Bad Bronze Again

George Thomson

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NAEVIUS AND THE ALIMONIUM REMI ET ROMULI

Donatus, ad Ter. Ad. 537, after offering two explanations of the phrase lupus in fabula, adds 'nam falsum est quod dicitur interuenisse lupum Naevianae fabulae alimonio Remi et Romuli, dum in theatro agitur'. Does this mean that Naevius wrote a separate praetexta dealing with the infancy of Romulus, or was this the same praetexta as that entitled Romulus which is mentioned by Varro (L.L. vii. 54)? It seems to me that neither of these alternatives should be adopted. Donatus is merely refuting an absurd theory (which one almost suspects him of inventing). Since fabula can mean 'play' as well as 'story', 'fable', the phrase lupus in fabula could be taken to have originally meant 'the wolf in the play'. The question would then arise—what was the play in which a wolf might be supposed to have appeared? The mention of a wolf might suggest the infancy of Romulus, and Naevius had written a praetexta dealing with Romulus. But to explain the phrase in this way would, as Donatus very rightly says, be false. The only value of the passage is to confirm indirectly the statement of Varro that there was a play of Naevius which had Romulus as its hero.

W. Beare.

University of Bristol.

BAD BRONZE AGAIN

In C.R. lix. 52 Mr. D. E. Eichholz and Professor T. A. Sinclair have criticized my interpretation of Aesch. Ag. 390-3 κακοὶ δὲ χαλκοῦ τρισάτων τρίβω τε καὶ προσδολεῖ μελαμπάγης τὸν δικαιοδίκην (C.R. vii. 35), the former on the ground that it is technically impossible. I deferred my reply in order to obtain expert advice, and now offer the following comments after consulting a Greek goldsmith.

Mr. Eichholz wrote: 'It was not the touchstone which marked the gold, but on the contrary the gold which marked the touchstone.' That is true, so far as the lydian stone is concerned. There was a confusion in my note on this point, and I am grateful for the correction.

But how does he translate Theogn. 449-50 εἰρήνης δὲ μὲ τάσιν ἐπὶ ἐγραμμα ὁσσόπε ἄπελθον χρυσόν, ἐκραβὼν ἵετε τριβόμενον βασάνων? The last four words must surely mean 'red to look at when rubbed with the touchstone'. Here it is the mark left by the stone on the gold that is inspected, not the mark left by the gold on the stone.

The colour of impure gold varies according to the alloy. Mixed with copper, it is reddish; with silver, whitish; with nickel, greenish. When the lydian stone is used, the colour of the metal proper, as distinct from any dirt with which it may be encrusted, appears as a thin streak adhering to the stone, which being black throws it into relief. This method has the additional advantage that the stone can be marked previously with a streak of gold-assaying. Professor Sinclair explains it as follows: 'If bronze or copper or brass is bad, polishing and hammering will reveal impure streaks of black.' This is technically correct, but it involves three difficulties. It is doubtful whether procobolaios can mean 'hammering'; the idea of bad bronze as a symbol of unrighteousness is without parallel in Greek poetry; and, as he admits, melamampys is left without point in relation to the man.

It seems that my interpretation is the only one that does justice to melamampy.

GEORGE THOMSON.

University of Birmingham.

TWO NOTES ON EURIPIDES

Cyclops 402-4 καὶ ἀκαθάρτας τὸ λάβον μαχαίρη σάρκα ἐξάντα πυρί, τὰ δ’ ἐς λέπην ἐφίδεων ἔφεσα μέλη.


. I.T. 753-4 Πν. ἀκονε δη νυν δε παράδομοι λόγων. ἤφ. ᾠδὰς ἐστοι καινῶς, ἴν καλὸς ἤξη.


E. L. B. MEURIG DAVIES.