

MYRMIDONS, DOLOPES, AND DANAANS: WORDPLAYS IN *AENEID* 2

As Aeneas begins his story of Troy's fall he wonders if in relating it even her enemies, such as the Myrmidons or Dolopes or the soldiers of Ulysses, could refrain from tears (*Aen.* 2.6–8). The reference to a weeping soldier of Ulysses is a subtle allusion to Vergil's Homeric model,¹ but why are the Myrmidons and Dolopes mentioned? The usual explanation that these were the soldiers of Neoptolemus,² who plays a central role in Aeneas' account of Troy's fall, is not entirely satisfactory.

In Homer the Myrmidons inhabit Phthia (cf. *Il.* 2.683–4) and are thus naturally linked with Achilles and Patroclus,³ but the Dolopes seem to play no role at all in the fighting. Their name occurs only once in the *Iliad* (as the people ruled by Phoenix)⁴ and not at all in the *Odyssey*.

In the *Aeneid*, however, the Dolopes appear four times, all in Book 2. Twice they are mentioned along with the Myrmidons,⁵ once with Achilles,⁶ and once with the Atridae.⁷ In none of the instances does the context require either their presence or that of the Myrmidons. Vergil may well have associated both with Neoptolemus, but if that is why they are introduced in Book 2, it is exceedingly strange that in the account of Neoptolemus' attack on the palace (*Aen.* 2.469–558), where one would expect Myrmidons and Dolopes to play a major role, they are conspicuously absent.⁸

The explanation, I believe, lies in the opportunities for wordplay which the two names provided.⁹ The Wooden Horse, ostensibly a gift (*donum*) to Minerva, but in

¹ The *nostos* (*Od.* 9–12), but especially the song of Demodocus about the sack of Troy (*Od.* 8.499–520), which causes Odysseus to weep (*Od.* 8.521–2). For a fuller discussion of the exact influence of Homer in this passage see G. N. Knauer, *Die Aeneis und Homer*, Hypomnemata 7 (Göttingen, 1964), pp. 169–72.

² So Servius, Heyne, Forbiger, Conington, Austin on *Aen.* 2.7.

³ The later literary tradition, apart from stressing connections between Thessaly and Aegina, does not significantly depart from the Homeric picture of the Myrmidons (see J. Schmidt, 'Myrmidones', *RE* 31, 1108–11).

⁴ cf. *Il.* 9.484 (also Apollod. 3.175 and Pind. fr. 173). In historical times the Dolopes are quite firmly established in Thessaly, but their role in myth seems to have been rather limited (see J. Miller, 'Dolopes', *RE* 9, 1289–90).

⁵ *Aen.* 2.7 (see above) and *Aen.* 2.785: 'non ego Myrmidonum sedes Dolopumve superbas/aspiciam'. Myrmidons also appear at *Aen.* 2.252 and *Aen.* 11.403.

⁶ cf. 'hic Dolopum manus, hic saevus tendebat Achilles;/classibus hic locus, hic acie certare solebant' (*Aen.* 2.29–30). But the mere fact that they are mentioned in the same verse does not necessarily mean that the Dolopes were encamped with Achilles. The opposition in the second line between *classibus* and *acie*, emphasized by the repeated *hic*, suggests that the same anaphora in the first line may also function to contrast the different (or even opposing) points on the shore held by the Dolopes and Achilles. Cf. also Austin's comment on *Aen.* 2.29.

⁷ 'undique collecti invadunt, acerrimus Aiax/et gemini Atridae Dolopumque exercitus omnis' (*Aen.* 2.414–15).

⁸ After *Scyria pubes* (*Aen.* 2.477) Vergil reverts to *Danai* (*Aen.* 2.495) and *Danaum* (*Aen.* 2.505), a name which since Homer has been applied to Greeks in general, see J. Miller, 'Danaoi', *RE* 8, 2093–4.

⁹ Wordplays on proper names occur in Homer (see G. Dimock, 'The Name of Odysseus', *The Hudson Review* 9 [1956], 52–70) and are fairly common in Greek tragedy, e.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 686–90 (Helen), *Sept.* 576–9 (Polyneices); Soph. *Aj.* 430–1 (Ajax), *OT* 397, 924–6, possibly 1038 (Oedipus); Eur. *Bacch.* 508 (Pentheus). Cf. also E. S. McCartney, 'Puns and Plays on Proper Names', *CJ* 14 (1918–19), 343–58; W. B. Stanford, *Ambiguity in Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1939); and the excellent comment of E. R. Dodds on Eur. *Bacch.* 367 about the feeling of the ancients that a person's name revealed something essential about him.

For discussions of wordplays in early Latin poetry see O. Skutsch, *The Annals of Quintus Ennius* (Oxford, 1985) on *Ann.* 127, 222, 231, 290, 369, 540 Sk; P. Friedländer, 'The Pattern of

fact a clever stratagem (*dolus*) for capturing Troy,¹⁰ dominates the early part of Book 2. The theme of guileful gifts first appears in disguise, lurking in the names of the Greeks who would weep to tell a tale of such woe (*Aen.* 2.6–9);

quis talia fando
MyrmidonUM DOLOpumve¹¹ aut duri miles Ulixi
temperet a lacrimis? et iam nox umida caelo
praecipitat suadentque cadentia sidera somnos.

The next mention of Myrmidons occurs in a setting that is similar, but more ominous (*Aen.* 2.250–3):

vertitur interea caelum et ruit Oceano nox¹²
involvans umbra magna terramque polumque
MyrmidonUMque DOLOS; fusi per moenia Teucrici
conticuere; sopor fessos complectitur artus.

Austin (on *Aen.* 2.252) calls it ‘an unexpected addition to the natural phenomena of earth and sky’, but equally unexpected is the metamorphosis of *Dolopum* (*Aen.* 2.7) to *dolos* (*Aen.* 2.252),¹³ which reveals the treacherous nature of the Myrmidons and their gifts.

These two passages in which Myrmidons and Dolopes strangely intrude on the description of night provide a frame within which this theme of deceptive gifts is quickly developed. Aeneas’ account about the Wooden Horse stresses its insidious nature – *simulant* (*Aen.* 2.17), *ea fama vagatur* (*Aen.* 2.17), *furtim* (*Aen.* 2.18), *caeco lateri* (*Aen.* 2.19). And then, as the Trojans come out to view the abandoned Greek camp, the joyous mood of *iuvat ire et...videre* (*Aen.* 2.27–8) is disturbed by the cacenphaton *DoriCA CAstra*,¹⁴ while *hic DOLOpum manus* (*Aen.* 2.29) hints at what

Sound and Atomistic Theory in Lucretius’, *AJP* 62 (1941), 16–34; and J. M. Snyder, *Puns and Poetry in Lucretius*’, *De rerum natura*’ (Amsterdam, 1980).

Vergil furnishes numerous instances of etymological or aetiological wordplay, e.g. *dis AGrippa secundis/Ardus AGmen AGens* (*Aen.* 8.682–3), *LATe LATio* (*Aen.* 8.14), *LATiumque...LATuisset* (*Aen.* 8.322–3). Further examples in J. Marouzeau, *Quelques aspects de la formation du latin littéraire* (Paris, 1949), pp. 71–9; W. F. Jackson Knight, *Roman Vergil* (London, 1944), pp. 197–206; J. S. Th. Hanssen, ‘Virgilian Notes’, *SO* 26 (1948), 113–25; E. Kraggerud, ‘Einige Namen in der Aeneis’, *SO* 36 (1960), 30–9; H. Mørland, ‘*Nisus, Euryalus* und andere Namen in der Aeneis’, *SO* 33 (1957), 87–109; H. Mørland, ‘Zu den Namen in der Aeneis’, *SO* 36 (1960), 21–9; H. Mørland, ‘Zu einigen Stellen in der Aeneis’, *SO* 48 (1973), 7–23. The most recent treatment of wordplay in Latin writers is that of F. Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca, 1985), esp. pp. 62–3, 281, 303–4 on etymological wordplays with names.

¹⁰ cf. ὃν ποτ’ ἐς ἀκροπόλιν δόλον ἤγαγε δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς (*Od.* 8.494).

¹¹ The differences in vowel quantity between *Myrmidōnum* and *dōnum* would not have been an impediment to the wordplay, since Latin literature furnishes many examples of ‘wordplay across vowel quantity’ (see Ahl, op. cit. [n. 9], pp. 56–7).

¹² The traditional view that *ruit* implies ‘upward motion’ here (see Austin *ad loc.* and J. Henry, *Aeneidea* ii.24–5) has been challenged by S. Mack in *CQ* 30 (1980), 153–8 and most recently by P. E. Knox in *CQ* 39 (1989), 265. The image of night’s fall (*ruit*, *Aen.* 2.250) anticipates the image of Troy crashing down (*ruit alto a culmine Troia*, *Aen.* 2.290) from its lofty height (see Mack, above, p. 158).

¹³ Miller, ‘Dolopes’, col. 1289 (citing Fick, *Griechische Personennamen*, p. 387) suggests that the name may derive from δόλος.

¹⁴ Although Servius objects to this obscene sequence of sounds, many scholars doubt whether cacenphata would have been consistently avoided (cf. Forbiger, Conington, Austin *ad loc.*, and J. S. Th. Hanssen, ‘Remarks on Euphony–Cacophony, and the Language of Virgil’, *SO* 22 [1942], 105–6). Yet surely Vergil would not have been indifferent to sound effects which rhetoricians found offensive. When he did use them in *Aen.* 2.27, he may well have done so ‘to stigmatize the detestable invading force of the Greeks’ (see G. Highet, *The Speeches in Vergil’s Aeneid* [Princeton, 1972], pp. 130–1). Of the six collocations of *-CA CA-* in Vergil four occur in contexts where cacenphaton might not be out of place (the others are *Geo.* 2.13 and *Aen.* 3.203). Three of these four involve Greeks (*DoriCA CAstra*, *Aen.* 2.27 = 6.88; *AchaiCA CAstra*, *Aen.* 2.462), while one occurs in Venus’ speech outlining her plot to ensnare Dido (*Aen.* 1.673–4).

soon is stated overtly: *sive DOLO seu iam Troiae sic fata ferebant* (*Aen.* 2.34). But the main focus is on the massive offering to Minerva (*DONUM exitiale Minervae*, *Aen.* 2.31) which the goddess herself has helped to prepare.¹⁵

As tension mounts and narrative quickens, the association between *donum* and *dolus*, words initially occurring alone (lines 31 and 34), becomes more explicit. The first to suspect a connection is Capys (*DANAUM INSIDIAS suspectaque DONA*, *Aen.* 2.36),¹⁶ and then Laocoon arrives to argue that it is naive to debate whether the Horse is a gift or a clever scheme, for Greek gifts and Greek plots are one and the same – *aut ulla putatis/DONA carere DOLIS DANAUM?* (*Aen.* 2.43–4). The Greeks' duplicitous nature (*sic notus Ulixes?*, *Aen.* 2.44) makes them suspect even when they bear gifts – *timeo DANAOS et DONA ferentis* (*Aen.* 2.49).¹⁷ This climactic phrase is followed by an equally climactic act that might have revealed the *dolus* to all, had not fate and their own wits led them astray and made them an easy prey for the arch-deceiver Sinon.¹⁸

Thus by means of a few memorable phrases the notions of guile and gifts are inextricably linked with the Greeks, who are called *Danai*, presumably for the alliterative effect. But perhaps we should suspect another wordplay. Austin (on *Aen.* 2.5) comments that *Danai* is 'the name used most often by Virgil for the Greeks'. This is misleading, for while it is most common in Book 2 (32 times [53.3 % of all names for 'Greek']), elsewhere in the *Aeneid* it is less frequent (12 [22.6 %]) than *Graius* (20 [32.3 %]). Such an overwhelming preference for *Danai* cannot be explained on the basis of the poetic tradition Vergil follows, for it is not Homer's favourite,¹⁹ and the name is rare in early Latin hexameter poetry.²⁰ As the chart below will illustrate, *Danai* occurs more often only in the fragments of Roman tragedy (9 [25.7 %]), but so do other names, such as *Achivi*, *Argivi*, and *Grai*. Lucretius, with the exception of 1.86, uses *Graius* exclusively, as does Vergil in the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*. It is also the

¹⁵ Servius, followed by others (e.g. Henry, *Aeneidea* ii.44), explains *Aen.* 2.31 as follows: 'non quod ipsa dedit, sed quod ei oblatum est'. But there is obviously intentional ambiguity here, for the Horse was fashioned with Athena's help (cf. *Od.* 8.493, *Il.* 15.71), as *divina Palladis arte* (*Aen.* 2.15) clearly indicates (pace Henry, *Aeneidea* ii.31–8). The same ambiguity also attends Sinon's words when in *Aen.* 2.189 he warns of violating the *DONA Minervae*. Shortly thereafter the suggestion of 'divine gifts' finds its full expression in the description of the night (*Aen.* 2.268–9):

tempus erat quo prima quies mortalibus aegris
incipit et DONO DIVUM gratissima serpit.

¹⁶ *Danaum insidias* is normally taken to mean 'the treacherous device of the Greeks' (so OLD), but the phrase is ambiguous, for its etymologically more literal sense is 'the place where the Greeks sit in ambush', so that Capys ends up saying more than he realizes. Henry (*Aeneidea* ii.43–4) suggests that *Danaum insidias* may derive from *ξεστὸν λόχον Ἀργείων* (Eur. *Troia*. 534).

¹⁷ cf. Soph. *Aj.* 665, Eur. *Med.* 618, and A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (Leipzig, 1890), pp. 120–1.

¹⁸ With the appearance of Sinon the theme of treachery (*DANAUM INSIDIAS*, *Aen.* 2.65 and cf. 309) becomes focused on one person who is the archetype for all (*crimine ab uno disce omnes*, *Aen.* 2.65) as a consummate practitioner of perjury and deception (*INSIDIIS periurique ARTE Sinonis*, *Aen.* 2.195), a craft seen as quintessentially Greek (cf. *Aen.* 2.106: *ARTISque PELASGAE*; also *Aen.* 2.152: *ARTE PELASGA*, where it is equated with *DOLIS*). Austin (on *Aen.* 2.152) notes how 'the repetition brings out the parallelism between Sinon's craft in the first part of his story and that of this new and final chapter'. The only instance of *Pelasmus* attested in earlier Latin poetry is the Ennian *sub Marte Pelasgo* (*Ann.* 14Sk), which may well have inspired the Vergilian phrase. For the notion of ruin brought about by a combination of Greek guile and divine disfavour cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 361–2.

¹⁹ *Iliad*: *Δαναοί*, 141 times; *Ἀργεῖοι*, 188; *Ἀχαιοί*, 602. *Odyssey*: *Δαναοί*, 13 times; *Ἀργεῖοι*, 34; *Ἀχαιοί*, 124.

²⁰ Once in Lucr. 1.86 and in Var. *At.* 1.4 (M).

more common name in the fragments of Roman epic and in Cicero's poetic fragments.

Nor are the demands of a narrative wherein Greeks play such a dominant role decisive here. One might have expected that desire for variation would have prompted Vergil in Book 2 to exploit as many of the available variant names as possible. Instead, two of the more common ones (*Graius* and *Argivus*) see rather limited service, while the incidence of *Danai* is more than doubled and two relatively rare names are added (*Myrmidones* and *Dolopes*). These three are the first to be mentioned (within 3 lines, *Aen.* 2.5–7), and even more striking is the fact that, with one exception (*Dorica castra*, *Aen.* 2.27), only they are used in the first fifty lines.

It is, of course, Dido who had asked to hear about the *insidias Danaum* (*Aen.* 1.754), and Aeneas' first *Danai* (*Aen.* 2.5) is a reference to her request. The second instance, *ductores Danaum* (*Aen.* 2.14), seems to be a reminiscence of Lucretius 1.86. But then in three consecutive occurrences (*Aen.* 2.36, 44, 49) *Danai* and *dona* are linked to produce not only effective alliteration, but seemingly to suggest an affinity between the gift and the giver, between *DONA* and *DANAum/DANAos*.

The association between the syllable *DAN-* and the notion of 'giving' may have been facilitated by the existence in early Latin of alternative forms of *do*, such as *danunt*.²¹ In addition, Vergil could have been influenced by a Greek source, for not only do we find in Hellenistic epigrams traces of what must have been a not uncommon pun involving 'Dorians' and 'gifts',²² but it is also possible that some Hellenistic writer may well have connected *Δαναοί* with the rare poeticism *δάνος*, meaning 'gift'.²³ The word occurs five times in Lycophron²⁴ and once in the fragments of Euphorion (fr. 42 Powell). If Meineke is correct in joining this Euphorion fragment with fr. 41,²⁵ *δάνος* would here refer to the sword Ajax had received from Hector (cf. Soph. *Ai.* 817–18), thus making the passage an example of the destructiveness of an enemy's gifts (cf. *Aen.* 2.49 and note 17, above). Euphorion was partial to stories derived from the Trojan Cycle.²⁶ Servius' notes²⁷ even suggest that he covered some of the same ground as *Aeneid* 2, including the Trojan Horse (cf. fr. 68). Nor was he above indulging in wordplays on names (cf. fr. 57). One is therefore tempted to suspect him as a likely source for the play on *Danai*. However, as we speculate about potential sources, we should not forget that Vergil, whose ear was very finely tuned to all the nuances of Latin and Greek, was himself fully capable of recognizing and exploiting the possibilities of a bilingual pun contained in *dona Danaum*.

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²¹ cf. *Cap.* 819, *Mer.* 226, etc., also *CIL* 1.1531.7, Naev. 40M, Caecil. *com.* 176R, Pac. *trag.* 207R. For other examples of wordplay involving a change of vowel see Ahl, *op. cit.* (n. 9), pp. 57–9 and *passim*.

²² cf. Leonidas of Tarentum (*A.P.* 6.305.1–2): δῶρα... | θήκατο δέιστος Δωριέος κεφαλᾶ, and Archimelus (in Athen. 5.209b): κάρπον πίονα δωροφορῶν, | Σικελίας σκαπτοῦχος ὁ Δωρικός. Could examples like these have suggested *Dorica castra* (*Aen.* 2.27)?

²³ I am indebted to the Editors for drawing my attention to this possibility.

²⁴ *Alex.* 269, 710, 887, 1269, 1381. Of these, 269 and 1269 occur in a Trojan context, but they have no immediate relevance for *Aen.* 2.

²⁵ Fr. 41: Πλευρά τε καὶ θώρηκα διήρικεν ἰνίου ἄχρης.

Fr. 42: Τό ρά οἱ δάνος ὥπασεν Ἐκτωρ.

These fragments have usually been assigned to the poem about Hyacinthus, in which E. rejects the version in which the flower springs from the blood of Ajax (cf. F. Skutsch, 'Euphorion', *RE* 11, 1181).

²⁶ cf. fr. 44, 54, 56, 59, 60, 62, 66, 72, 73 Powell.

²⁷ See Servius on *Aen.* 2.32, 79, 201, 341; also cf. F. Skutsch, *RE* 11, 1188; R. Heinze, *Virgils epische Technik* (Leipzig, 1915), p. 18; Austin on *Aen.* 2.201.