

The Bobbio Scholiast's Sources for his Commentary on Cicero's Speeches

Asconius Pedianus (9 BCE-76 CE) is the most well-known of the ancient commentators on Cicero. His commentary, or what remains of it, addresses five speeches; the extant part can be dated to 54-57 CE. A later scholar (writer? teacher?), known as the Bobbio Scholiast after the monastery town in northern Italy where the manuscript of his commentary was found (Richter, 151-56) also wrote on Cicero's speeches, probably in the 4th or 5th century CE. The manuscript of this scholiast's work is a very messy palimpsest of 204 pages in total, which at some point was divided into two parts: slightly more than half of the surviving folios are in the Vatican library (Vat. Lat. 5750) and the other part is preserved in the Ambrosiana in Milan (Ambr. E 147 sup.) The manuscript appears to have been reused at the end of the 7th or the beginning of the 8th century CE; the scholiast's commentary lies beneath a report concerning the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon (La Bua, 161).

Angelo Mai, who discovered the manuscript in 1814, first thought that it was more Asconius, but when the part in the Vatican turned up a few years later, Mai realized that this was in fact the work of another commentator altogether—luckily for us, for the Bobbio scholiast comments on 12 of Cicero's speeches (as opposed to Asconius' five). And although generally the comments of the latter are longer and fuller, the Bobbio manuscript contains fragments of one speech (*de aere alieno Milonis*, 52) which would be otherwise completely lost. It also provides the bulk of the extant fragments of two others (*In P. Clodium et Curionem*, 61, and *de rege Alexandrino*, 65). The Bobbio commentary was published by Mai in 1828; by Orelli in 1833; by Hildebrandt in 1907, and most recently by Thomas Stangl in 1912, which I am using.

In this paper I propose to investigate the sources used by the Bobbio scholiast in his commentary. I hope to shed some light on the question of “what he knew and how he knew it,” although I have to say at the outset that the issue is very complicated and often inexplicable.

I will begin with Asconius, as an obvious source for a later commentator on Ciceronian oratory to use, and then consider other authors whose works the Bobbio author may have consulted. I will look for instances of allusion and intertextuality, especially noting any seemingly “direct

quotations.” Authors to be considered are Cicero himself, of course (there are not infrequent cross-references within the commentary to other speeches discussed by the scholiast, as well as material from letters and dialogues); Livy; Cornelius Nepos; Lucilius; Sallust; and fragments of earlier orators. Among Greek authors, I will look at Plutarch, Xenophon and Plato; the Bobbio scholiast did use Greek sources and even quotes from them directly—this is something that Asconius never does.

This investigation of the Bobbio scholiast’s use of sources is very much a work in progress. I will focus on “classical” authors, although our scholiast also cited later authors. In this paper, in addition to identifying passages that might have informed and even inspired the scholiast, I hope to be able to understand the reasons why he chose the authors and works to aid him in his explication of the speeches of Cicero. Where was he writing? In Rome? In northern Italy? What books did he have access to, for example, in the 4th or 5th century? Were his choices influenced by his purpose in writing the commentaries? Who was his intended audience? We may well be unable to answer these questions, but my hope is to learn something about the composition of this commentary from an examination, albeit limited, of the sources used by the Bobbio scholiast.

Bibliography

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