

Lucan, Cicero's Correspondence, and *Pharsalia* 7.68-123

In writing a historical epic about Julius Caesar's civil war, the poet Lucan was indebted to both earlier epic and historiographical traditions. Among his epic predecessors, Lucan was influenced by both Vergil's *Aeneid* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in addition to other earlier Latin epics (Reed 2011). Lucan's use of historiographical sources, however, can be harder to discern. Whereas ancient authors of historical prose would occasionally quote and allude to their sources (cf. Suet. *Calig.* 8.1-5), Lucan's *Pharsalia* is written in metered verse and does not identify any of the historiographical sources that Lucan consulted. Nevertheless, in writing an epic about Julius Caesar, Pompey, and the fall of the Roman Republic, Lucan must have consulted earlier authors who documented the events of the civil war. This paper will argue, based on verbal and thematic parallels between Cicero's letters (e.g. *Att.* 7.21) and Cicero's speech in *Pharsalia* 7.68-123, that Lucan very likely consulted Cicero's correspondence as a source for his epic.

Scholars are divided on whether Lucan structured his narrative based on multiple historiographical sources or primarily consulted a single source. Scholars arguing for a single source, such as Pichon (1912) and Radicke (2004), have maintained that Lucan primarily followed this historian Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*. Support for this view can be found in close similarities between the sequence of events in the *Pharsalia* and the outlines of Livy's history preserved in the *Periochae* (109-113). Other scholars, however, such as Holliday (1969) and Roche (2009), have argued that Lucan structured the *Pharsalia* based on a wider array of historiographical sources than just Livy. Most notably, scholars arguing for this view have identified Asinius Pollio's lost history and Julius Caesar's own *Commentarii* as probable sources that Lucan consulted.

Of particular controversy, however, is whether Lucan consulted Cicero's correspondence as a source for the *Pharsalia*. Unlike Livy, Asinius Pollio, or Caesar, Cicero's letters did not constitute a structured and continuous narrative of the events during the civil war. Nevertheless, Cicero was a famous contemporary whose letters provide day-to-day glimpses and insights into events during 49-48 BCE. Furthermore, Holliday (1969: 89-90) argues that, while the exact publication date of Cicero's correspondence is unknown, Cicero's letters would have been published by the time that Lucan wrote his *Pharsalia*. This is shown by Seneca the Younger's quotation (*Ep.* 97.4) of Cicero's correspondence with Atticus (1.16.5) under the heading *Ciceronis epistularum ad Atticum I* ("Book I of Cicero's Letters to Atticus"), which establishes a *terminus ante quem* for the correspondence's publication by the early 60's CE. Since Cicero's letters would have been in published form, and even quoted by Lucan's uncle Seneca, there is *plausibility* to the argument that Lucan consulted Cicero's letters when writing the *Pharsalia*.

In order to argue that it is *probable* that Lucan consulted Cicero's correspondence, however, more needs to be shown than that the letters were published and available. This paper will argue that Lucan likely consulted Cicero's letters when composing Cicero's speech in *Pharsalia* 7.68-123. In the speech, Cicero criticizes Pompey's inaction during the war and urges him to attack Caesar's camp. This incitement stirs up Pompey's camp and leads to the Battle of Pharsalus, in which Pompey is defeated. Historically, however, we know that Cicero was not present at the Battle of Pharsalus, but was instead staying at Dyrrachium. Since the speech is fictional, Lucan could not have based 7.68-123 on any speech of Cicero found in the writings of previous historians.

Instead, this paper argues that Lucan structured Cicero's speech in 7.68-123 based on similar complaints about Pompey in Cicero's own correspondence. In Cicero's correspondence,

Lucan would have found letters that contained multiple complaints about Pompey during the civil war (e.g. *Att.* 7.21). In adapting these complaints into a speech of Cicero, given before the Battle of Pharsalus, Lucan shifts the blame for the defeat away from Pompey and instead places it upon senators, such as Cicero, who were urging Pompey toward a temerarious attack against Caesar. *Pharsalia* 7.68-123 thus not only sheds light on Lucan's depiction of Pompey and Cicero, but also provides clues about the written sources that Lucan consulted. If Lucan did consult Cicero's correspondence when composing 7.68-123, the narrow view of Lucan's source material is called into question, since the use of epistles by Lucan would suggest that he consulted a much wider range of sources than only Titus Livy.

Bibliography

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