

THE *VITAE STATII* OF NICCOLÒ PEROTTI AND POMPONIO LETO



By Marianne Pade

*This article contains an analysis and comparison of the almost contemporary lives of Statius compiled by the two Roman humanists, Niccolò Perotti and Pomponio Leto, respectively. It argues that the life by Perotti may be slightly earlier than the one by Pomponio. Exploiting for the first time Statius' *Silvae*, both lives break new ground: Perotti is primarily concerned with correcting the mistakes of the biographical details found in the medieval *accessus* to Statius' two epic poems; Pomponio, on the other hand, rewrites the poet's life completely on the basis of information gleaned from the *Silvae*.*

1. Perotti's commentary on Statius and the letter to Pirro

By the end of the 1460s, Niccolò Perotti (1430–1480) had been in the service of Cardinal Bessarion for almost two decades. Born in Sassoferrato, he had come to Rome as a young man not yet twenty years of age, and he had launched his career as a humanist with a number of successful translations from the Greek, dedicated to Pope Nicholas V. During his years in Rome, he had formed acquaintances with several prominent curial intellectuals, notably Lorenzo Valla and Giovanni Tortelli. Then, with very few exceptions, for years Perotti stopped publishing under his own name and worked almost exclusively as Bessarion's trusted secretary – and ghostwriter. However, around 1470 this period had clearly come to an end. Bessarion, and with him Perotti, had returned to Rome in 1464 after several foreign legacies. Perotti then became papal governor of Viterbo, a position that allowed him to cultivate Roman humanist circles.¹

We have evidence of this in the letter of dedication of his 1470 commentary on the *Silvae* of Statius. The commentary is not preserved in its entirety; the text breaks off at *Silv.* 1,5,33 and the last gloss is on 1,5,21–22 *arida luctu flumina*. Like several other works of Perotti, the commentary is dedicated to his beloved nephew Pirro. In the letter, Perotti first expresses

¹ For Perotti's life, see Charlet 1997. There is a bibliography of Perotti scholarship until 2011 in Charlet 2011. For Perotti's time in Viterbo, see Pontecorvi 2011, and for the commentary on the *Silvae*, see Abbamonte 1997.

some anxiety that people would fault him for returning, after 20 years, to the study of poets, since he was now both a grown up man and a bishop. He was, in fact, archbishop of Siponto. The sentence is interesting, because it presupposes that the study of poetry became only the young, and by way of explanation or excuse, Perotti emphasized that he had undertaken the work for the young Pirro, who would profit from the reading. As to the other obstacle, his being a bishop, Perotti referred to Jerome:

Nec nos deterruit, quod lascivius plerisque in locis hic poeta uideretur, quum diuum Hieronymum uirum sanctissimum non modo eum legisse, sed plerumque etiam testimonio eius usum esse uideremus (cf. *Hier. epist.* 130,19).²

(And it did not put us off that this poet in many places appears lascivious, since we know that Saint Jerome, the holy man, did not only read him, but also used him as witness.)³

Perotti would expand on this in his later commentary on Martial, the *Cornucopiae*, where he acknowledges that his work on the poet reveals his thorough familiarity with subjects of which an archbishop, such as he, ought perhaps to be ignorant!⁴

In the Statius preface, Perotti then goes on to tell that after he had finished his grammar, the extremely successful *Rudimenta grammatices*, and dedicated it to Pirro while he was still governor of Viterbo, he spent the entire winter and most of the autumn correcting and annotating Martial together with Pomponio Leto:⁵

Hinc post Rudimenta grammatices, quae tibi nuper, quum Thusciae prouintiae praeessem, dedicaui, omnem hanc hyemem et maximam partem autumnii in corrigendo atque exponendo Martiali unà cum Pomponio meo Fortunato consumpsi (Mercati 1925, 156).

² The dedication to Pirro is edited in Mercati 1925, 156–158 (here 157); I have however restored Perotti's orthography from the autograph Vat. lat. 6835. For this manuscript see below.

³ The English translations from the letter are by Johann Ramminger.

⁴ “Si opus aederet, non defuturos qui se reprehenderent, quod iam et aetate grandior et dignitate Pontifex ad studia Poetarum, a quibus ante uigesimum annum sese ad caelestem philosophiam transtulerat, nunc temere uideretur reuersus; tum multa esse apud hunc Poetam uulgi iudicio obscena quae interpretari Pontificem indecens putaretur” (if he published the work, there would surely be some who would fault him for returning to the study of poetry at his age and a then bishop. Having turned to heavenly philosophy more than twenty years previously, he seemed to have returned rashly; and there is much in this poet which is commonly regarded as obscene and which it would seem indecent for a bishop to explain), Perotti 1989–2001, I, proh. 3, in the following CC.

⁵ For the collaboration between Perotti and Leto, see Campanelli 1998, Ramminger 2001, Charlet 2006 and Pade 2007 and 2008.

Pomponio's and Perotti's collaboration on the text of the *epigrammata* took place in Rome, in the winter of 1469–70, just after Perotti had left his post as governor of Viterbo.⁶

After the two humanists had finished the daunting task of emending Martial's text and annotating it, they decided they wanted to go on working on a poet from the same period, even if completely different from Martial, but valuable and no less difficult to emend and expound:

Caeterum hoc opere non contenti, alium quoque eiusdem aetatis poetam, etsi minime huic similem, bonum tamen nec minus uel corruptum uel difficilem emendandum exponendum que suscepimus (Mercati 1925, 157).

We have here an interesting testimony of the special interest of the Roman Academy in the Latinity of the Silver Age.⁷ Perotti and Pomponio chose to work on Statius, not because his *Silvae* in any way resembled the sexually explicit epigrams of Martial, but because the two poets were more or less contemporary. Also, Perotti wanted to give Pirro the opportunity to study a different kind of text: "Solent enim uel delicatissimi cibi, si semper eosdem sumas, fastidio esse, et uiliores quoque epulae subinde mutatae delectant" (for even the most sumptuous food becomes distasteful if one always has the same, and so a more plain fare will please, Mercati 1925, 157). The implication of this must be that Perotti's commentary on Martial, which eventually became the *Cornu copiae*, was originally meant for Pirro.

Perotti enjoined on Pirro to read the *Silvae* carefully and make a note of everything; the humanist expressed the hope that his work would be useful also to his friends, the members of the so-called *Academia Bessarionea*, of whom he gives a list, and even to Bessarion himself. The members of the *Academia Bessarionea* comprised not only Pomponio, but also several of the Pomponiani who had been imprisoned together with him in Castel St Angelo, and so as Fabio Stok has shown, the list, all in all, places the *Silvae* commentary solidly in the context of Pomponio's circle.⁸

So in a way does the autograph manuscript of the commentary that is part of the present Vaticanus latinus 6835, a volume that contains a number of autograph copies of Perotti's works.⁹ At the beginning of both the letter to Pirro (ff. 54^r–55^v) and the text itself (ff. 56^r–94^v), with its surrounding commentary, space is left for a 7–8 lines tall initial – that was never filled in. Perotti also planned a coat of arms to be painted at the bottom of the

⁶ For the date of the commentary, see note 13 below.

⁷ On this see Stok 2011 (3).

⁸ Stok 2011 (1-2) and Bianca 2012. For Pomponio, see § 4 below.

⁹ See Reeve 1977, 209–210.

page where the text begins, but that did not happen either. We do not know which style Perotti would have chosen for these decorative elements, but we can still see that the rubrics, which he himself executed, are written in fairly confident epigraphic capitals, without a hint of uncials. Moreover, he used alternating purple and green ink for them and after the first text he filled up the line with an ivy leaf. All this is in a style that began to be *en vogue* in Rome in these years, especially in books connected with the Roman Academy.¹⁰

2. Statius in the Middle Ages

In qua re nec dictu facile est nec credibile auditu quos sustinuerimus labores, tum propter multarum rerum ac reconditarum uarietatem, quarum etiam uocabula uix aut nullo modo intelligi poterant, tum propter errorum multitudinem, quibus undique totus liber scatebat. Quos emendare pene supra uires hominis fuit. Superauit tamen difficultatem omnem studium et diligentia, talemque ad extremum reddidimus hunc poetam, ut, qui iam supra mille annos á nemine intellectus fuit nec in praesentem usque diem nobis exceptis intelligitur, iam ab adolescentibus quoque mediocriter eruditus possit intelligi (Mercati 1925, 156–157).

(In that endeavour it is neither easy to say nor credible when you hear what difficulties we encountered: in the first place on account of the great variety and obscurity of the content expressed in a vocabulary which could be understood only with difficulty or not at all, secondly because of the great number of corruptions which afflicted this text throughout; their emendation nearly exceeded our ability. Still, all difficulty was overcome by zeal and diligence, and in the end we accomplished that this poet – who has not been understood by anybody for over thousand years and to this day is understood only by us – can now be understood also by youngsters with moderate education.)

As this passage from the letter to Pirro shows, Perotti emphasized that the task he and Pomponio undertook was daunting – and indeed it would have been. Statius was one of the most widely read classical Latin poets during the Middle Ages when his two epics – the *Thebais* and *Achilleis* – were very influential, whereas the *Silvae* was virtually unknown.¹¹ Poggio had found a copy of the work during the Council of Constance that he sent back to Italy early in 1418, but it seems not to have circulated before 1453 when Poggio

¹⁰ Cp. on this style of manuscript, see Maddalo 1996, 83–85, Pade 2007 and Piacentini 2007.

¹¹ There is a good outline of the medieval commentary tradition to Statius' works in Berlincourt 2013, 50–58.

took up his final residence in Florence. The earliest dated descendant of Poggio's manuscript was written at Rome in 1463. Poggio's manuscript is now Matritensis 3678.¹²

Apart from what can be gleaned from the *Silvae*, practically the only source for Statius' life is a passage from Juvenal (6.82–87). For this reason Statius, in spite of his popularity during the Middle Ages, did not have a traditional *vita*, although biographical data are included in the various *accessus*. So when Perotti and Pomponio began their intense study of the *Silvae* – more or less at the same time as the *editio princeps* of the *Thebais* and *Achilleis* appeared in Rome around 1471 – they were fairly unencumbered by earlier commentaries.

3. Perotti's life

Perotti's *vita Statii* was edited by Harald Anderson, together with that of Pomponio, in the third volume of his revised edition of *The Manuscripts of Statius* from 2009.¹³ The volume treats the reception of Statius, especially with regard to *vitae* and *accessus*, and Anderson presents a great amount of valuable material that greatly facilitates the study of individual *vitae*. However, with regard to the two lives composed by Perotti and Pomponio, his treatment contains a number of mistakes that need to be corrected and jeopardize some of his conclusions. Since Anderson's book is so far the standard-treatment of the two lives, I shall here briefly touch upon these points.

Anderson maintains (p. 107) that Pomponio's *vita* and commentary are composed between the spring of 1469, when he was released from prison, and 26–27 July 1471, when Paul II died. He moreover relies on Mercati's monograph from 1925 for the date of Perotti's commentary on the *Silvae*, i.e. 1472 (p. 106), and if so later than Pomponio's work on Statius. Both *vitae* could then be composed as a reaction to the *accessus* printed with the presumed Roman *editio princeps* of Statius' two epics, for which Anderson tentatively accepts a date of 1471 (p. 84). However, as John Monfasani has shown, Perotti's commentary on Statius was compiled during the summer of 1470,¹⁴ whereas Pomponio's, as Silvia Maddalo has demonstrated, was copied between 1470 and 1471.¹⁵ Perotti's *vita* may accordingly be slightly earlier than that of Pomponio – but both may contain material from the other,

¹² On the transmission of Statius, see Reeve 1977 and 1983.

¹³ Anderson 2009, 106–111.

¹⁴ Monfasani 1986 and 2005. Reeve 1977, 210 also argues that Pomponio's Statius manuscript must be dated 1470; in his life of Statius in Vat. lat. 3279 (see below), Pomponio refers to his life of Lucan, printed in Rome in 1469, as written *superiore anno*, and he mentions that Perotti *emendat aperitque* Statius.

¹⁵ Maddalo 1991.

as the two humanists had worked together on Statius. As to their being written in reaction to the *accessus* in the *editio princeps*, we cannot decide for sure. The date of the *princeps* may be as early as 1470, but we do not know. Its *accessus* and the commentary as a whole are copied from a late fourteenth-century manuscript now in Carpentras.¹⁶

With regard to Anderson's edition of Perotti's *vita*, the first difficulty is that the text, as printed by him, may not be *one* text. The first 13 lines of his transcription (p. 109) are copied from a long gloss, written in green ink, in the margin above and to the right of Perotti's rubric to the proem of the *Silvae* (Vat. lat. 6835 f. 56^r; see Illustration 1). Below that, in the right margin opposite the beginning of the proem is a note on the dedicatee of Book One of the *Silvae*, the poet Stella, in purple ink, and then again in green ink, the last eleven lines of Anderson's transcription. At the bottom of the page, leaving space for a coat of arms, is a note in purple ink on the opening words of the proem, *diu multumque*. There are also several interlinear glosses and a number of *notabilia* in red in the left margin. Now, if we would assume that the two long glosses in green were intended, on Perotti's part, to form one continuous *accessus*, one could explain the present mise en page as a result of lack of space, or bad planning. Perotti would then have copied first Statius' text, then the purple gloss on Stella, and then begun his *accessus* at the top left corner of the page. When he discovered that there wasn't space enough, he continued it below the gloss on Stella. The problem with this theory is that there is no indication – perhaps apart from the color – that Perotti wanted us to read the two passages in green as a continuous text. All portions of the text are neatly placed on the page, which looks as if it had been carefully planned; and there are no diacritical signs inviting us to connect the two green passages. Moreover, on careful inspection of the lower green passage we see that it is in fact placed opposite the lines where Statius talks about the *subito calore*, about how he composed the work in the heat

¹⁶ *Editio princeps* of Statius, *Thebais & Achilleis*, with commentary. Rome: Printer of Statius, about 1470. ISTC: is00700600 and IGI 9154. The *accessus* is copied from the present Carpentras, Bibliotheque municipale, 369. Anderson 2009, 112 ff., also discusses the *accessus* in BAV, Ottob. lat. 1261. As Anderson says (p. 112), the *accessus* in the Ottobonianus rewrites the Carpentras *accessus* by adding details from the *Silvae*. However, Anderson curiously maintains (*ibid.*) that it is dated 1435 – and thus earlier than the *vitae* of Perotti and Pomponio that according to Anderson are the first to make use of the information found in the *Silvae*. This chronological problem is resolved by an examination of the Ottobonianus, which is a composite manuscript: the codicological entity dated 1435 (ff. 23–43) contains the *Polistoria* and *De virtutibus Romanorum* by Johannes Caballinus, written in a cursive bastarda, whereas the two quaternions (ff. 7–22) containing the *vita Statii* and the beginning of a commentary on the *Achilleis* are written in an elegant, late fifteenth-century humanist cursive hand.

of the moment – and Perotti’s text is simply a gloss on that. So we need to examine the two texts separately.

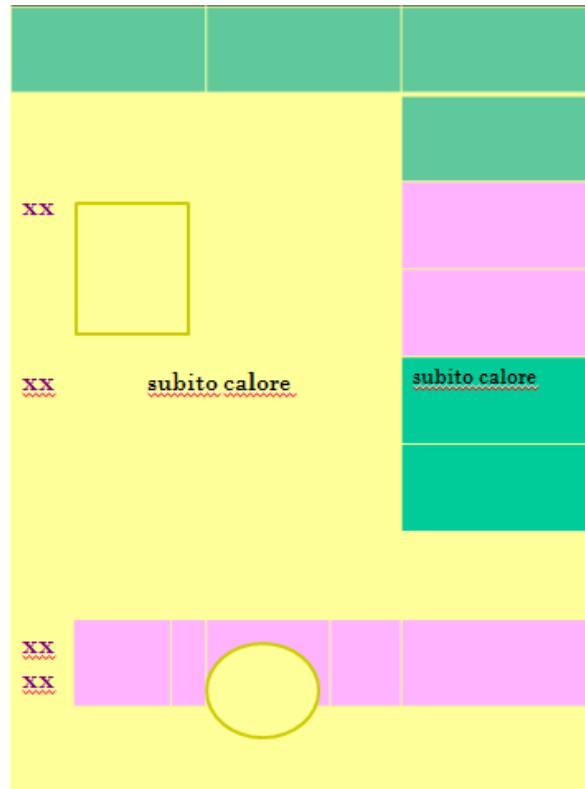


Illustration 1: Layout of Vat. lat. 6835 f. 56r.

Anderson (p. 106) rightly says that the first *accessus* that realized the scholarly importance of the *Silvae* poems sought to incorporate the poems into old and respected traditions. The best example of this is Perotti’s *accessus* – which according to Anderson mimics the style and language of the so-called *Quaeritur accessus* that Anderson dates to the ninth century (pp. 1–2). Perotti’s only contribution was the correction of Statius’ nationality and the discussion of the genre *silvae* at the end of the *accessus* – which as we have seen is not really part of the *accessus*, but a separate gloss.

If we look more carefully at the two texts, I think it will become evident that although Perotti did base his life on the *Quaeritur accessus* (= *Qa*), his interventions are more thorough than what Anderson gives him credit for.

Perotti does indeed correct Statius’ nationality, and not only in the *accessus*. In his rubric to the proem, written in purple epigraphic capitals that spring to the eye, Perotti states that Statius is from Naples: “P. Papinii Statii neapolitani poetae Silvarum liber primus incipit foeliciter” (Vat. lat. 6835, f.

56^v). This is a piece of information found only in the *Silvae*; earlier *accessus* had claimed that Statius was *Tholossensis*, i.e. that he came from Toulouse.¹⁷

Perotti: ¹P. Papinius Statius poeta Neapolitanus fuit, ut ipse diuersis in locis testatur.

(the small letters before the quotations refer to their place within the two lives)

Qa: ⁷Dictus est autem proprio nomine Statius, Papinius autem cognomine, Surculus autem agnomine quasi sursum canens

Perotti's *Vita* thus opens with the statement that *Publius Papinius poeta* was a Neapolitan poet, as he himself tells in several passages. Anderson, as already mentioned, said that this correction was about Perotti's only independent contribution. However, on closer inspection Perotti does more than correct the nationality. At the end of the *Queritur accessus* we read that the poet "was called Statius by name, that his *cognomen* was Papinius and his *agnomen* Surculus, 'singing upwards', as it were". This explanation of Statius' name is found in most earlier *vitae*, together with the etymology of Surculus, but Perotti transmits the correct form of the poets name. I shall return to this further on.

Perotti: ²Claruit tempore Domitiani imperatoris, quanquam Vespasiani temporibus Thebaida incepisset

incoep- *a.c.*

Qa: ¹Queritur quo tempore fuerit iste Statius, sed constat ueraciter fuisse eum temporibus Vespasiani imperatoris et peruenisse usque ad imperium Domitiani fratris Titi, qui etiam et Titus iunior dictus est

Perotti's next sentence to some degree echoes the opening of the *Queritur accessus*, but it would be wrong to say it mimics its language, as Anderson maintained – quite the contrary, I would say. Perotti briefly states that Statius had achieved fame at the time of Domitian, although he began to write the *Thebais* under Vespasian. The medieval *accessus* is much longer. It has the formulaic language common to many *accessus*, *queritur etc.* (it is asked), and much unclassical phrasing, like the clumsy *constat ueraciter* (it is truly certain). Perotti left out that Domitian is the brother of Titus – perhaps it was banal – but instead he adds that Statius began the *Thebais* under Vespasianus' reign. The *Queritur accessus* mentions that too, but almost at the end of the text, and with a phrasing that no fifteenth-century humanist would be caught dead using: "Scripsit autem Thebaiden supra ta-

¹⁷ E.g. "Si quis autem unde fuerit querat, inuenitur fuisse Tholosensis", *Queritur accessus* l. 4, ed. Anderson 2009, 6. All quotations from this text are from Anderson.

xati imperatoris tempore” (However, he wrote the *Thebais* in the time of the afore-mentioned emperor). Perotti gives *Thebaiden* a correct Greek accusative, *Thebaida*, and he would of course never use the verb *taxo* with the meaning ‘to mention’ that it acquired during the Middle Ages. In the *Cornu copiae* Perotti explains the meaning of *taxo* as *aestimo*, *appratio*, that is to estimate (CC 33,3).

Perotti: ³Nobili ortus est prosapia et magno in honore habitus.

in *om. Anderson*

Qa: ⁴Fuit autem nobili ortus prosapia, clarus ingenio et doctus eloquio.

Perotti’s information about Statius’ family, that he was *nobili ortus prosapia* (of noble family), is clearly derived from the medieval *accessus*, and a case in which Perotti is may be wrong to retain it, because Statius’ father was not a nobleman. We know that Statius was crowned by Domitian, which might be what Perotti refers to with *magno honore habitus* (held in great honour). The reason why he omits the *clarus ingenio et doctus eloquio* (famous for his intellect and a trained orator) from the medieval *accessus* may be that this is a description of a teacher of rhetoric with whom Statius the poet was confused for centuries – I shall return to that further on.

Both texts next quote the lines from Juvenal which are the only external source for his life – and repeated in most medieval *accessus* to Statius’ two epics.

Perotti: ⁵Huius satyrus noster ita meminit: Curritur ad uocem iocundam et carmen amicae Thebaidos, lætam quæ fecit Statius urbem: Promisitque diem. Tanta dulcedine captos Afficit ille animos tantaque libidine uulgi Auditur. sed cum fregit subsellia uersu Exurit, intactam Paridi nisi uendat Agauen (*Iuu. Sat. 7.82–86*).

Quum *Anderson*

The next passage in Perotti’s *vita* concerns earlier, erroneous identifications of Statius’ birthplace. According to Anderson, the correction of these mistakes was Perotti’s only independent contribution in his life of the poet.

Perotti: ⁶Quidam ignari eum Tholossensem dixerunt fuisse, ducti in errorem similitudine nominis alterius Statii Ursuli oratoris qui Tholossensis fuit et Neronis tempore rhetoricam in Gallia celeberrime docuit.

rheticum *Anderson*

Qa: ²Si quis autem unde fuerit querat, inuenitur fuisse Tholosensis, quæ ciuitas est Galliæ.

³Ideoque in Gallia celeberrime docuit rethoricam, sed postea ueniens Romam ad poetriam se transtulit.

The *Queritur accessus* first explained when Statius had lived and then it goes on to his birthplace, again using the formulaic language of questions: “If anyone asks where Statius was born, he will find out that he was from Toulouse, a city in Gaul. Therefore he achieved fame as a teacher of rhetoric in Gaul, but afterwards he came to Rome and changed to poetry” – *ad poetriam se transtulit* is the most unclassical wording. Perotti ends his *vita* by correcting this: “Ignorant people have asserted that Statius is *Tholossensis*, from Toulouse, misled by the similarity of his name to that of another Statius, namely Statius Ursulus. The latter was an orator from Toulouse who was a famous teacher of rhetoric in Gaul under Nero’s reign”. This last piece of information is derived from St Jerome’s chronicle and a L. Statius Ursulus is also mentioned by Suetonius in his work on grammarians and orators.¹⁸ It was the confusion of the two *Statii* that at some time during the Middle Ages lead to the poet’s being saddled with the *agnomen* Surculus, as we saw, a name that is clearly a corruption of Ursulus. Perotti was of course aware of the importance of having sorted this out, and one of the marginalia in the Vat. lat. 6835 draws attention to this passage in the *vita*, saying *Duo Statii* (indicated by “xx” on Illustration 1 above).

Perotti was proud of his work on Statius. In the *Cornu copiae* he recalls how he had cleared away mistakes regarding Stella, the dedicatee of Book 1 of the *Silvae*, and how he had been the first to get Statius’ nationality right. Before him, everybody had though he came from Toulouse!¹⁹

4. Pomponio’s life

Let us now turn to Pomponio’s *vita Statii*.²⁰ As mentioned above, it is probably slightly later than Perotti’s.²¹ It is written in the form of a letter to Gaspare Biondo, from 1466 head of the Registry of the Apostolic Chamber, member of the Roman ‘Academy’; Pomponio’s c. 1470 edition of Nonius Marcellus opens with a letter to him.²² Gaspare was the son of the more famous Flavio Biondo, whom Leto refers to in the letter, and whose *Roma Instaurata* (Rome before 22.6.1471) and *Italia Illustrata* (Rome 1474) he edited. Anderson tentatively identifies Gaspare as the editor of the *editio*

¹⁸ “L. Statius Ursulus Tolosensis celeberrime in Gallia rhetoricam docet,” Hier. *a.* 2073.

¹⁹ “Quem errorem nos primi sustulimus in commentariis in Papinii siluas a nobis editis, in quibus et Papinium ipsum Neapolitanum fuisse declarauimus, qum antea ab omnibus Tolossanus existimaretur,” CC 90,3.

²⁰ The latest general treatment of Pomponio’s life and work is Accame 2008.

²¹ Maddalo 1991, 48 draws attention to a marginal note in Vat. lat. 3279, f. 191^r that mentions Paul II as *clemens* (mild). She argues that the adjective may allude to the fact the Paul had reinstalled Pomponio at his post of the *Studio* after his release from prison in 1470. Paul II died in 1471. See also Ruyschaert 1968, 75.

²² Text in Laetus 2005.

princeps of Statius' *Thebais* and *Achilleis* which is by the same printer as the edition of the *Roma Instaurata*.²³ However that may be, it is not mentioned by Pomponio in the passage of the opening of the letter containing his *vita Statii* where he may allude to the *accessus* printed in the *princeps*.²⁴

The letter is copied before Pomponio's commentary on the *Thebais* in Vat. lat. 3279, ff. 1^r-2^v,²⁵ one of the manuscripts he wrote for the young nobleman Fabio Mazzatosta who was among his favourite pupils.

Nuper de Papinii vita sermo fuit quae ignota est ut aliorum fere poetarum. Scripsere ueteres sed neglegentia quadam talia posterii contempserunt. Nec mirum, nam illustria Romanorum monumenta pene extincta sunt et nisi Graeca lingua opem tulisset de tam magna re publica atque imperio maior pars desideraretur. Necesse ergo est hinc inde colligere, ut faciunt agricolae in inculto campo, plerumque tamen si quae bonae herbae sunt sub insalubribus, ita latent, ut inueniri nequeant (Pomponius, *vita Statii* Vat. lat. 3279, f. 1^r = PvS).²⁶

(Recently there has been talk about Statius' life, unknown as that of most other poets. The ancients wrote about it, but later generations carelessly did not treasure what they wrote. One should not wonder at that, since the glorious records concerning the Romans were almost lost, and if there had not been assistance from Greek works, most facts regarding a state and empire of such magnificence would be missing. So one has to collect material here and there, as farmers in an untended field, even though good herbs may be irretrievably hidden under unwholesome ones.)

Pomponio thus begins the *vita* by stating that he sets out to correct mistakes made by earlier writers, which, Anderson suggests, could be an allusion to the *vita* in the *editio princeps* that was based on the so-called *Carpentras accessus*. Anderson's argument for this is that the details discussed by Pomponio are identical with the issues found in the *princeps* (p. 107). It may be the case that Pomponio wrote in reaction to the *princeps*, but I find the negative relation between his *vita* and that of the *princeps* difficult to prove. Nor

²³ Anderson 2009, 106.

²⁴ On Gaspare see Fanelli 1968 and Bianca 2011, 51.

²⁵ Vat. lat. 3875, again written by Pomponio for Fabio Mazzatosta, contains *Silvae* and *Achilleis*. There is a thorough description of the two manuscripts in Maddalo 1991, 58–61 n. 51. Pomponio's interest in Statius' work is also evidenced by the exemplar of Vat. lat. 3875, now Rome, Biblioteca Vallicelliana, Ms. C 95, copied by Pomponio sometime during the 1460s. The date of the manuscript is based on Pomponio's hand which does not yet show the characteristics of the period after 1470, as for instance the uncial 'g'; Piacentini 2007, 88–91; see also Reeve 1977, 207.

²⁶ See my edition of the complete *vita*, with *apparatus criticus* and *apparatus fontium*: Laetus 2014.

am I convinced that Pomponio “associates himself with the Greek tradition as opposed to the *posterii* who have allowed Rome to perish” (Anderson 2009, 106). I believe that he simply refers to what had become almost a *topos* at the time, namely that the return of Greek studies to Italy earlier in the century had brought about a cultural reawakening.²⁷ The material he collected for the compilation of the life did not come from a large number of sources. Most of what he writes that is new, compared to earlier *vitae*, comes from the *Silvae* that he had studied with Perotti.

P. Papinius Statius pater Greca et Romana lingua eruditus ad nouissimum usque diem professus est. summo honore apud Domitianum habitus. [...] adeoque claruit, ut quod Homero, ei contigit; due enim urbes, Selle Epyrotarum et Neapolis Campanorum de natali solo certabant (PvS).

Pomponio first discusses the poet’s father, Publius Papinius Statius pater, a learned grammarian who taught until he died and was held in the greatest esteem by Domitian. Indeed, two cities claimed to have been his native city, Selle (modern editions *Hyele*) and Naples. All this is found in *Silv.* 5,3 which is an *epicedion*, a funeral poem for the Elder Statius.²⁸ It can, however, hardly be a correction of the information found in the *princeps*, in so far as the *accessus* there does not mention Statius’ father at all. As already mentioned, the part of the *princeps*’ *accessus* that talks about the poet’s life is derived from the *Queritur accessus*.

Pomponius next mentions the poet’s mother, Agelina, who was the only wife of his father who outlived her: “Ex Agelina uxore, quam unicam habuit, et cuius superstes fuit, P. Papinium Statium suscepit”. This is perhaps the only place where Pomponio shows an indebtedness to the medieval tradition. Statius mentions his mother as the only wife of his father in the *epicedion* (5,3,240–241) but he does not mention her name. This Pomponio must have found in one of the medieval lives. Again the *accessus* of the *princeps* does not mention any of this, nor does it mention how Statius’ father supported the studies of their son and how he died of a sleep that could not be interrupted:

P. Papinium Statium suscepit, cuius pueritiam ac iuuentutem litteris fouit, copia uarietateque rerum refersit, et omne eius studium, quoad

²⁷ For this, see Pade 2014, 11–12.

²⁸ The inclusion of so much material about the Elder Statius made Gerardus Iohannes Vossius say that Pomponio had actually written lives both of the father and of the son and dedicated both to Gaspare Biondo. The two lives were later used by Giraldi who had corrected some errors: “Etiam ad Gasparem, Blondi filium, vitam scripsit Statii poetæ, uti & patris eius. Utamque Gyraldus Historiæ suæ de poetis inserit; sed ita ut, ubi erret, eum emendet,” Vossius 1627, III, 555.

vixit, iuuit operaque castigauit. Senex uicio inexpergibilis somni periit.

All this Pomponio extracted from the *epicedion* (5,3,210–214, 233–237 and 260–261).

Papinius filius, iuuenis admodum, Claudiam Claudii Apollinaris filiam impatiens amoris uxorem duxit, cui tanta modestia atque castitas et amoris obseruantia fuit ut matrimonialem fidem absentia mariti XX annis non fraudarit. Vergens ad senium eam Neapolim comunem patriam reuocauit (PvS).

Pomponio next turns to the poet himself. The younger Statius, the poet, married Claudia, the daughter of Claudius Apollinaris, as young man, for love. This virtuous women bore a 20 years absence of her husband without breaking her marriage vows; when old age approached, Statius called her back to Naples, their common fatherland. Most of this is found in the third book of the *Silvae* (5,6–10), in the preface (3. Proem.) and in the fifth poem which is dedicated by Statius to his wife (3,5,6–8 *et passim*) – but I haven’t found out where Pomponius got the information about Claudia’s father. A Claudius Apollinaris is mentioned by Tacitus, he was a fickle admiral under Vespasian (*hist.* 3,57,1).

Albe, Domitianus Cesar, eadem qua patrem qui p̄sens erat, filium corona muniuit, et auro insigniuit. Qua ex re non ingratus, poeta Thebaisa et Achillem dignissimo Cesaris numini consecrauit (PvS).

It was again in the *epicedion* to the Elder Statius that Pomponio found the information that the poet was crowned by Domitian in Alba, in the presence of his father who had received the same honour (5,3,227–229). Grateful for the honour, Pomponio goes on, Statius dedicated the *Thebais* and *Achilleis* to Domitian. This last piece of information is curious. Statius himself certainly says nothing of the kind, and I have not seen it in any of the older *accessus*. However, we find it repeated in the rubric of book 1 in the Mazzatosta *Thebais* that says “P. Papinii Statii Thebais Domitiano Augusto”. The manuscript is, as I mentioned written by Pomponio, but the multicolored rubrics are by Bartolomeo Sanvito, and the decoration by Gioachino de’ Gigantibus.

Pomponio then mentions Statius’ three main works, the *Thebais*, the *Achilleis* and the *Silvae* – where, as he says, one reads about the poet’s friends and his life. In connection with the last, he mentions Perotti’s work on the text:

Hos ex omni parte corruptos multa uigilia et laudabili industria Nicolaus Perotta Pontifex Sipontinus, in quo ut mea fert opinio tantum a-

cuminis atque doctrine ad interpretandum est, quantum ueteres habuerunt, emendat aperitque.

(Corrupt in every passage, these books are being emended and annotated by Niccolò Perotti, bishop of Siponto, with endless and laudable industry. In my opinion he shows such acumen and learning in his commentaries that he equals the ancients.)

High praise indeed!²⁹

At the end Pomponio sums up: “Habes non de filio tantum sed et de patre que legi; perquire tu, forte aliquid amplius adicies, nam elucubratio duorum maior est quam unius” (Here you have what I read not just about the son but also about the father. Try to add anything, if you can, for two see more than one). Since this comes immediately after his mentioning of the *Silvae* and of Perotti’s work on the poems where one could read about the poet’s life and friends, I think Pomponio is actually telling us that his life of Statius is based on information gathered during his reading of the *Silvae* – a conclusion we also reached. The Greek sources Pomponio mentioned at the beginning do not seem relevant in this context.

5. Conclusion

The two lives by Perotti and Pomponio respectively were composed at almost the same time, and it is not inconceivable they discussed what they were doing. But they evidently had very different goals. Perotti took one of the medieval standard-lives which recurs in innumerable contexts and corrected the errors there, based on insights gained from his reading of the *Silvae* and from other authors, notably St Jerome. He also carefully rephrased the medieval *vita* into humanist Latin.

Pomponio, on the other hand, does something new. Perhaps he knew that his friend had cleared the ground, correcting the errors about Statius that had been repeated for centuries, and so he saw no need to argue in detail with earlier lives. Instead he profited from the wealth of biographical information he found in the *Silvae*. He extracted the bare facts of Statius’ and his father’s lives from the poets rather florid narrative, and presented a coherent picture that was used repeatedly by later writers.

²⁹ On this passage see Fera 2002, 75 and Stok 2011 (3), 162.

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