

Mutantia Arma Virumque Cano: The Weapons and Tactics of Vergil and Homer

In writing his epic tale about the historical founding of Rome, Vergil was heavily inspired by the earlier epic poet, Homer. This inspiration is evident in much of his language, his style, and his multiple references to Homer's epics throughout the body of the *Aeneid*. However, in one area — the fighting style of Trojans — Vergil strays from the Homeric example. This difference is most notable in Aeneas, the protagonist of the *Aeneid*. Homer first describes Aeneas in Book IV of the *Iliad* as he confronts Diomedes, a Greek hero who is massacring Trojan soldiers in blood lust. When Aeneas confronts Diomedes, he is described as *σὸν ἀσπίδι δουρὶ τε μακρῷ* (“with a shield and long spear”) (Hom.II.5.297). In contrast, when Aeneas leaps off of the Trojan ship in Book X of the *Aeneid*, the first person that he kills is described *huic gladio perque aerea suta,/ per tunicam squalentem auro latus haurit apertum* (“Driven through the brazen joints and through the tunic rough with gold, the sword drank from his pierced side”) (313-314). This quote describes Aeneas, charging into battle, killing his first victim with a sword, and forgoing the use of the long spear that he first had in Homer's work. Aeneas' choice of weapons is not the only aspect of warfare where Vergil strays from Homer. The tactics of the Trojan prince change as well. While in the *Iliad* Homer describes Aeneas as using his spear in melee combat, in the *Aeneid* he requests spears from Achates saying *non ullum dextera frustra / torserit in Rutulos* (“None shall my hand hurl at the Rutulians in vain”) (Verg.An.10.333-334). This statement precedes a passage which lists the Latins who are killed by the spear throws of Aeneas. These passages show a move in Aeneas' tactic from the use of a spear for melee combat to the use of it as a ranged weapon.

Many scholars such as J. Spaeth and H. Nehr Korn have explored various allusions between Vergil and Homer. These studies concentrate on the character and morals of the Trojans

as well as on how Vergil alters these traits to liken the Trojans to their eventual descendants, the Romans. In a similar way, Vergil makes alterations to the armaments and tactics of the Trojans and shows the use of anachronistic fighting styles in battle passages in order to further solidify the link between the Trojans and the Romans.

Bibliography

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