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TYCHE

Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte
Papyrologie und Epigraphik

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Papyrologie und Epigraphik**

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NIKOLETTA KANAVOU

Notes on the *Blemyomachia*

(*P.Berol.* 5003 + *P.Gen.* inv. 140 + *P.Phoib.* fr. 1a/6a/11c/12c)*

The partially preserved late antique, anonymous epic poem on the Blemyan wars, known conventionally as the '*Blemyomachia*', encompasses 86 lines that survive (in varying degrees of completeness) in fragments of a papyrus codex (*P.Berol.* 5003) from the Egyptian city of Thebes. Two further papyrus finds from the excavation of the Monastery of Phoebammon (*P.Gen.* inv. 140, *P.Phoib.* fr. 1a/6a/11c/12c)¹ have provided small parts of about another 75 lines. The poem is usually dated to the 4th–5th c. AD on the basis of palaeographical evidence.² The epic composition, which apparently belongs to the late antique tradition of panegyric and encomiastic poetry,³ describes in 'sub-Homeric style' (closer in language and metrics to Homer and Quintus Smyrnaeus than to the 'modern style' of Nonnus)⁴ what was probably a historical clash between the Blemyes, an African tribe of the upper Nile region, and the Romans, which ended in Roman victory; one hero, Germanus, receives in the surviving fragments particular praise. The choice of the Blemyes as the hostile 'other'

* I am most grateful to the Humboldt Foundation for funding my research fellowship in Heidelberg, where this short article was written. The article has profited considerably from the comments and suggestions of the anonymous reviewer of *Tyche*.

¹ On the provenance and manner of acquisition of the papyrus finds containing the *Blemyomachia* fragments see M. Steinrück, *Neues zur Blemyomachie*, ZPE 126 (1999) 112; L. Miguélez-Cavero, *Poems in Context: Greek Poetry in the Egyptian Thebaid 200–600AD*, Berlin, New York 2008, 60.

² Steinrück (above n. 1) 99. For a new handwriting parallel, see most recently C. De Stefani, *P.Heid. inv.G 1271 (= MP31611): Editio Princeps of the Recto and a New Edition of the Verso*, ZPE 188 (2014) 38 (the papyrus preserves a sequence of anonymous hexameter poems of the 5th–6th c. AD that largely draw on Homeric, esp. Iliadic content); cf. also *P.Köln* IV 172 (4th–5th c. AD), esp. p. 36.

³ See Miguélez-Cavero (above n. 1) 103; G. Agosti, *Greek Poetry*, in: S. F. Johnson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Oxford, New York 2012, 365.

⁴ Thus M. L. West, Review of Livrea (this note), CR 30 (1980) 276. See H. (E.) Livrea, *Anonymi fortasse Olympiodori Thebani: Blemyomachia (P.Berol. 5003)* (Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie 101), Meisenheim am Glan 1978, 15 ('tecnica centonaria'); T. Viljamaa, *Studies in the Greek Encomiastic Poetry of the Early Byzantine Period*, Helsinki 1968, 44–45; G. Agosti, F. Gonnelli, *Materiali per la storia dell'esametro nei poeti cristiani greci*, in: M. Fantuzzi, R. Pretagostini (eds.), *Struttura e storia dell'esametro greco*, Vol. 1, Rome 1995, 293; M. Whitby, *From Moschus to Nonnus: The Evolution of the Nonnian Style*, in: N. Hopkinson (ed.), *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus*, Cambridge 1994, 128–129.

in this quasi-Homeric poem is commonly thought to have sprung from a particular contemporary war event, of either topical or larger significance;⁵ the Egyptian territory of the Roman Empire was indeed threatened by local tribes such as the Blemyes since the reign of Decius and certainly around the time when the *Blemymachia* was composed.⁶ Claudius Claudianus, a panegyrist poet roughly contemporary with the poet of the *Blemymachia* (and a possible candidate, among others, for its authorship⁷), also refers to the ‘savage Blemyes’ (*Blemyasque feros*, c.m. 28.19). However, the epic dramatization of the Blemyan wars may well exaggerate their historical importance: the poet of the *Blemymachia* — an aspiring Homer! — presents them as an equivalent to Homer’s Trojans, who will submit to no other but the hero Germanus, an equal of Achilles. The place of the Blemyes in poetic consciousness was in any case not just historically inspired, but further guaranteed by the mythical connotations which they carried in earlier literature; these still find an echo in the 4th c. AD in the work of Avienus (who attributed to them an odd physical appearance and the curious ability to run barefoot without leaving any footprints; *Descr. Orb.* 329–333 = *GGM* II 158).⁸

⁵ On the possible historical relevance of the poem see Livrea (above n. 4) 12–15 and more recently Whitby (above n. 4) 128. On the Blemyes see mainly R. T. Updegraff, *The Blemmyes I: The Rise of the Blemmyes and the Roman Withdrawal from Nubia under Diocletian* (with additional remarks by L. Török), ANRW 2.10.1 (1988) 45–106, and recently J. H. F. Dijkstra, *Blemmyes, Noubades and the Eastern Desert in Late Antiquity: Reassessing the Written Sources*, in: H. Barnard, K. Duistermaat (eds.), *The History of the Peoples of the Eastern Desert*, Los Angeles 2012, 238–247; M. Rücker, *Nomaden als das ganz Andere?*, in: Ch. Schubert, A. Weiß (eds.), *Amazonen zwischen Griechen und Skythen: Gegenbilder in Mythos und Geschichte*, Berlin, Boston 2013, 13–37 (24–33 on the Blemyes). The ethnic is spelled with one μ in the *Blemymachia*, but otherwise spellings with one or two μ alternate in our sources.

⁶ The Bishop Appion of Syene is known to have asked the emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III for military assistance against them and the Nobades in the early 5th c. (*P.Leid.* II Z = *SB* XX 14606). See now A. Obluski, *Dodekaschoinos in Late Antiquity: Ethnic Blemmyes vs Political Blemmyes and the Arrival of the Nobades*, *Mitteilungen der Sudanarchäologischen Gesellschaft* 24 (2013) 141–147, on the possibility that ‘Blemyes’ had by that time become a designation of a population that was not all ethnically Blemyan. A famous mention of the Blemyes in the 4th c. comes from the archive of Abinnaeus, a Roman officer who escorted a mission of Blemyes to Constantinople (*CEL* I 226, 7). Other important episodes relating to the Blemyes involve the exiled former patriarch Nestorius, a Blemyan captive in this period (*Wilcken Chr.* 6); the Monophysite Shenute paralyzing the hands of Blemyan soldiers (*FHN* 301) etc. See M. Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, Liverpool 2000, 21 n. 62 (on Euagr. Schol. *HE* 1.13).

⁷ Viljamaa (above n. 4) 49. Claudianus was the poet of a Greek *Gigantomachia*; but see Whitby (above n. 4) 128–129 on the stylistic and thematic divergence between that poem and the *Blemymachia*.

⁸ On the Blemyes’ mythical associations see further Livrea (above n. 4) 9; K. Sethe, *Blemyes*, *RE* 3.1 (1897) 566–568; Rücker (above n. 4) 28–33. Cf. in particular Plin. *nat.* 5.8.46: *Blemmyis traduntur capita abesse ore et oculis pectori adfixis*. ‘The Blemmyae are reported to have no heads, their mouth and eyes being attached to their breasts’ (transl. H. Rackham, Loeb). The mention of a Blemyan ‘founding hero’ in Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* (385–397) is also

All of the fragments of the *Blemyomachia* were last edited by M. Steinrück in an article that appeared in ZPE some fifteen years ago.⁹ Steinrück also provided a German translation and a short commentary that includes references to the *Blemyomachia*'s intertextual (mainly Homeric) allusions.¹⁰ The poem had previously received an analytical commentary (with a full introduction and an Italian translation) by E. Livrea,¹¹ who made a case for its ascription to the historian Olympiodorus of Thebes, but without conclusive evidence.¹² In what follows, I re-examine a number of uncertain readings in fragments 11 and 12¹³ and provide a few supplementary comments on the poem's Homeric connections (references follow Steinrück's edition):

fr. 11, l. 5 γαστρός ἀποθρόσκοντα κατέρρηξε[ν] ἔ[γκατ]α γαίη.

Livrea printed γαίη and Steinrück followed him, translating: '...platzen die Eingeweide aus dem Bauch und flossen zur Erde.' Similarly Page: 'his entrails leapt from his belly and flowed down upon the earth'. The papyrus breaks off after H. West's¹⁴ proposed restoration γαί[νης] may be right. Although the case would admittedly not make any difference for the sense, the genitive seems to guarantee a smoother syntax. West did not provide any support for his reading, but it is worth pointing out that there are good Homeric parallels for καταρρέω + genitive: ... κατὰ δὲ νότιος ῥέειν ἰδρώς / ὄμων καὶ κεφαλῆς ... 'And in streams down from his head and shoulders flowed the sweat', *Il.* 11.811–812; ... δάκρυα δέ σφιν / θερμὰ κατὰ βλεφάρων χαμάδις

worth noting; see Ch. Barthel, *Eine Origo Gentis Blemmyorum in den Dionysiaka des Nonnos von Panopolis*, *Tyche* 29 (2014) 1–16.

⁹ Above n. 1, 99–114. See his n. 2 for details of previous editions.

¹⁰ On these see also Livrea (above n. 4) 15–17; Miguélez-Cavero (above n. 1) 155–156 and *passim*.

¹¹ Above n. 4. There is an English translation by D. L. Page, *Select Papyri III. Literary Papyri: Poetry*, London, Cambridge Mass. (Loeb) 1941, 590–595. A French translation of the most recent edition is found in *P.Gen.* IV 158 (M. Steinrück). A commentary on selected fragments of *P.Phoib.* was provided by L. S. B. MacCoull, *Papyrus Fragments from the Monastery of Phoebammon*, in: R. Bagnall (ed.), *Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Congress of Papyrology, New York, 24–31 July 1980*, Chico 1989, 491–498.

¹² A summary of views on the authorship of the *Blemyomachia* is found in Miguélez-Cavero (above n. 1) 60. Though hardly any poetry by him survives, Olympiodorus must have also functioned (like Claudianus) as a professional, 'wandering' poet (in A. Cameron's term; see *Wandering Poets: a Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt*, *Historia* 14 [1965] 470–509). He was clearly well informed about the Blemyes, whom he is supposed to have visited (cf. fr. 37 in Photius' summary of his history), but attribution of the poem to him is not as obvious as assumed by B. Mugelli, *Materiale digressivo negli istorici λόγοι di Olimpiodoro da Tebe: l'exkursus egiziano*, *Simbolos* 3 (2001) 209 and n. 12; 224. West (above n. 4) rightly stressed the weakness of the relevant argument; cf. also Whitby (above n. 4) 128; 153 n. 291; D. Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*, London, New York 2002, 73.

¹³ This is where most discrepancies between Livrea's and Steinrück's texts are found. The texts of fr. 13 and 14 are nearly identical (a minor difference is]ρων and]τῶν respectively in fr. 14, l. 4). My suggestions emerge from study of the online picture of the papyrus, found at <http://ww2.smb.museum/berlpap/index.php/record/?result=0&Alle=5003>.

¹⁴ Above n. 4.

ῥέε ... ‘And hot tears ever flowed from their eyes to the ground’, *Il.* 17.437–438, as well as for κατὰ γαίης: αἰχμή δ’ Αἰνεΐαο κραδαιομένη κατὰ γαίης ‘And Aeneas’ spear point stood quivering in the earth’, *Il.* 13.504 (transl. A. T. Murray, W. F. Wyatt, Loeb).¹⁵

fr. 11, l. 8 Αἴνιος αὐτε Μίμαντα δαήμονα θηροσυνάων

Page, Livrea, and Steinrück translated respectively: ‘the skilled huntsman’; ‘abile nella cac<c>ia’; ‘den Meister der Jagd’; ‘expert à la chasse’. Livrea informs us in his apparatus that the editors have read δ[αή]μονα or δαήμονα. Steinrück prints δαήμονα; although the H is clear enough, neither the preceding A nor the Δ are clearly legible. Still, δαήμονα remains the most likely reading. Δαήμονα θηροσυνάων is seen by Livrea as a conflation of phrases from Apollonius Rhodius (1.80, δαήμονα μαντοσυνάων) and Quintus Smyrnaeus (3.203, ἀνδρὶ πολυκμήτῳ μογερῆς ἐπίστορι θήρης; 8.296, δαήμονι τεκτοσυνάων); he also offers parallels for θηροσύνη.¹⁶ Both Livrea and Steinrück, however, missed the similarity of this phrase to the Iliadic sequence αἴμονα θήρης (*Il.* 5.49). The phrase is commonly translated as ‘skilled in the chase’ (transl. A. T. Murray, W. F. Wyatt, Loeb; cf. ‘a man of wisdom in the chase’, transl. R. Lattimore). Ancient lexicography indeed connected αἴμων with δαίμων / δαήμων (*EM* α 510).¹⁷ δαήμονα θηροσυνάων could be a deliberate variation of αἴμονα θήρης; such variations are a recognized sign of Alexandrian influence.¹⁸

fr. 11, l. 16. Αὐτ]ομέδων is the editors’ preferred restoration; the name is commonly thought to allude to Automedon, Achilles’ charioteer in the *Iliad* (9.209).¹⁹ The poet of the *Blemyomachia* may well be thinking of Achilles in fr. 14, l. 5, where the hero Germanus is characterized with the epithet ῥηξήνωρ ‘breaker of men’, used exclusively for Achilles in the *Iliad*.²⁰ However, there is no indication that the context of fr. 11 also refers to Germanus, and several other heroes are mentioned. We might therefore consider another possible restoration: Λα]ομέδων,²¹ name of Priam’s father

¹⁵ Cf. Opp. *C.* 2.515; 4.194. On κατὰ + genitive in Homer see further P. Chantraine, *Grammaire Homérique*, Tome II: *Syntaxe*, Paris 1963, 112–113. For an instance of καταρρέω with dative see D.P. 943: ... αὐτόματοι δὲ κατέρρεον ὕδασι λίμναι.

¹⁶ Nonn. *Dion.* 5.433; Opp. *kyn.* 4.44. See Livrea (above n. 4) 17; 68.

¹⁷ Cf. *LfgGrE* s.v. αἴμων, Αἴμων (E. Risch). The only other occurrence of this rare word, in Euripides (*Hec.* 90), λύκον αἴμονι χαλῶν ‘a wolf’s bloody jaws’, allows the meaning ‘bloody in the chase’. Should this meaning be assumed for the Homeric word, it would not cancel the Blemyomachian parallel. Note also a hellenistic funerary epigram for a Ἰππαίων Αἴμωνος (Hippaimon, son of Haimon), described as a hunter (*AP* 7.304; D. L. Page, *Further Greek Epigrams*, Cambridge 1981, 80–82).

¹⁸ Cf. Whitby (above n. 4) 129.

¹⁹ Also in Q.S. 8.35. See Livrea (above n. 4) 68.

²⁰ As noted by Page (above n. 11) 591; Livrea (above n. 4) 17; Miguélez-Cavero (above n. 1) 156 n. 319.

²¹ There seems to be space in the lacuna for three letters, but ΛΑ might occupy a little more space than the equivalent for two letters: in the same fragment, ΛΑΜ (beginning of l. 7) occupies about the same space as ΠΕΡΣ (beginning of l. 6).

(mentioned several times in the *Iliad*), and a name of obviously greater mythical importance than Automedon, with a durable presence in ancient literature up to the late antiquity.²² Perhaps significantly, nearly all other Homeric names that appear in this fragment up to this point are used in the *Iliad* for Trojans: Πολάρτης (on him see below), Λαμπετίδης (15.526), Ἀγίγνωρ (*passim*). Αἴνιος (21.210) is the name of a Paeonian in the *Iliad*, thus also an enemy of the Achaeans (the Paeonians were Trojan allies, see *Il.* 2.850; 16.288), and Δολίος appears in the *Odyssey* as the name of the father of two of Odysseus' treacherous servants. A 'Trojan' identity would also be more appropriate to this [...]μέδων if he is assumed to be the killer of Aisymnos (an Achaean hero in Homer, *Il.* 11.303) in l. 18.

fr. 12, l. 8. κατὰ μέσον ἐελμένοι ἥτε κάπροι 'penned in the centre like boars' (transl. Page). For the simile, cf. *Il.* 5.781–3, ἔστασαν ... / εἰλόμενοι, λείουσιν ἐοικότες ὠμοφάγοισιν, / ἢ συσὶ κάπροισιν²³ 'they stood ... close gathered, like ravening lions or wild boars' (transl. A. T. Murray, W. F. Wyatt, Loeb). The *Blemyomachia* verse refers to the position of the Blemyes as they are about to be attacked by the poem's hero (Germanus). The Iliadic passage similarly describes a group of Achaeans on the defensive. In both poems, the analogy between fighters and animals such as lions and boars suggests 'aggression under attack'.²⁴

fr. 12, l. 9. -]λόμενοι κατ' ὄρ[ε]σφι λίνων ὑπὸ θηρητήρων

Steinrück prints -]λόμενοι for palaeographic reasons,²⁵ but the reading is far from certain. On the other hand, closer consideration of Livrea's αἰθόμενοι shows this reading to be particularly appropriate. Among the parallels which he provides for this difficult line,²⁶ the verse τίς δὲ λέοντος ἐνὶ φρεσὶν αἰθεταὶ ἀλκή ('What strength burns in the lion's heart', Opp. *hal.* 5.36) seems to be the closest to the *Blemyomachian* line and provides considerable support for the restoration αἰθόμενοι; it is indeed possible that the poet of the *Blemyomachia*, like Oppian, imagined his *kaproi* as 'burning with strength' in the hunters' nets. Another potential use of αἰθόμενοι, in relation to 'burning hunger', is made somewhat difficult by the following τεκέων ὑπερ 'defending their offspring'. On the sequence λιμῶ δ' αἰθόμενος (used for a θήρ in Apollonius Rhodius 1.1243), cf. Hesiod fr. 43a, b M–W and Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4 F 7 etc. (τὸν δ' Αἴθων' ἐκάλεσσαν ἐπ]όν[υ]μ[ο]ν εἴνεκα λιμοῦ / αἴθωνος κρατεροῦ).²⁷

²² Cf. the reference to him by the 4th–5th c. AD grammarian Maurus Servius Honoratus (*Aen.* 2.241).

²³ Cf. 7.256–257. Note that in his edition of the *Iliad*, M. L. West treats 5.783 as an interpolation.

²⁴ See G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary II* (books 5–8), Oxford 1990, 139 (with further parallels).

²⁵ 'Der verlorene Schluß eines Doppellambda könnte den leeren Zwischenraum bis zum Omikron erklären' (above n. 1), 107.

²⁶ These include the also closely similar Q.S. 2.372; see Livrea (above n. 4) 74.

²⁷ See also M. L. West, *Hesiod: Works & Days*, Oxford 1978, 248. In book 19 of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus assumes a beggar identity under the name Αἴθων ('hungry beggar?').

fr. 12, l. 20.]ενέοντα. The lacuna invites multiple supplements. To the various possibilities raised,²⁸ we might add ὑπερμ]ενέοντα (cf. ἄνδρες ὑπερμενέοντες ‘the lordly men’, *Od.* 19.62), περισθ]ενέοντα (‘in the greatness of his strength’, used for Odysseus at *Od.* 22.368), ἐπισθ]ενέοντα (‘very mighty’, of the legendary Lapiths and of men in Apollonius Rhodius 1.41; 1.543; of the Trojans in Quintus Smyrnaeus 10.91; used of Zeus in Homer and Hesiod). Ludwich’s δυσμ]ενέοντα also finds support in the *Odyssey* and in the formulaic κακὰ ῥέζετε δυσμενέοντες (‘do harm out of hostility’, 2.73, 20.314).

It is not necessary to assume that the hero Pylartes — mentioned in fr. 2 (= *P.Phoib.* fr. 1a), l. 5 and in fr. 11, l. 6 — draws on an Iliadic Pylartes who ‘dies twice’.²⁹ Pylartes is in all likelihood a name shared by two different Trojan heroes (one killed by Aias, *Il.* 11.491; one killed by Patroklos, 16.696).³⁰ πωλάρτης, ‘gate fastener’, is further used as an epithet of Hades (*Il.* 8.367; 13.415); this significance is appropriate in a name that features in a list of slain men (who only appear momentarily in order to die). Homonymies³¹ occur frequently enough in Homeric poetry.³²

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²⁸ E.g. οὐ μ]ενέοντα (Buecheler); δυσμ]ενέοντα (Ludwich); see Livrea’s apparatus (above n. 4) 42. I share his view (*op. cit.*, 77) that a personal name would be suitable here, but name accusative forms in -ενέοντα are short.

²⁹ Thus Steinrück (above n. 1) 113; cf. previously MacCoull (above n. 11) 496.

³⁰ See H. von Kamptz, *Homerische Personennamen: sprachwissenschaftliche und historische Klassifikation*, Göttingen 1982 (1958) 220; P. Wathelet, *Dictionnaire des Troyens de l’Iliade*, Paris 1988, II 952–953; *LfGrE* s.v. Πωλάρτης (V. Langholf); *Homeric Encyclopedia* (ed. M. Finkelberg), II s.v. Pylartes.

³¹ On Homeric homonymies (esp. in respect to their treatment by ancient scholars) see R. Nünlist, *The Ancient Critic at Work: Terms and Concepts of Literary Criticism in Greek Scholia*, Cambridge 2009, 240–241.

³² A couple of minor points on Steinrück’s text: fr. 11, l. 3 read χαμάδις (paroxytone, not oxytone; thus also previous editors. Cf. H. W. Chandler, *A Practical Introduction to Greek Accentuation*, Oxford² 1881, 247 §877); fr. 11, l. 19 read ὠκυ]πέτες. On the accent, see Livrea (above n. 4) 69.