

The *Scholia Bernensia B* and Fronto ΣBB in Verg. *georg.* 4.283

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Abstract At the end of the fourth book of Virgil's *Georgics* we are told of the marvellous deed of Aristaeus, the invention of the bugonia. Yet we learn from the *Scholia Bernensia B* on the *Georgics* that this story was also known from a lost work of a poet named Fronto. A careful scrutiny of the relevant passage in the light of the manuscript tradition of the *Scholia Bernensia B* proves that this name has in fact been interpolated into the text of the *scholion*. A hypothesis is put forward as to the origin of this addition.

Keywords Virgil. *Scholia Bernensia* on Virgil's *Georgics*. *Scholia Danielis* on Virgil's *Georgics*. Pseudo-Fronto. Interpolation.



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In the second recension of the so-called Bern scholia on Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics*, the *Scholia Bernensia B*, mention is made of a poet who, as well as Virgil, connected the *bugonia*, the marvelous story of the ox-born bees, with the myth of Aristaeus. The main witness to the text of this commentary, Bern, BB, ms. 172 (B), a ninth-century manuscript provided with marginal scholia, reads as follows:¹

ARCADII (MEMORANDA INVENTA MAGISTRI) Arist(a)ei Apollinis et Cyrenis filii. Hic enim iuxta fabulam quam Fronto poeta descripsit, originem gignendarum apium primus invenit.

(The famed findings of the) Arcadian (master): Aristaeus, the son of Apollo and Cyrene. He indeed first discovered, according to the story told by a poet called Fronto, how bees can be produced.²

This passage gained some renown when it was incorporated under the name of Fronto in Emil Baehrens' *Anthology of Latin fragmentary poetry* along with some further lines culled from two grammatical treatises that date back to the late fourth or early fifth century: Diomedes' *Ars* and the work Consentius wrote on the Latin nouns and verbs.³ Yet no indication is there found about the identity or the date of this poet.⁴

But, when Willy Morel gathered and edited anew the relics of the Roman poets, the otherwise unknown poet Fronto assumed an identity. Morel proposed in fact to identify him with a very illustrious writer, Marcus Cornelius Fronto, the most celebrated rhetorician of the Im-

1 I wish to express my sincere thanks to Dr David Daintree for revising the present paper. The Author takes full responsibility for the errors and inaccuracies that persist. A special debt of gratitude is owed to the Anonymous Reviewer for saving me from indulging in one-sided judgement.

I have checked the passage against the digital facsimile of the manuscript. The images which are provided by the *Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland (e-codices)* are available at the following web address: <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/List/one/bbb/0172>. The scholion is found in the left-hand margin of f. 66r and is edited in Hermann Hagen's *Scholia Bernensia ad Vergili Bucolica atque Georgica* (Hagen 1967, 301).

2 These words are said to come from Iunilius' commentary on Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics*. Although any reference to the authorship of a given commentary of the *Scholia Bernensia B* generally offers valuable evidence about its origin and nature, this information will be set aside in what follows, for it is not immediately relevant to the present discussion. On the Bern scholia and the history of their transmission see Daintree, Geymonat 1988, cols 711b-717a (B), and 717b-720a (bibliography). Cf. also Cadili 2003; Cadili, Daintree, Geymonat 2003, i-iv; and Cadili 2008.

3 Baehrens 1886, 376 (fr. 1).

4 Cf. Schanz, Hosius 1935, 811 note 3. See Keil 1857, 513.30 (Diomedes); 1868, 349.15 (Consentius).

perial Age (ca. AD 100-166).⁵ This opinion is nonetheless barely probable not only because no poem by Marcus Cornelius Fronto is known,⁶ it is also the wording itself of the scholion that decidedly rules it out. Aristaeus (*hic*) is here said to have discovered the *bugonia* (*originem gignendarum apium primus invenit*), as recounted by a poet named Fronto (*iuxta fabulam quam Fronto poeta descripsit*). This implies that Fronto should not be numbered among the imitators of Virgil, but instead among his sources. If Virgil – for the scholiast is evidently suggesting a comparison between the end of the *Georgics* and a pretended poem by Fronto – has linked the *bugonia* to the myth of Aristaeus according to (*iuxta*) Fronto’s tale, we are then entitled to conclude that Virgil has imitated Fronto, and, accordingly, that the latter poet, not Virgil, first made up this feature of the legendary narrative.⁷

Though there are good reasons for thinking that Aristaeus’ discovery of the *bugonia* is essentially due to Virgil,⁸ we should not ignore the possibility that he drew it from a source to which only the Bern scholion now bears witness.

We might then think, for example, that we are presented here with a scribal mistake, and that the reading under scrutiny conceals the name of a poet other than Fronto, who, in this very instance, inspired Virgil and helped him to give new shape to the myth of Aristaeus. A name comes immediately to mind: Euphorion, the Hellenistic poet from Chalcis. The corruption could quite easily be explained if we assume that it does result from more than one faulty transcription (*euphorio* > *euforio* > *forio* > *fronto*). Some Virgilian passages are probably modelled after Euphorion and this poet is moreover not ignored in the still extant commentaries on Virgil’s works.⁹ But certainly conjectures of this sort are easily susceptible of harsh criticism for it is very seldom possible to strengthen them by positive evidence.

On the other hand, it would not be wise to discard a piece of information given by a scholion on account of its seeming unreliability. Even a late scholiast very rarely invents a name: he can miswrite, transpose or remove it, but usually does not improve the content of its source with additions of this kind.

⁵ Cf. Morel 1927, 140 (fr. 1). See also Büchner 1982, 171 (fr. 1); Blänsdorf 1995, 361 (fr. 1).

⁶ Cf. Timpanaro 1985, 311; Steinmetz 1989, 283; and Courtney 1993, 391 (fr. 1). The passage has not been included in van den Hout’s edition of Fronto’s works (Hout 1988). See also Niebuhr 1816, xxvi, Hout 1999, 462 (*ad* 201.10-14), and Zetzel 2018, 103.

⁷ Cf. *DS* in *Verg. Aen.* 2.311 (Rand et al. 1946, 406.6-9): *Bene ergo proximam Deiphobi domum dicit invasam, apud quem Helena fuerat; secundum Ucalegonem posuit, quem iuxta Homerum in consiliis et amicitia constat Priami fuisse*. Cf. Kamptz 1956-70, cols 752.55-753.11 (II 2b).

⁸ See Conte 1984, col. 321a; Mynors 1990, 294; Horsfall 2016, 130.

⁹ Cf. Edwards 1990; Hollis 1992; Canetta 2011.

Let us consider the passage once again:

ARCADII (MEMORANDA INVENTA MAGISTRI) Arist(a)ei Apollinis et Cyrenis filii. Hic enim iuxta fabulam quam {Fronto} poeta descripsit, originem gignendarum apium primus invenit.

(The famed findings of the) Arcadian (master): Aristaeus, the son of Apollo and Cyrene. He indeed first discovered, according to the story told by the poet (Virgil), how bees can be produced.

If we bracket the word *Fronto*, the observation made in the Bern scholion does not essentially diverge from the one found near the same passage in the margins of another ninth-century manuscript, in which Servius' commentary on the *Bucolics* and the *Georgics* has been supplemented with glosses stemming from a different late antique commentary, the so-called *Servius Danielis* or *Danielinus*:¹⁰

MAGISTRI Aristaeum dicit, Apollinis et Cyrenes filium, qui primus invenit, quemadmodum apes possint reparari.¹¹

(The Arcadian) master: he refers to Aristaeus, the son of Apollo and Cyrenes, who first discovered how to restore a lost bee brood.

Then, the comment on *georg.* 4.283 we find in the margins of Bern 172 probably contains an interpolation. But whence has the reference to Fronto been taken and why has it been embedded into the text of the scholion?

Since the manuscript has no other suggestion to offer to answer confidently this question, we venture the following conjecture.

We might surmise - hoping to avoid the pitfalls of too speculative reasoning - that the name of Fronto was prefixed to an interlinear gloss which was intended to explain the word *fama* that stands at the end of *georg.* 4.286:

Sed si quem proles subito defecerit omnis
nec genus unde novae stirpis revocetur habebit,
tempus et Arcadii memoranda inventa magistri
pandere quoque modo caesis iam saepe iuvenicis
insincerus apes tulerit cruor. Altius omnem
expediam prima repetens ab origine famam. 285

¹⁰ Thilo 1887, 342.7-9. The manuscript here referred to is Leiden, UB, ms. Voss. lat. O. 80 (*codex Lemovicensis*). Cf. Munk Olsen 1985, 808-9 (Bc. 37), and Meyier 1977, 137-9.

¹¹ Thilo 1887, 342.7-9. Cf. *DS in Verg. georg.* 1.14 (Thilo 1887, 134.29-30).

But if someone has suddenly been bereft of a whole bee brood,
and ignores how to replace it with a new stock,
then it is time to disclose the Arcadian master's famed findings,
telling how, more than once, the rotten blood of slain bullocks
engendered bees. I shall entirely unfold the story,
tracing it back to its very first origin, which is rooted in the remotest
[past.

This note might have been gleaned from a grammatical treatise on the differences of words of similar meaning (*De differentiis*), which was falsely reckoned among the works of Marcus Cornelius Fronto, as can be inferred from the only medieval manuscript that contains it, a palimpsest of Bobbio origin, now in the National Library of Naples (lat. IV A 8, f. 37v; 39r-v).¹² These observations, which give the impression of being the remains of a much larger work, can instead hardly be dated back to a period prior to the seventh century.¹³ Among them there is also a note involving the word *fama*:¹⁴

opinionem et rumorem et famam. Opinio hominem suspectum facit, fama vel commendat vel destruit, rumor indicat. Opinio ostendit, fama iudicat, rumor tumultuatur.

(The words) *opinio*, *rumor* and *fama* (differ from each other in that) *opinio* brings repute, *fama* implies either a commendation or striking a blow to one's own reputation, *rumor* is hinting at something. *Opinio* is an expression of esteem, *fama* involves judgement, *rumor* raises hearsay.

Of course, we are not able to say how many words have been drawn from this passage and put above *georg.* 4.286. But the fact that Fronto's name is now found in a marginal note of Bern 172 suggests the possibility that the scribe of the book from which **B** descends filled up with the largest part of pseudo-Fronto's entry the space comprised between *georg.* 4.286 and the preceding line. It was only after doing so that he made mention of the source of the gloss. But there being not enough room, he penned it very close to the scholion on *georg.* 4.284, which was written in the left-hand margin of the manuscript and is now found, nearly in the same position, in Bern 172. The scribe of the Bern manuscript probably took it not as if it were the indication of the work which had provided the gloss standing in his exem-

¹² Cf. Jannelli 1827, 7, no. 14; Lowe 1938, no. 403; Collura 1943, 50-1, and Tristano 1988, 228-9, no. 391.

¹³ Cf. Della Casa 1992, 62.

¹⁴ Keil 1880, 522.32-523.2.

plar between the two Virgilian lines, but a word that once belonged to the scholion; in other words, he presumed that the name of Fronto had first been omitted from the scholion and then written down beside it, for it had not been possible to put it where it originally stood.¹⁵

If this conjecture may claim some right to be likely, a conclusion might be drawn: the manuscript from which **B** derives also had a marginal commentary. But from this same book could also have been copied another witness to the text of the *Scholia Bernensia*, **V**, a ninth-century manuscript containing an abridged version of this commentary. The account of Aristaeus's discovery there runs as follows:¹⁶

ARCAD{E}I Arist(a)ei Apollinis et Cyrenis filii (filii **B**). Hic originem gignendarum apium primus invenit ut fabulae tradunt.

The Arcadian (master): the son of Apollo and Cyrenes. He discovered how bees can be produced, as is known from traditional accounts.

The word *fabulae* we find in this comment (*ut fabulae tradunt*) probably conceals the genuine reading that is *Fronto*. As is well known, medieval compilers or scribes did not shrink from replacing a poet's or a writer's name with generic expressions whenever it was unfamiliar to them or hardly readable.¹⁷

If the above arguments have not been too daringly put forward, we may eventually suggest that the manuscript from which both **B** and **V** stem had a Virgilian glossed text and a marginal commentary. Further studies on the tradition of the *Scholia Bernensia B* are of course needed to confirm or refute the opinions we have tentatively presented here.

15 The Anonymous Reviewer rightly suggested me not to rule out the possibility that the commentary inserted between the lines of the manuscript came from a genuine, yet lost, work by Fronto on Latin grammar. See Serv. *in Aen.* 1.409, and 7.688, and Hout 1988, 270 (fr. 41-42).

16 The manuscript is Paris, BNF, ms. lat. 1750. The leaves numbered 159-75 have been removed from Leiden, UB, ms. Voss. lat. F 79, which contains the largest part of the Bern commentary on Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics*. Ff. 159r-160v of the Paris manuscript provide the notes missing there. Cf. Munk Olsen 1985, 808 (Bc. 36) and Bischoff 2004, 54, no. 2202. The above-quoted passage, which is printed in the appendix attached to Hagen's edition (Hagen 1967, 336), can now be consulted online. The digitized images of *Parisinus lat.* 1750 (here, f. 160r, l. 1-2) have been made available by the Digital Library of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Gallica* (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8479009h>).

17 I owe this observation to a very insightful comment of the Anonymous Reviewer. An example of the scholiasts' dislike for uncommon name is to be found in the *Commenta Bernensia in Lucanum* (in 3.402). See Usener 1869, 110.25-111.3, and Lehnus 1979, 128 (F IIc), and 130 n. 6. Here *fabulae* would clearly stand for *historiae fabularis scriptores*.

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