

The Muses' Playground: Early Roman Epic lecture

A) Key players:

i) Livius Andronicus (Greek freedman and grammaticus from Tarentum): *Odusia* (*Odyssey*) in Saturnian metre (1 book > 40ish fragments left). Written sometime between c. 260-207 BCE.

ii) Naevius (c. 270-201 BCE) : *Punic war* (from fall of Troy to peace of 241 BC), Saturnians. Later divided into 7 books (> c.60 fragments). Focus on First Punic War (264-241 BCE) with backstory. Speculation: book 1 on war upto capture of Agrigentum (262): possibly describing temple pediment. Book 2: Aeneas and his arrival in Carthage; Book 3: Aeneas in Italy: Books 4-7 First Punic war (events 240-61?)

iii) Ennius: (c. 239-169 BCE). b. 239 BCE at Rudiae. Introduced dactylic hexameter to Latin epic. *Annals* (600 lines left!): originally 15 books (fall of Troy to 189 BC): then 3 more (Istrian and third Macedonian wars from 189-171 BC)

B) Historical context: early Roman republic. Power politics and patrons:

e.g. Ennius = client-poet of M. Fulvius Nobilior who brought back statues of Greek Muses and Hercules, defender of Muses, after conquest of Ambracia (put on display in temple for worship)

Literature engaging with politics: Ennius' play *Ambracia*; *Annals* invoke Greek Muses (not Camenae, as Livius and Naevius) = paralleling patron's introduction of the Greek muses to Rome

1) "You will learn that we Camenae are those whom they call Musae" (Enn. *Ann.* 487 Skutsch)

2) "Tell, Muse, what each Roman commander wrought by force in the war with King Philip" (Enn. *Ann.* 322-3 Skutsch)

C) intellectual context. Early Roman culture: interaction with Greek culture

i) Italians had long and close association with Homer: e.g. by C5th century the Etruscans had accepted Odysseus as the hero who brought their race to Italy. Romans familiar with Homeric culture (through Etruscans; through Greek colonies of southern Italy and Sicily and contact with mainland Greece)

The beginnings of Latin literature in September 240 BCE (scripted Latin play(s) at the *Ludi Romani*, adapted from Greek originals by Livius Andronicus)?

3) "It is worth reminding ourselves that, on the available evidence, no society in the ancient world other than the Romans took over the prototypical forms of the institution of Greek literature as the basis for a corresponding institution in their own vernacular." (Feeney 2005: 230)

first practitioners of Latin literature = bi-lingual or tri-lingual Greeks (Livius Andronicus probably captured at Tarentum; Ennius from Rudiae: would have grown up speaking Greek and Messapian)

4) "the first composers of Latin literature are translating out of a language they know extremely well ... into another language that they also know extremely well, but not natively, having at the same time usually grown up with a third language. These men ... gain great advantages in artistic, or career, terms, for they have the opportunity to be a very big fish in a practically non-existent pond instead of a herring in the ocean of Greek literature. If we put ourselves in Ennius' shoes, there is an undeniable appeal to being the first person to write a dactylic hexameter epic in Latin rather than

the two hundredth person to write one in Greek.” (Feeney 2005: 239)

5) “An important part of this relationship involved the barbarianization of the other Italians by Romans intent upon establishing cultural superiority. This self-assertion on the part of the Romans was vigorously contested” (Feeney 2005: 237)

6) “For the Italians, the stakes were very high, and one possible reaction was clearly to trade up, and to acquire the language of the ruling power” (Feeney: 2005: 238)

D) Value of Naevius and Ennius for the *Aeneid*

i) differences in the Troy myth

Aeneas’ departure from Troy: cf. Naevius and Ennius: more men (more responsibility: social hero)-but fewer real companions and no wife (more responsibility; isolation: loneliness of power)

7) “Naevius in *The Punic War* says that Aeneas had one ship which Mercury built” (Serv. Dan. on *Aen.* 1.170= Naevius Bk 1.12)

8) “I embarked upon the Phrygian sea with twenty ships, following the destiny which had been given me”(Verg. *Aen.* 1.381-2; tr. West)

9) “Servius supplemented, on ‘When weeping I forsake my country’s shores,’ in Virgil: Our poet likes to reproduce the very words of his authority, with some change of phrase or even change of persons. Thus Naevius introduces, in the following words, the wives of Aeneas and Anchises in tears as they leave Troy for ever-

The wives of both were passing out from Troy by night; their heads were veiled, and both were weeping many tears, as they went away.” (Serv. Dan. on *Aen.* 3.10= Naevius Bk 1.5-7; tr. Warmington)

Anchises in Naevius: seer; reached Italy with Aeneas

Aeneas at Carthage in Naevius; affair with Dido unlikely

10) “With charm and shrewdness asked [s]he earnestly / How Aeneas forsook the city Troy.” (Naevius Bk 1.19-20; tr. Warmington: assumption Latinus is addressing Aeneas. Dido?)

11) “Whether Naevius actually used a Dido episode as a mythic motivation for the Punic War is unknown and therefore much debated, but the germ of the idea was doubtless present” (Goldberg 1995)

ii) Techniques: e.g. prophecy to conjure Roman greatness (cf. *Aeneid* 1); ecphrasis (art evokes Roman superiority over barbarian enemies: cf. Shield, *Aeneid* 8)

12) “In Book 1 of the *Aeneid* a storm is described (81-123), and Venus complains to Jupiter about the dangers her son faces (227-53), and Jupiter comforts her by telling her that her posterity will flourish (254-96). All of this is taken from Book 1 of Naevius’ *Punic War*: there too Venus complains to Jupiter while the Trojans are beset by a storm, and after her complaint Jupiter comforts her by speaking of her posterity’s great expectations.” (Macrobius 6.2.31; Tr. Kaster: 2011)

13) “On it were engraved images, in what way the Titans, two-bodied giants and great Atlases, Runcus and Purpureus, children of Earth...” (Naevius, *Punic War*, fr.4) (Giant-Olympians fight; from description of Agrigentum temple pediment?)

14) “It [the portrayal of Olympian victory over giants] thus surely foreshadows Rome's coming victory over barbarian Carthage” (Duffalo, 18)

iii) Ennius' *Annals* and Naevius' *Punic War* as intertexts

15) “Indeed it should be noted that the important colloquy between Venus and Jupiter at *A.1.223-96* is a rewriting not only of Homer as noted above, but also of Naevius ... who may have been the first to extend epic prophecy to include events in the poet's own world.” (Boyle 1993: 97): advertising models

e.g. Turnus fighting to capture (proto-Roman) camp (*Aen.* 9.806-14): cf. *Ann.* 409-16 (parallels with Roman military tribune trying to recapture a Roman camp)

16) “So sword-arm and shield were of no avail. The warrior could no longer stand his ground in the hail of weapons that overwhelmed him from every side. The helmet rang and rang again on his hollow temples and the solid bronze was cracked by rocks. The plumes were torn from his head and the boss of his shield gave way under the blows ... Sweat poured off the whole body of Turnus like a river of pitch and he was given no breathing space” (*Aen.* 9.806-14)

17) “From all sides missiles fly at the tribune like a rain: they pierce his shield, the boss rings from the impact of the spears to the brazen clanging of his helmet; yet, however much they strive from all sides, no one is able to rip through his body with their weapon. Constantly he dashes down and shatters the incessant stream of their spears. Sweat covers his entire body, he is in great distress and has no chance to catch his breath. With their swift-winged weapons, the Istrians keep him occupied, hurling their weapons by main force at him.” (Enn. *Ann.* 409-416) (reworking of Ajax scene *Iliad* 16.102-11)

Gates of War opened by Discordia/Juno (Juno more suspect)

18) “After foul Discord broke open the ironclad doors and doorposts of war” (Enn. *Ann.* 7.258-9)

19) “The Queen of the gods burst the iron-bound Gates of War” (*Aen.* 7.622)

20) “of hellish body daughter bred” (Enn. *Ann.* 7.260-1, of Discordia) (Discordia one of models for Allecto)

self-conscious intertextuality: e.g. tree-felling scene (Enn. *Ann.* 181-5, possibly after the battle of Heraclea with cremation of 11000; cf. *Il.* 23.114-120) > *Aen.* 6.179-182

21) “Then strode they through deep thicket-woods and hewed /With hatchets; mighty oaks they overset; / Down crashed the holm and shivered ash outhacked; / Felled was the stately fir; they wrenched right down / The lofty pines; and all the thicketwood / Of frondent forest rang and roared and rustled” (Enn. *Ann.* 181-5)

22) “Down came the pines. The ilex rang under the axe. Beams of ash and oak were split along the grain with wedges, and they rolled great manna ashes down from the mountains” (*Aen.* 6.179-182, felling for Misenus' pyre)

23) “It will be observed that much felling of wood is needed for the cremation of 11,000 bodies. In Virg. *Aen.* 6.179ff., the enormous preparations for the funeral of one man, Misenus, are astonishing” (Skutsch 1985: 341)

silva (“wood”) can mean “mass of raw material”

24) “the *tour de force* of allusion to poetic material from the *Aeneid*’s archaic predecessor, the *Annales*, is figured as a harvest of mighty timber from an old-growth forest - in a landscape (that of *Aeneid* 6) charged with associations of awe and venerability” (Hinds 1998: 13)

appearance of Hector’s ghost to Aeneas: cf. Homer appearing to Ennius in a dream

25) “Homer the poet appeared at my side” (Ennius, *Enn. Ann.* 5; tr. Warmington)

26) “he displaces the poet’s dream on to the hero of the poem ...in alluding to Ennius’ claim to be the successor of Homer the allusion enacts Virgil’s own claim to be the modern successor of Ennius (as well as Homer)” (Hardie 1993: 103)

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