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THE GIANTS IN THE POEM OF NAEVIUS

By EDUARD FRAENKEL

Inerant signa expressa, quo modo Titani
bicorpores Gigantes magnique Atlantes
Runcus ac Purpureus filii Terras

When we examine recent discussions about this fragment from the first book of the Bellum Poenicum (19 Morel, 44–6 Warmington, 7 Marmorale), we find an agreement such as otherwise is rare in classical studies. In many countries many scholars, old and young, have adopted Hermann Fränkel’s view (Hermes LXX, 1935, 59 ff.) that the passage was inspired by certain sculptures which Naevius had seen at the temple of Zeus Olympios at Acragas. But whereas Fränkel himself drew only cautious conclusions (he assigned the fragment to the story of Aeneas and considered more than one possible way in which it might be connected with that story), several among his followers jumped to the history of the year 262 B.C. and used the fragment as a cornerstone for the reconstruction of the main narrative of the Bellum Poenicum.1 It would not be surprising if soon it came to be regarded as an established fact that Naevius in the first book of his epic dealt with the siege and capture of Agrigentum in 262 B.C. Therefore a note of caution may not be out of place although I have scarcely anything to say that has not been said before.

About one fundamental point the wording of the fragment leaves no doubt whatsoever. The work of art described by Naevius represented not merely those giants, but an action performed by them. That is shown by quo modo.2 In the now lost continuation of the sentence the expression quo modo must have been followed by a finite verb.3 As regards the syntax of ‘Inerant signa expressa, quo modo Titani bicorpores Gigantes’, etc., it would be wrong to take Titani, Gigantes, Atlantes, etc., as being in apposition to signa; rather should we say that the whole secondary clause beginning with quo modo and culminating in a finite verb was explicatory of the phrase inerant signa expressa. Lest this construction might be thought too harsh, I will quote a close parallel, Terence, Eun., 583 ff.

virgo in conclavi sedet
suspectans tabulam quandam pictam: ibi inerat pictura haec, Jovem
quo pacto Danaeae misisse aiunt quondam in gremium imbrem aureum.

Before we can attempt to say something about the kind of action likely to have been described in the quo modo clause, we must try to form a clear idea of the relation in which the subjects of this clause, Titani, Gigantes, Atlantes, Runcus ac Purpureus, and filii Terras, stand to one another. Here it would be fatal to overemphasize Atlantes at the expense of the rest. The conclusion of the preserved piece, ‘Runcus ac Purpureus filii Terras,’ makes it absolutely clear what is meant by the whole series. Even if we admit the possibility that Runcus has nothing to do with Ρόικος or Ροίτος (despite the fact that in Horace, Ōdes 3, 4, 54 f., Porphyron is followed by Rhoeutus), there remains Purpureus, undoubtedly identical with Πορφυρίων,4 one of the most famous Gigantes, ζηγνιεσ’ filii Terras. The subjects in the quo modo clause are not an unspecified number of giants, but only the two Gigantes, Runcus and Purpureus. As can be inferred from a manner of quoting which we more than once observe in Priscian,5 it is improbable that in the text of Naevius other subjects should have followed after filii Terras.

To give weight to his description and to convey an adequate idea of the enormous stature of Runcus and Purpureus Naevius is not content with calling them bicorpores


2 Not many Latinists will be prepared to accept Professor Warmington’s translation of quo modo Titani, ‘in the fashion of Titans.’

3 Morel is right in putting three dots after filii Terras.

4 See Bentley’s note on Horace, Ōdes 2, 19, 23.

5 See Appendix.
Gigantes, but adds Titani and magni Atlantes. A similar accumulation of parallel members can be observed in other fragments of the Bellum Poenicum. It does not surprise us to find the names Titani and Gigantes employed indiscriminately to denote the same mythological creatures, for we are used to the identification, or confusion, of these two types of monsters, which, though not original, had probably become fairly common by the time of Naevius. But to see Atlantes thrown in is, at any rate at first, somewhat surprising. The plural of Atlas, as H. Fränkel remarks, occurs only in connexion with works of architecture, where it means 'colossal statues as supports for the entablature' (Liddell and Scott). 8 Male equivalents to Caryatids; 9 'Atlantes in the plural are unknown in mythology.' 9 But in admitting the correctness of this statement we must forget that in the passage before us the name Atlantes, so far from being predominant, is subservient to 'Runcus ac Purpureus filii Terras' and on an equal footing with Titani and Gigantes, and must we connect these Atlantes with the famous 'Telamones' of the temple of Zeus Olympios at Acragas? 10 To do so might suggest that we are not sensitive enough to the muscular and sometimes hard style in this work which 'quasi Myronis opus delectat'. Surely it would be safer to admit that Naevius, bent upon extolling the magnitude of his giants by equating them with a variety of enormous figures, remembered the colossal Atlas and, with a bold stroke, added magni Atlantes to his list.

When we now return to the question what action of Porphyrion and his companion was described in the quo modo clause, the obvious answer is that it was the gigantomachy, the assault of these monsters against Zeus and his Olympian host. In this struggle Porphyrion, the bosaules Gignantov (Pind., Pyth. 8, 17), took a leading part; the evidence, beginning with Ar. Birds 1252, is well-known. We hear of no other prominent action of Porphyrion.

The old interpretation 11 of 'Inerant signa expressa' as describing a gigantomachy is considerably strengthened by the fact that the war of the Giants against the gods was a favourite theme in works of ancient decorative art, especially in reliefs. 12 No alternative subject could be suggested that would square equally well both with what is indicated by the words of Naevius and with the artistic tradition which forms the background of such an Ïôrôsiaig in poetry. But when we go on to inquire on what kind of object the gigantomachy described in Book I of the Bellum Poenicum was to be seen, we have to remind ourselves that on this point no certainty is possible. Paul Merula thought of decorations of the ships of Aeneas, and various other suggestions have been made. 13 Far more ingenious than most of them is the idea, put forward by Theodor Bergk 14 and, independently, by

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6 See H. Fränkel, p. 59 f.
8 cf. Puchstein, P-W ii, 2107.
9 E. Spangenberg, Enni Annalium fragmenta, 1825, 195, observed, 'Atlantes nonnis in hoc Naevii versu occurrunt. Idem videntur esse, qui Gignantes.'
10 These Telamones 'waren hauptsächlich nackte männliche Kolossalfiguren von 7,68 m. Höhe, die vor einer Wand stramm aufrecht stehend auf dem männliche Kolossalfiguren von 7,68 m. Höhe, die
11 See Q. Enni...fragmenta...ab Paulo G.F.P.N. Merula, Lugd. Bat. 1595, p. L, where the lines of our fragment are quoted, with the comment 'ye waj cymungen'
12 For a bibliography see e.g. Waser, P-W, Suppl. III, 701 ff. There are two recent monographs by Francis Vian, Répertoire de Gigantomachies figurées, etc., Paris, 1951, and La guerre des Giants, 1952.
13 The article 'exprimo', Thes. L. L. v, 1788, 22, merely reproduces Morel's note.
14 Zeitschrift für die Alterthumswissenschaft 9, 1842, 191. Bergk says in the text that the fragment of Naevius is 'the description of the gigantomachy and titanomachy in the temple of Jupiter at Agrigentum', and in a footnote he quotes Diodorus 13, 82, 4, τού του διόνυσου...
15 However, the fact that τού τού διόνυσου the capture of Troy was represented seems to exclude the possibility of metopes being thought of). When Marmorale, Naevius poeta, 2nd ed., p. 30, says 'secondo il Bergk la descrizione doveva riguardare un tempio di Agrigento, ma non ne aveva dato una prova esplicita', it appears that he knows the reference to Bergk in Kliassmann's edition (1843) of Naevius, p. 46, but has not read Bergk himself. No one familiar with the sad condition of most Italian libraries will blame him for that, but then he ought not to have criticized the great scholar.
Hermann Frankel, that Naevius in this passage was describing part of the decorations of the temple of Zeus at Acragas. I admit the possibility of this hypothesis, but I would rather advocate a different solution, no novel one either. If we read in an ancient epic, an epic about a war, an elaborate description of a relief, it is a priori likely that the object to which the relief belongs should be a shield. A description of somebody's shield was in fact indispensable to any such epic, from Homer to Nonnos. To quote a particularly incongruous example: in the dreary composition of Silius Italicus we are not spared a detailed ἔκφρασις of Hannibal's shield (2, 395-450). It is, moreover, relevant to our problem that the noblest shield in the ancient world, the shield of the Pheidian Parthenos, was decorated on the inside with a gigantomachy.15 Therefore the guess that the passage 'Inerant signa expressa' comes from the description of a gigantomachy on a shield is as probable as can be expected in the circumstances. I do not know whether Niebuhr, Röm. Gesch. 1, 2nd ed., 199, was the first to make this guess;16 he has been followed by many scholars. His hypothesis is also recommended by the expression inerant, with which the passage emphatically begins. The words ἐν δὲ . . . ἔσσαν or ἐν δ' ἔσσε (in succession to the ἁμορικὸς ἐν δὲ . . . σοφήσει or ἐν δ' ἔτεις) are commonly used to open a new section in epic descriptions of shields, from the Hesiodic Ἀστίς on (161, 169, etc.).17

Whichever interpretation of 'Inerant signa expressa' we accept, we shall have to regard the passage as a fine example of 'griechische Bildung in altromischen Epen'. If Bergk and Hermann Franke are right, the fragment would tell us something about the impression which a monumental work of Greek sculpture had made on Naevius. If Niebuhr and his followers are right, the first writer of a Roman epic would have adopted a very old and very common device of Greek epic poetry.

There remains a last question. Supposing that the gigantomachy described by Naevius was the decoration of a shield, whose shield was it? Niebuhr suggested the shield of Aeneas. But since we have learnt from Strzelecki that, if we duly respect the book numbers in the quotations, the contents of Book I of the Bellum Poenicum appear to be far more complex than was formerly assumed, Aeneas can no longer be considered the only or the most probable candidate. So I must end with a non liquet.

APPENDIX

THE EXTENT OF SOME QUOTATIONS IN PRISCIAN

One might expect that Priscian, who in section 6 (beginning at Gramm. Lat. 11, 198, 6) of the sixth book of his Institutions is solely concerned with the gen. sing. in -as, should content himself with quoting 'Runcus ac Purpureus filii Terras'. But he does quote three full saturnians, beginning with 'Inerant signa expressa'. Why this apparent waste of paper? And if he quotes so much, why does he not continue until he reaches the finite verb in which the quo modo clause culminated?

The same two questions could be asked in regard to Priscian’s quotation (Gramm. 11, 352, 1) of Naevius Bell. Poen. fr. 12 Morel, where all that matters for the grammarian’s purpose is the genitive marum so that it would have been sufficient to quote ‘Neptunum regnatorem marum’, and yet Priscian quotes:

Senex fretus pietatei deum adlocutus summi
deurm fratem Neptunum regnatorem
marum,
a rather long piece, but again without its finite verb. And if we look a little farther afield,

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16 Klussmann and Vahlen in their editions of Naevius quote Niebuhr.
17 cf. e.g. Apoll. Rhod. 1, 730 ἐν μὲν ἔσσαν κτλ., 735 ἐν δ' ἔσσαν κτλ., Quint. Smyrn. 6, 200 ἐν μὲν ἔσσαν κτλ., 260 ἐν δ' ἔτει ἔσσε κτλ. I had noticed these passages (it was easy enough) when I found in Maximilian Mayer’s book, Die Giganten und Titanen, 1887, 267 f., this remark: 'In dem Punier-Krieg des Naevius . . ., wo die Worte vorkommen: inerant signa . . . filii Terras, wird man zunächst immer an einen Schild denken müssen, wie man sich denn auch sogleich an das ἐν δ' ἔσσε der herkömmlichen Schildbeschreibungen erinnert sieht.'—The expression is not, of course, confined to ἔκφρασις of shields; see e.g. Moschus, Europa 44 ἐν μὲν ἔσσε κτλ., 50 ἐν δ' ἔτει κτλ.
we find (Gramm. II, 253, 11), under the heading impos, this quotation from ‘Accius in I didascalicon’ (fr. 9 Morel):

falsidica audax

gnati mater pessimi, odibilis, natura impos,

excors, ecfera.

As this cataract of abuse, apart from the phrase natura impos, is irrelevant to the issue in hand, it seems that for some reason the excerpting grammarian did not wish to curtail the series of parallel nominal and adjectival items whereas he appears to have been less disturbed by the absence of a final verb. This is precisely what we noticed in the two passages previously quoted.

The point to which I want to call attention is not so much the occasional absence of the verb as the tendency to leave a combination of parallel nominal membra intact and complete. In Book XVIII, 304 (Gramm. III, 375, 14 ff.), Priscian, to illustrate a certain meaning of gestare and gerere, quotes Verg., Aen. I, 653 f.,

praeterea sceptrum Ilione quod gesserat olim,

maxima natarum Priami.

For the point under discussion it would make no difference if ‘maxima natarum Priami’ were omitted. Another instance: Priscian’s reason for quoting (Gramm. II, 486, 15) Ennius Ann. 321 f. V. 2 has nothing to do with the contents of the passage, his point is purely morphological (the perfect tursi), and yet he does not stop at the end of the hexameter, ‘Cyclops venter velut olim turserat alte,’ but continues ‘carnibus humanis distentus’.

Another instance: Gramm. II, 81, 6: the glyconic from Varro’s Menippeae (437 Buech.), ‘aevternam hominum domum,’ would suffice as evidence for the form aeviternus, but because aeviternam domum is in apposition to tellurem, Priscian quotes:

per

aeviternam hominum domum,
tellurem propero gradum.

At Gramm. II, 492, 1 the point at issue, ‘polluceo polluxi,’ would be made perfectly clear if the quotation from the Colax of Naevius began with polluxi. But Priscian actually quotes:

Qui decumas partes ? quantum aliensi fuit,
polluxi tibi iam publicando epulo Herculis
decumas.

The reason for the inclusion of the first line is not far to seek: although the meaning of decumas at l. 3 has no bearing on the conjugation of polluceo, the excerptor wanted to clarify decumas and therefore added the decumas partes to which it refers.

The use of the nominative acris as masculine is discussed by Priscian at Gramm. II, 153, 11 and 230, 5. At both places he quotes from Book XII of the Annals of Ennius these lines (367–9 V. 2):

Omnes mortales victores cordibus vivis

laetantes, vino curatos somnus repente

in campo passim mollissimus perculit acris.

Here the second line is indispensable, since somnus is the noun to which acris belongs; then, to make laetantes fully intelligible, the first line is included in the quotation, and consequently we find here again the completeness of the nominal membra which we noticed before; in this case we also obtain a complete sentence.

Priscian does not, of course, always and consistently use this type of extensive quotation, but he uses it often. I have confined myself to a small selection of examples. It does not seem possible to determine whether this particular method of quoting is due to Priscian himself or to some of his sources.

18 He quotes the passage ‘Inerant signa expressa’, etc., a second time (Gramm. II, 217, 10), as evidence for the form Titanus, and here he stops at the end of l. 2, Atlantes. The omission of l. 3 may be intentional or may have occurred in the course of the transmission of Priscian’s text.