What were Naevius' sources for this part? Probably the Greek historian Hellanicus whose account of Aeneas' exodus is preserved in a long excerpt in Dionysius of Halicarnassus.⁶ Hellanicus, in turn, may have borrowed from Stesichorus and other poets.

We cannot be certain about the Dido episode,⁷ but several scholars feel today that Naevius deserves credit for the idea of establishing in myth a personal motive for the war he chronicles. It was pointed out long ago that there was more meaning in the mythical forecasting of the

Quarterly 14 (1964), pp. 280 ff.; 15 (1965), pp. 126 ff.

⁵Cicero (*Brutus* 75) compares Naevius' epic to a sculpture by Myron, whose technique was far from primitive, though he considers Ennius more polished. Ennius himself seems to have counted Naevius among the *vates* and *fauni* of early Latin poetry (almost certainly no compliment, whatever it means), but he silently acknowledges the status of the *Bellum Poenicum* in his own time by leaving out from his *Annales* the First Punic War. In an age when archaic poetry had become fashionable again, Fronto, the teacher of Marcus Aurelius, in a letter (p. 62 N) calls Naevius one of those poets who *in eum laborem studiumque et periculum uerba industriusius quaerendo* (sic scribendum videtur: *quaerendi* cod.) *se commisere*, and he himself certainly admires the *insperatum atque inopinatum uerbum...quod praeter spem atque opinionem audientium promitur* (p. 63). This is true of Virgil, too! For possible echoes of Naevius in Fronto, see now M. P. Pieri, *Studi Tragica* (Rome 1979), pp. 11 ff.

⁶*Early Roman History* I. 45. 4 - 48. 1 (= *FGH I F 31* Jacoby, with Jacoby's commentary in vol. I, pp. 444 ff.).

⁷Cf. N. Horsfall, *Proc. Virg. Soc.* 13 (1973-74), pp. 1 ff.

conflict between Rome and Carthage at a time when these two nations were fighting for supremacy or at least for survival, than in the age of Virgil when the power of Carthage was only a distant memory.⁸

The fragment (fr. 23 M) that seems to support this view, "gently and knowingly she (or he?) finds out how Aeneas had left the city of Troy,"

blande et docte percontat, Aenea<s> quo pacto
Troiam urbem liquerit

fits well into the Virgilian context. In Book I of the *Aeneid* Venus talks to her son Amor about Dido's *blandae uoces* (670 ff.) that keep Aeneas in Carthage, and towards the end of the same Book, during the banquet in honor of Aeneas, Dido asks him a number of questions which reveal a certain amount of knowledge (*doctrina*) of the Trojan War and its cast of heroes. Dido, not unlike Cleopatra in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Book X, when she entertains Julius Caesar, is pictured as a well-educated Hellenistic queen who wishes to keep up with the latest developments in the world of politics, history or science, and whose table-talk is far from trivial.

Books I - III of the *Aeneid* seem to correspond in parts to Book I of the *Bellum Poenicum*, with some characteristic changes noted by ancient commentators. In Naevius, for example, Aeneas and his crew had only *one* ship (fr. 11 M), but specially built for them by Mercury, while in Virgil the Trojans have a fairly large fleet, even after the devastating storm in *Aeneid* I which also reflects a theme from the *Bellum Poenicum* (fr. 13 M). The logic (or logistics) behind this change is simple enough: Virgil had to fill the whole second half of his epic with fighting, but no ancient reader would have understood how so many warriors could have come out of only one ship. For Naevius the problem did not exist: he could make Aeneas disappear from his story, as he turned to history.⁹

⁸W. Y. Sellar, *The Roman Poets of the Republic* (3rd ed., Oxford 1889), pp. 58-59.

⁹Learned tradition that goes back to antiquity connects Naevius' fr. 17 with Book IX and fr. 21 with Book X of the *Aeneid*. It seems to me that fr. 12 should be connected with a curious passage in Book XI (vv. 785-93). Here Arruns prays to the Apollo of Soracte before he throws his spear at Camilla: *Summe deum* (cf. *summi deum regis* in Naevius), *sancti custos Soractis Apollo, / quem primi colimus, cui pineus ardor aceruo / pascitur, et medium freti pietate* (cf. *fretus pietate* in Naevius; the reading *pietati*, adopted by Morel and others, may be pseudo-archaic) *per ignem / cultores multa preminus uestigia pruna*. The situation is different: in the *Aeneid* Arruns supports his prayer to Apollo of Soracte by reminding him that he, Arruns, faithfully performed the ancient (Etruscan?) ritual of walking barefoot over red-hot coals, while, in the *Bellum Poenicum* it is presumably Anchises who prays to Neptune, brother of Jupiter, whom Virgil calls several times *regnator Olympi* (cf. *regnatorem marum* in Naevius). But the accumulation of borrowings from

Material, technical details such as this were important to ancient readers, and they are often dealt with at length in the commentaries that we have. The evidence points to certain objects that Aeneas was able to salvage from Troy, as opposed to other precious things which were captured by the victorious Greeks. There are some references, not all of them easy to interpret, which may be grouped together:

pulchraque <uasa> ex auro uestemque citrosam (fr. 10 M)

(where *uasa* has been added by Reichardt) and

ferunt pulchras creterras, aureas lepistas (fr. 7 M).

It is not clear whether these strange spellings (*creterres* for *κρατῆρες*, *lepistae* for *λεπασταί*) should be attributed to Naevius or to the medieval scribes. Unlike the medieval scribes Naevius knew Greek well, though he may have learned it in the form of a local dialect rather than as *Koine*. But he is clearly speaking about valuable vessels, and to him it may have seemed an achievement worthy of being recorded that they had been saved in the hour of defeat. In addition to these, Naevius seems to have mentioned a special kind of triangular tables, *anclabres* (fr. 8 M), used in the worship of the gods. All these objects should be placed in the same context; they were clearly essential for Aeneas and his clan, if they were to continue the cult of their gods in a foreign country, and so they may, in Naevius' epic, have illustrated Aeneas' *pietas*. Bowls or cups of this particular shape were still used in the temples of the Sabines in Varro's time, but apparently not in other parts of Italy — perhaps a local survival of Etruscan rites.¹⁰

It is uncertain whether the descriptive fragment (19 M) refers to one of these vessels or to a temple. A great deal has been written about these lines, mainly because of the unique plural *Atlantes*. This is the text as most editors print it:

Naevius seems significant, and the *Bellum Poenicum* was clearly in Virgil's mind when he worked on the later books of the *Aeneid*.

¹⁰It would seem therefore that frs. 7, 8 and 10 M belong to the same context, but that the *uasa*, *creterres*, *lepistae* and *anclabres* are perhaps more likely to be cult objects which were part of the Greek booty described in *Aen.* II. 763-65: *huc undique Troia gaza / incensis erepta adytis, mensaeque deorum / crateresque auro solidi*; the correspondences (not noticed by the commentators, it appears) are remarkable. But there is also a crater which Anchises fills with wine (*Aen.* III. 525) when he first sees Italy; it may be the one which he had received from Cisseus, the father of Hecuba and which Aeneas later gives to Acastes (*Aen.* V. 535-38), clearly a valuable gift, decorated with figures. According to Varro, *Ling. Lat.* 5. 123, *dictae lepistae quae etiamnunc in diebus sacris Sabinis uasa uinaria in mensa deorum sunt posita*; the same connection between sacred vessels and sacred tables. Both Varro and Virgil may have thought of Naevius.

inerant signa expressa, quomodo Titani,
 bicorpores Gigantes magnique Atlantes
 Runcus ac Purpureus, filii Terras....

It seems to me that, with two small textual changes, we can cut the whole Gordian knot of problems; for *Atlantes* read *Athamantis*, and before *Terras* insert *et*:

magnique Athamantis,
 Runcus ac Purpureus, filii <et> Terras,

i.e. *Runcus ac Purpureus, filii magni Athamantis et Terras*. It was easy for *Athamantis* to become *Atlantes*, since Atlas was a more familiar figure than Athamas; the ending *-antes* could be influenced by *Gigantes*, but the change of I to E occurs very often in texts. The omission of ET after I and before T can also be explained as a form of haplography. Naevius refers to the Gigantomachy, and both Rhoecus (Runcus) and Porphyrion (Purpureus) were Giants who took part in this epic battle: Rhoecus was killed by Dionysus, Porphyrion by Zeus. From Pindar, *Pyth.* 8. 15-17 we know that Porphyrion was king of the Giants and their leader in the battle against the gods. Other sources establish a family relationship between a Porphyrion and Athamas, but the relationship varies: according to the scholion on *Iliad* II. 511 Porphyrion, Athamas and Olmos were sons of Sisyphus; cf. Steph. Byz. s.v. 'Argynnos'; scholion on Apollonius Rhod. II. 511; but according to Nonnus, *Dionys.* IX. 315 ff. Athamas was the father of Porphyrion. Hesiod, fr. 10 West makes Athamas the brother of Sisyphus. Though the details are uncertain, the tendency of the mythical tradition seems clear: in one way or another Athamas, Porphyrion and Sisyphus are connected as "enemies" of the Olympian gods and victims of their wrath. Thus — if these textual changes are accepted — Naevius may help us to restore a detail of Greek mythology.

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The vocabulary of Naevius' epic and tragic fragments shows some kinship with Virgil's epic idiom. I have already mentioned *quianam* meaning *cur, quare* (fr. 15 M); Ennius still uses it in this sense (*Ann.* 259 V), and so does Accius (*trag.* 583). Virgil has it twice (*Aen.* V. 13; X. 6), both times in direct discourse; in the first instance Palinurus speaks, in the second Jupiter. Quintilian (*Inst. Or.* VIII. 3. 24 ff.) lists this as one of Virgil's deliberate archaisms:

...propriis (sc. *uerbis*) dignitatem dat antiquitas. namque et sanctiorem et magis admirabilem faciunt orationem, quibus non quilibet fuerit usus, eoque ornamento acerrimi iudicii P. Vergilius unice est

unus. 'olli' enim et 'quianam' et 'moerus' et 'pone' et 'porricerent' adspergunt illam quae etiam in picturis est gratissima, uetustatis inimitabilem arti auctoritatem. sed utendum modo nec ex ultimis tenebris repetenda....

Other words and phrases Virgil left, as Quintilian would say, in the darkness of the past. I have mentioned fr. 23 M, presumably from the Dido episode:

blande et docte percontat, Aenea<s> quo pacto
Troiam urbem liquerit....

Neither the verb *percontari* (or *percontare*) nor the expression *quo pacto* appears in Virgil, perhaps because they had become too pedestrian in his time, though *hoc pacto* is used, in a technical context, in the *Georgics* (II. 248). Virgil also seems to avoid *pollere* (fr. 30 M), though both Seneca (*Agam.* 805) and Lucan (*Phars.* IX. 795) accept it as a "poetic" word. On the other hand, Virgil does not hesitate to use expressions that must have had a colloquial flavor in his time, and he may have done so because Naevius had established, so to speak, their right of citizenship in the epic idiom. The famous verse *numquam omnes hodie moriemur inulti* (*Aen.* II. 670), the last line of Aeneas' impassioned speech, echoes a passage from Naevius' play *The Trojan Horse* (fr. 13 R³):¹¹

numquam hodie effugies quin mea moriaris manu.

Both in Virgil and in Naevius the use of *numquam* for *non* and redundant *hodie* (added for emphasis) was felt to be colloquial, yet the effect is magnificent.

There is very slight evidence that Virgil took over archaic forms from Naevius that later were normalized in the textual tradition of the *Aeneid*, for instance the adjective *quies*, *quietis* (fr. 22 M) for *quietus* in *Aen.* XII. 559 *urbem / immunem belli atque impune quietam* where the Codex Romanus (5th century) has *quietem*, but I would hesitate to introduce the archaic form here or elsewhere.¹²

On the whole, considering the meager remains, Virgil seems to have borrowed a good deal from Naevius, not only from his epic but also from the tragedies. The *Trojan Horse* was mentioned already: this play was still performed in Cicero's time, and Virgil may have had it in mind when he wrote parts of *Aeneid* II. It is certainly no coincidence that in at least two instances Virgilian parallels help us to emend the

¹¹Leipzig 1897.

¹²Virgil does not use Naevius' expressive *augescit* (fr. 33 M). He does have *auget* (e.g. *Aen.* VII. 211). He replaces *uicissatim* (fr. 41 M) by *uicissim* (e.g. *Aen.* VI. 531).

text of Naevius' tragic fragments:

alte iubatos angues implexae (*in sese* codd. Nonii) gerunt, (*trag.* 18 R³)

where Bergk's emendation (*Opusc.* I. 331) can be supported by Virgil, *Georg.* IV. 482-83: *caeruleosque implexae crinibus anguis / Eumenides*, and

dubii ferventem per fretum intro currimus, (*trag.* 53)

where the MSS have *faventem* which is clearly impossible; Onions' suggestion is plausible not only because of Euripides *Iph. Taur.* 1386-87 *νεὼς / λάβεσθε κώπαις ῥόθιά τ' ἐκλευκαίνετε*, but also because of Virgil *Georg.* I. 327 *implentur fossae et caua flumina crescunt / cum sonitu feruetque fretis spirantibus* (but R has *spumantibus*) *aequor*.

I can think of no better conclusion to this lecture than the epitaph which Naevius is supposed to have written for himself and which is quoted (fr. 64 M) by Gellius, *Noct. Att.* I. 24. 2 as an example of Campanian arrogance, *superbia Campana*, though he grudgingly admits that there is more than a little truth to it, "If it were right for immortals to weep for mortals, the divine Muses would weep for the poet Naevius; and so, after he was delivered to the treasure-house of Orcus, they forgot in Rome how to speak Latin":

Inmortales mortales si foret fas flere,
 flerent diuae Camenae Naeuium poetam.
 itaque postquam est Orchi traditus thesauro,
 obliti sunt Romae loquier lingua Latina.

Some scholars think that this epitaph is from Varro's *Imagines*, composed by Varro himself; if so, one must admire his skill in imitating Naevius' style, with its striking alliterations and assonances, and in recreating Saturnians that have an authentic ring.

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