

The Transmission of Priscus of Panium: Excisions, Emendations, and Editorial Evaluations

Priscus of Panium was the most significant historian to discuss Attila the Hun. Priscus' work on Attila was used as a source nearly a dozen other 5th and 6th century historians with Evagrius even asserting "Priscus the rhetor wrote a detailed and very erudite history" (‘περιέργως καὶ ἔς τὰ μάλιστα λογίως Πρίσκοϋ ὁ ῥήτωρ γράφει’) (Blockley, 1981). Yet, his work survives only in fragments. These fragments can be categorized into two main groups. The first group is made up of quotations and summaries from other historians and authors – a standard means of transmission for fragments. Material from Priscus is found in Jordanes, Cassiodorus, Procopius, Evagrius, John of Antioch, Theophanes, John Malalas, and Nicephorus Callistus, with some of them naming Priscus outright as a source in their histories, and others using material that modern scholars know only existed in Priscus' text (Blockley, 1983). These fragments make up roughly one third of all fragments of Priscus. The second group of fragments was part of a deliberate editorial project under the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905-959 CE). Using a sort of scissors and paste method, he and his editors cut and compiled passages from classical historians, organizing them thematically to create handbooks. The other two thirds of Priscan material comes from this group, specifically from the handbooks on diplomatic embassies. This paper argues that Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus' editorial project had specific goals: to depoliticize Priscus' work and to create a handbook for diplomats in the tradition of Hellenic military handbooks.

In terms of methodology, this paper will consist of a close philological analysis of the fragments from the *Excerpta de Legationibus*, noting places where the text has been edited. It will also compare the *Excerpta* to the fragments found in other historians' work (e.g. comparing the *Excerpta* to Jordanes' quotations of similar material in Priscus), as a means of showing that

Priscus' work was in fact quite political and was not as focused on diplomatic minutiae as the *Excerpta Constantiana* have lead certain modern historians to believe. Indeed, in the most recent Teubner edition of Priscus, the editors indicate that Constantine Porphyrogenitus' editors in fact added material to provide context to the disparate fragments, as opposed to the earlier Blockley edition. By analyzing these instances of editing and emendation, modern scholars can glean important information regarding medieval textual transmission, editing, and now lost classical sources. In terms of scope, this paper does not claim to analyze every instance of excision and emendation as the exercise would be tedious and hardly fruitful.

Bibliography

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