



Gnaeus Naevius

The Fragments

DELPHI  CLASSICS

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*The Fragments of*  
**GNAEUS NAEVIUS**

(c. 270 - c. 201 BC)



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Version 1

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**GNAEUS NAEVIUS**



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## *The Fragments of Gnaeus Naevius*



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## The Translations



*Paestum, a major ancient Greek city on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea, Campania — one tradition holds that Naevius was born in Campania.*

## The Fragments of Naevius



*Translated by E. H. Warmington, Loeb Classical Library, 1936*

A prominent Roman epic poet and dramatist of the Old Latin period, Gnaeus Naevius was born in c. 270 BC. Much of the information concerning his life is plagued with uncertainty. Aulus Gellius refers to his “Campanian arrogance,” leading early commentators to identify Naevius as a native of Campania. However, “Campanian arrogance” was an idiomatic phrase indicating boastfulness and so may not actually confirm his native town. Other scholars have pointed out that there was a plebeian gens *Naevia* in Rome, meaning he could well have been a Roman citizen by birth. Naevius served either in the Roman army or among the *socii* in the First Punic War, so he is believed to have reached manhood before 241.

His career as a playwright began with the exhibition of a drama in c. 235 and he continued to write tragedies and comedies for the next thirty years, though all that remains of his work are fragments. Towards the close of his career, Naevius incurred the hostility of the nobility — especially, it is said, of the Metelli, due to the numerous attacks he made on them in his dramas. It is recorded that at their insistence he was even imprisoned. After writing two plays during his imprisonment, in which he is said to have apologised for his former rudeness, he was liberated by the aid of the tribunes of the commons. However, he was likely forced to retire from Rome in c. 204, moving to Utica. It may have been during his exile, when withdrawn from his active career as a dramatist, that he composed his epic poem on the First Punic War. Probably his last composition was his own epitaph, written in Saturnian verse. This was an old Latin poetic form, of which the principles of versification have become obscure. The metre was moribund by the time of the literary verses and forgotten altogether by classical times, falling out of use with the adoption of the hexameter and other Greek verse forms. The epitaph reads:

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

If immortals were allowed to weep for mortals,  
the divine Muses would weep for the poet Naevius.  
And so after he was delivered to the strongbox of Orchus,  
Romans forgot how to speak the Latin language.

If these lines were the result of jealousy of the growing ascendancy of the rival poet Ennius, this would indicate that Naevius lived considerably beyond 204, when Ennius began his career in Rome. Unlike his fellow playwright Livius Andronicus (the earliest Roman poet whose name is known), Naevius was a native Italian, not a Greek. Naevius was also an original writer, not a mere adapter or translator of Menander and the other dramatists of Greece’s New Comedy of manners. If it is due to Livius that the forms of Latin literature were, from the first, moulded on those of Greek literature, it is due to Naevius that much of its spirit and substance was of native growth. He deviated from his Greek originals, producing at least two specimens of the *fabula praetexta* (national drama), one founded on the childhood of

*Romulus and Remus* (Lupus or Alimonium Romuli et Remi), the other called *Clastidium*, which celebrated the victory of Marcus Claudius Marcellus over the Celts (222 BC).

Nevertheless, it was as a writer of comedy that he was most famous and most productive. Although he is never ranked as a writer of tragedy with Ennius, Pacuvius, or Accius, he is placed in the canon of the grammarian Volcatius Sedigitus as third (immediately after Caecilius and Plautus) in the rank of Roman comic authors. Sedigitus characterises Naevius as ardent and impetuous in character and style. He is also likened with Plautus and Ennius as a master of his art in one of the prologues of Terence. Naevius' comedy, like that of Plautus, seems to have been a free adaptation of his originals, rather than a slavish copy of them. The titles of most of the plays, like those of Plautus, and unlike those of Caecilius and Terence, are Latin, not Greek.

Naevius also drew from the writers of the old political comedy of Athens, as well as from the New Comedy, and he attempted to make the stage at Rome, as it had been at Athens, an arena of political and personal warfare. Several of the fragments demonstrate a strong spirit of partisanship and this spirit was especially popular and adverse to the senatorial ascendancy that became more pronounced with the progress of the Second Punic War. Besides his attack on the Metelli and other members of the aristocracy, the great Scipio also served as a target of criticism on account of a youthful escapade. Among the lines still remaining from his lost comedies, we can detect the idiomatic force and rapidity of movement characteristic of Plautus' work. There is also evidence of a preference for alliteration, which is a marked feature in all the older Latin poets down even to Lucretius.

Not only is Naevius the oldest native dramatist of Latin literature, but he is the first Roman author of an epic poem, *Bellum Punicum*. It appears to have combined the representation of actual contemporary history with a mythical background, inspiring the Roman type of epic poetry that would be perfected by Virgil almost 200 years later. The epic was composed as one continuous work, though it was divided into seven books by a grammarian of a later age. The earlier part concerned the mythical adventures of Aeneas in Sicily, Carthage and Italy, borrowing from the interview of Zeus and Thetis in the first book of the *Iliad*, while also narrating an episode between Jupiter and Venus that would become a major passage in the *Aeneid*.

The latter sections of Naevius' epic dealt with the events of the First Punic War in the style of a metrical chronicle. This poem was the first to introduce the mythical connection of Aeneas and his Trojans with the foundation of Rome, which would have a lasting influence on the course of Roman literature and belief. The remaining fragments hint at a vivid and rapid narrative, to which the flow of the native Saturnian verse, in contradistinction to the weighty and complex structure of the hexameter, was naturally adapted. The advance in originality of Naevius' epic, far eclipsing the *Odusia* of Livius, is corroborated by its influence on Ennius' *Annales* and Virgil's *Aeneid*.



*A mosaic in Pompeii depicting Naevius' literary successor and perhaps rival, the epic poet Ennius*





*A well-preserved theatre at Pompeii*

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*UNASSIGNED FRAGMENTS*

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Unassigned Fragments



*The approximate extent of territory controlled by Rome and Carthage immediately before the start of the First Punic War, which would serve as the subject of Naevius' epic poem*

# **THE PUNIC WAR**

# BOOK I



The Sack of Troy; the escape of Aeneas to Italy; the foundation of Rome by Romulus?

1

Prologue. First line of the poem; invocation of the Muses:

Caesius Bassus: As seems clear, truth to tell, our archaic poets used this Saturnian metre without observing a fixed aw or maintaining a single type. . . . In passages of Naevius . . . I have found the following to be suitable (as examples) —

You daughters nine of Jupiter, sisters of one heart,

Naevius himself took part in the first Punic War:

Gellius: Naevius, according to a statement of Marcus Varro. . . served as a soldier in the first Punic War and asserts that very fact himself in the Song which he wrote on that war.

2-4

The foundation of Rome by Trojans or by their descendants. The omen that appeared to Anchises before the fall of Troy:

Probus: Ennius takes Anchises as being endowed with certain powers of augury, and, through these, of inspiration . . . . Naevius in the first book of *The Punic War* —

After Anchises had seen a bird within the range of view, hallowed offerings were set in a row on the table of the Household Gods; and he busied himself in sacrificing a beautiful golden victim.

5-7

Aeneas and Anchises with their wives leave the city of Troy:

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.

8-10

and many followers go with them:

Servius supplemented, on ‘I marvelling find’ in Virgil: Naevius in the first book of *The Punic War* has the following on Anchises and Aeneas in flight: —

Their path many mortals follow.

Here, you see, is ‘I marvelling find a great company’; —

Many other dashing heroes from Troy. . .

In these you see Virgil's 'ready in heart'; —

When they forthwith were passing outdoors there with the gold,

Here again, you see Virgil's 'laden with their wealth.'

11

Precious chattels rescued from the flames of Troy:

Isidore: 'Citrosa.' Curled as it were so as to resemble citrus-wood. Naevius —

and clothing clean and lovely, spun from gold and citrus-scented.

12

Marius Victorinus: In a passage of Naevius we have —

They carry beautiful bowls and golden goblets.

Aeneas' ship:

Servius supplemented: Naevius in *The Punic War* says that Aeneas had one ship which Mercury built.

13-15

Anchises embarks from Troy:

Priscianus: I have found 'marum' for 'marium' (a form of genitive which is, however, rarely used) in a passage of Naevius in *The Song of the Punic War* — Then the old man, stayed strong in piety, called on the ruler of the seas, Neptune, brother of the all-highest monarch of the gods.

The storm with which Venus caused Aeolus to vex the Trojans:

Servius supplemented, on Virgil: The whole of this passage (*Aen.*, I, 198 ff.) is taken over from the first book of Naevius' *Punic War*.

Venus complains to Jupiter, who gives a comforting reply:

Macrobius: At the beginning of the *Aeneid* a tempest is described, and Venus complains. . . . The whole of this passage is taken from Naevius, and comes from the first book of *The Punic War*. For there in the same way, when the Trojans are labouring in a tempest, Venus complains to Jupiter, and there follow words of Jupiter comforting his daughter with hopes of the future.

16

Beginning of Venus' appeal:

Varro: Naevius has —

She thus calls on her father, the all-highest and best

where 'supremum' is derived from 'superrumus.'

17

Festus: 'Quianam' is put for 'quare' or 'cur' in the works of archaic writers; for example, in a passage of Naevius in *The Song of the Punic War* —

Greatest ruler of the gods, why, pray, didst thou beget me?

Aeneas consults the Sibyl in a valley between Baiiae and Cumae:

Lactantius: Varro . . . says . . . that the fourth Sibyl is the 'Cimmerian' in Italy, who is mentioned by name by Naevius in his books of *The Punic War*.

The Sibyl orders Aeneas to bury a kinswoman of his in the island Procida, which is named after her:

Servius supplemented, on 'trembles high Prochyta' in Virgil: Naevius says that this island (Procida) took its name from a kinswoman of Aeneas.

## 18

Rude tribes of Italy:

Macrobius: 'Wood-haunting Fauns.' Naevius in the first book of *The Punic War* —

wood-haunting folk, unskilled in war

## 19-20

The wanderers in Latium; King Latinus addresses Aeneas:

Nonius: 'Perconta' . . . —

With charm and shrewdness asked he earnestly How Aeneas forsook the city Troy.

Ilia gives birth to Romulus:

Servius supplemented: Naevius and Ennius record that Romulus, the founder of Rome, was Aeneas' grandson through Aeneas' daughter.

## 21-2

Amulius rejoices at the preservation of Romulus and Remus?:

Nonius: 'Gratulari,' the same as 'gratias agere.' . . . —

And King Amulius raised his hands aloft  
Towards the sky, and thanked the gods.

From Book I or Book II

Romulus, before founding his city, takes the auspices from the Aventine:

Varro: Several causes are given for the name Aventine. Naevius derives it from 'aves,' giving as reason that thither birds betook themselves from the Tiber.

Rome is founded on the Palatine:

Varro: 'Palatium.' . . . Some think that this same place is derived from the ways of flocks; and so Naevius calls it 'Balatium,' The Place of Bleaters.



The Institutions of Romulus (or of Numa Pompilius):

Nonius: 'Castitas' and 'castimonia.' . . . A masculine form. . . in Naevius in The Song of the Punic War

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He makes declaration of sacred ordinances, and proclaims the rules of holy chastity.

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*End of Sample*