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1 Fondi, so-called  
Varronianum on  
the Via Appia

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# STUDYING LOCAL ANTIQUITIES IN THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES

## GIOVANNI PONTANO, FRANCESCO SODERINI, AND THE VARRONIANUM OF FONDI

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Between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, several humanists who were born or active in the centres of the Kingdom of Naples conducted antiquarian inquiries in order to investigate what traces remained of the ancient local past and to highlight the antiquity and nobility (and hence strengthen the civic identity) of their hometowns. Influenced by similar debates focusing on major Renaissance centres such as Rome, Florence or Naples, these humanists collected ancient literary sources dealing with their own cities and inspected ancient relics and sometimes entire archaeological areas in an attempt to match what they read in texts by the ancient authors with what they could

see on-site. This phenomenon spread throughout the entire kingdom, since an impressive number of towns of differing sizes could boast of Greek, Roman, or Italic origins and had antiquities that were still visible in their territories.<sup>1</sup>

In this article I will analyse an example, dating to the early sixteenth century, of how visible antiquities in the Kingdom of Naples triggered antiquarian research involving humanists and patrons from different centres of the Italian peninsula. More specifically, I will reconstruct an overlooked Renaissance debate focusing on the Roman ruins of Fondi, the ancient Fundi, one of the main cities of the northern area

<sup>1</sup> Many of the publications produced by members of the ERC project HistAntArtSI (a list can be found at [www.histantartsi.eu](http://www.histantartsi.eu), where a further bibliography is also available) discuss the Renaissance development, in the urban centres of southern Italy, of an antiquarian interest in the parallel study of classical texts and ancient ruins. See especially Bianca de Divitiis, "Memories from the Subsoil: Discovering Antiquities in Fifteenth-Century Naples and Campania", in: *Remembering Parthenope: The*

*Reception of Classical Naples from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. by Jessica Hughes/Claudio Buongiovanni, Oxford 2015, pp. 189–216; *eadem*, "Humanists and Artistic Debate in 15th Century Southern Italy: With an Appendix by Lorenzo Miletto. The Chapters on Architecture and Urbanism in Leone's *De nobilitate rerum*", in: *Humanistica*, XI (2016), 1/2, pp. 153–179, 307f.; Fulvio Lenzo, "Public Display and Civic Identity: Antiquities in the Seggi of Southern Italy, 14th to 18th Centuries", in: *Journal of the History of*

of the kingdom, in what is now southern Lazio. My exploration of this debate will begin with a work by Giovanni Pontano, his late dialogue *Aegidius*, and then go on to consider its connections with an antiquarian project undertaken in the city in 1519, namely the restoration of some Roman ruins carried out by an intriguing Renaissance patron, the Florentine cardinal Francesco Soderini. As we shall see, both Pontano's text and Soderini's initiative reveal the existence of a local tradition which aimed to establish a connection between Fondi and Terentius Varro, following a more extended contemporary debate focusing on the memory of this *auctor's* presence in southern Lazio. From a wider perspective, the provenance and relevance of the personalities involved, as well as the premises, characteristics, and purposes of this restoration, will highlight the extent of antiquarian interest in major South Italian centres and how such interest developed as part of the increasing international discourse on the antiquities of the early sixteenth century.

### I. Francesco Peto and Pontano's *Aegidius*

The dialogue *Aegidius* was written by Giovanni Pontano between 1501 and 1503, the year of his death, and was first printed in 1507.<sup>2</sup> As so often occurs in this humanist's dialogic works, the setting and fictional context of the *Aegidius* are presented realistically. The dialogue begins with the arrival in Naples of two of the characters who feature in the work, i.e.

the young humanists Suardino Suardo of Bergamo and Francesco Peto of Fondi. After entering the city gates, the two go in search of Pontano, whom they do not know personally. They find him at home, and so the dialogue begins. When Pontano asks them who they are, Suardino Suardi answers on behalf on them both and defines Francesco Peto as follows:

Mihi patria est Bergomum, nomen Suardino, huic vero Poeto, quo quidem cive merito gloriatur frequentissimum oppidum quondam Fundi, quos, ni displiceat, appellare ausim Varronianos, quorum in agris hodie quoque extant hortorum eius vestigia famaue sic teneat testenturque aedificia.<sup>3</sup>

My hometown is Bergamo, my name is Suardino; his name is Peto, and the city of Fondi justifiably takes pride in having him as its citizen. It was once a very busy city, which – with your permission – I would dare to call 'Varronian', since still today, in the countryside, there are traces of gardens belonging to Varro, as tradition affirms and as the buildings show.

Francesco Peto is a hitherto underestimated humanist.<sup>4</sup> He was active in the early sixteenth century between Rome and the Kingdom of Naples, and was among the protégés of the powerful baron and *condottiero* Prospero Colonna, whom he probably met in Fondi, when Colonna became the ruler of the fief.<sup>5</sup>

*Collections*, XXVII (2015), 2, pp. 159–174; Lorenzo Miletti, "Lanfiteatro e il criptoportico di Capua nell'antiquaria del Cinquecento: due sonetti inediti di Giovan Battista Attendolo", in: *La Parola del Passato*, LXVII (2012), pp. 134–148; *idem*, "Rediscovering Myths in the Renaissance: The Calydonian Boar and the Reception of Procopius' *Gothic War* in Benevento", in: *Greek, Roman & Byzantine Studies*, LV (2015), pp. 788–811; *idem*, "Virgil and the Water of Nola in the Renaissance: Pontano, Sannazaro, Ambrogio Leone, and Erasmus on *Georgics* 2.224–225", in: *Philologus*, CLX (2016), pp. 337–359. See also *Ambrogio Leone's De Nola (Venice, 1514): Humanism and Antiquarian Culture in Renaissance Southern Italy*, ed. by Bianca de Divitiis/Fulvio Lenzo/Lorenzo Miletti (forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> Pontani *Actius de numeris poeticis et lege historiae: Aegidius multiplicis argumenti. Tertius dialogus de ingratitudine qui Asinus inscribitur*, Naples 1507 (*Aegidius* at cc.

[Fvi] *recto* – Iiii *recto*). Modern editions of this dialogue, whose title pays homage to the theologian Egidio da Viterbo, are Giovanni Pontano, *I dialoghi*, ed. by Carmelo Previtiera, Florence 1943, pp. 241–284; *idem*, *Aegidius: dialogo*, ed. by Francesco Tateo, Rome 2013. More generally on Pontano's life and works see Liliana Monti Sabia, *Un profilo moderno e due Vitae antiche di Giovanni Pontano*, Naples 1998; Bruno Figliuolo, *s.v. Pontano, Giovanni*, in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, LXXXIV, Rome 2015, pp. 729–740.

<sup>3</sup> Pontano 1507 (note 2), c. [Fvi] *verso* (Pontano 1943 [note 2], p. 247; Pontano 2013 [note 2], p. 40). The translation is mine.

<sup>4</sup> Biographical profile in Lorenzo Miletti, *s.v. Peto, Francesco*, in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, LXXXII, Rome 2015, pp. 665–667.

<sup>5</sup> For a biographical profile of Prospero Colonna see Franca Petrucci, *s.v. Colonna, Prospero*, in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XXVII, Rome

We also know, from a Latin hexametric *sylva* written by Peto in about 1504, that he was a disciple of the famous Aristotelian philosopher Agostino Nifo and that he had been sent by Prospero to Naples where he completed his studies and frequented the humanist circle of Pontano.<sup>6</sup> It is probable that the setting of the *Aegidius*, beginning with Peto's and Suardo's arrival in Naples, represents their real arrival, an episode which can therefore be dated to around 1501.

As a poet and philosopher, Peto was not very prolific, at least as far as we can infer from what has come down to us of his writings: besides the *sylva* mentioned above, he left two Latin elegies in praise of Ettore Fieramosca<sup>7</sup> – the famous *uomo d'armi* from Capua who was under Prospero's command during the Franco-Spanish war of 1501–1504 and was the protagonist of the episode known as the *disfida* ('duel') of Barletta<sup>8</sup> – and a couple of epigrams.<sup>9</sup> Peto is nonetheless praised by several contemporary humanists: some poems by Giano Anisio are dedicated to him;<sup>10</sup> he appears as a major character in Mario Equicola's dialogue *De opportunitate*<sup>11</sup> and is mentioned in intro-

ductory epistles to three of Matteo Bandello's *Novelle* (III, 40; III, 67; and IV, 12).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, when he came to Naples, Peto was a brilliant young man of letters, and it is not surprising that he attracted the attention of Pontano, who made him one of the characters of the *Aegidius* and dedicated another dialogue to him and to Suardi, the *Asinus*.<sup>13</sup> Pontano also mentions a pun by Peto in his *De sermone* as an example of a refined sense of humour.<sup>14</sup> The biographical data we have for the rest of Peto's life is scarce: we only know that he served Prospero Colonna until his patron died in 1523 and that he was still alive in 1531, when Nifo published his *sylva*, as seen above.<sup>15</sup> From what remains of Peto's literary production, it is clear that he had strong antiquarian interests, as is shown by the extended passages in his poems on the origins of Fondi, Naples, Capua, and other cities.<sup>16</sup>

Returning to the passage from the *Aegidius*, it has recently been argued that the mention of buildings belonging to Varro (apparently Marcus Terentius) in Fondi refers to the famous Varronian villa of Cassi-

1972, pp. 418–426, in which, however, no mention is made of Prospero's artistic and literary patronage.

<sup>6</sup> Peto's *sylva* appeared for the first time at the beginning of Nifo's *Meteorica* in 1531 (*Suessanus in libros Meteororum: Augustini Niphi Medices, philosophi Suesani, in libris Aristotelis Meteorologicis commentaria* [...], Venice 1531, c. a2 recto). Nifo published it at the beginning of this edition, adding a note in praise of his disciple. On Agostino Nifo see Margherita Palumbo, *s.v.* Nifo, Agostino, in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, LXXVIII, Rome 2013, pp. 547–552.

<sup>7</sup> *Successo de lo combattimento delli tredici italiani, e' tredici franciosi, fatto in Puglia, con la disfida, cartelli, e la virile essortatione, che fece lo capitano Fieramosca a gli compagni, e' la gloriosa vittoria ottenuta da gli italiani: nel anno 1503*, Capua 1547.

<sup>8</sup> On Fieramosca see Felicita De Negri, *s.v.* Fieramosca, Ettore, in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XLVII, Rome 1997, pp. 418–421. On the *disfida* and its echo in the early modern period see the essays collected in *La Disfida di Barletta: storia, fortuna, rappresentazione*, ed. by Fulvio Delle Donne/Victor Rivera Magos, Rome 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. Vat. Lat. 3351, fols. I45v–I46r, I46v–I47r.

<sup>10</sup> Giano Anisio, *Varia poemata et satyrae*, Naples 1531, cc. 47v–48r, 58v–59v. Peto is also mentioned in two poems by Giano Anisio's brother, Cosma (Cosma Anisio, *Poemata*, Naples 1533, cc. 9r, 25r–v).

<sup>11</sup> Mario Equicola, *De opportunitate*, Naples 1507.

<sup>12</sup> Matteo Bandello, *La terza parte de le Novelle*, Lucca 1554, cc. 135r–v

(see also *idem*, *La terza parte de le novelle*, ed. by Delmo Maestri, Alessandria 1995, pp. 185f., 314); *idem*, *La quarta parte de le Novelle*, Lyon 1573, cc. 84r–v (see also *idem*, *La quarta parte de le novelle*, ed. by Delmo Maestri, Alessandria 1996, p. 108).

<sup>13</sup> Pontano 1507 (note 2), c. Iiii verso (*idem* 1943 [note 2], p. 287). Furthermore, at a certain stage in the writing of his dialogue *Actius*, Pontano decided to include both Peto and Suardo as characters, as witnessed by the manuscript tradition of this dialogue, though they do not appear in the *editio princeps* edited by Antonio Summonte: there is a full discussion in Salvatore Monti, "Per la storia del testo dell'*Actius*", in: Liliana Monti Sabia/Salvatore Monti, *Studi su Giovanni Pontano*, ed. by Giuseppe Germano, Messina 2010, II, pp. 909–945.

<sup>14</sup> Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *De Sermone et de bello Neapolitano*, Naples 1509, book VI, ch. 2, c. Gi verso. Critical editions of this work: *idem*, *De Sermone libri sex*, ed. by Sergio Lupi/Antonino Riscato, Lucca 1954; *idem*, *De sermone/De la conversation*, ed. by Florence Bistagne, Paris 2008 (with French translation).

<sup>15</sup> Extant data is discussed in Miletti (note 4).

<sup>16</sup> For a full discussion see *ibidem*. On Peto's antiquarian interest see Lorenzo Miletti, "Tacitis regnavit Amyclis: Francesco Peto da Fondi su Virgilio *Aeneis*, X 563–4", in: *Itinera Parthenopea, I: L'exemplum virgilien et l'Académie napolitaine à la Renaissance*, ed. by Marc Deramaix/Giuseppe Germano (forthcoming).

no.<sup>17</sup> Yet this interpretation gives rise to some problems, not only because Fondi and Cassino are two clearly different towns, but also because later, in the very same dialogue, another character, the humanist Francesco Pucci, says he has come directly from Cassino where he has seen and admired some ancient ruins of a Roman building, which he claims are to be identified with Varro's tomb.<sup>18</sup> In what follows I argue that the ancient *vestigia* visible in Fondi referred to in Pontano's dialogue are to be identified with some Roman ruins situated slightly outside modern Fondi, which were restored by Cardinal Francesco Soderini.

## 2. Renaissance Fondi and the *Varronianum*

From the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century, Fondi was one of the more northern fiefs in the Kingdom of Naples, a frontier city, whose territory adjoined the southern part of the Papal State. Due to such a strategic position, Fondi was very important for the political and military life of the kingdom.<sup>19</sup> The city had long been ruled by a noble family which, in the fifteenth century, became one of the most loyal families to the Aragonese crown, namely the Caetani, who made the city the object of an enlightened cultural policy. Cristoforo (count of Fondi from 1423 to 1441) and his

son Onorato II (from 1441 to 1491) engaged in intensive patronage, inviting artists and architects to Fondi to create or restore monumental buildings such as the baronial palace, the church of Santa Maria in Piazza, and the cathedral of San Pietro, which hosts paintings by Antoniazio Romano and Cristoforo Scacco.<sup>20</sup>

Onorato II's successor, Onorato III, however, abandoned the Aragonese, twice favouring the French occupation of the Kingdom of Naples: first in 1494/95, when Charles VIII invaded the peninsula, and then during the Franco-Spanish war of 1501–1504. As a consequence, Onorato III lost the city, which passed, as mentioned above, to Prospero Colonna, a member of a family who was traditionally hostile to the Caetani.<sup>21</sup>

When Prospero was awarded the rule of the city for the first time by King Ferdinand II of Aragon in 1495 – although he only took full possession of it in 1504, after the Spanish conquest of Naples<sup>22</sup> – he must have encountered a vivid cultural life and have met promising humanists like the young Francesco Peto. Although he had many feudal possessions and spent most of his life waging military campaigns throughout the Italian peninsula, Prospero had a particular penchant for Fondi and chose its cathedral as his burial place.<sup>23</sup> In 1517, furthermore, he wel-

<sup>17</sup> Francesco Tateo, in: Pontano 2013 (note 2), p. 40, note 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Idem* 1507 (note 2), c. Giii verso (*idem* 1943 [note 2], p. 255; *idem* 2013 [note 2], p. 56). It is well known that these ruins in Cassino, reproduced in drawings by both Giuliano da Sangallo and Francesco di Giorgio Martini, were at the time connected to Varro: see Howard Burns, "I disegni di Francesco di Giorgio agli Uffizi di Firenze", in: *Francesco di Giorgio architetto*, exhib. cat. Siena 1993, ed. by Francesco Paolo Fiore/Manfredo Tafuri, Milan 1993, pp. 330–357; Bianca de Divitiis, "Giuliano e le antichità della Campania", in: *Giuliano da Sangallo*, conference proceedings Florence 2011/Vicenza 2012, ed. by Amedeo Belluzzi/Caroline Elam/Francesco Paolo Fiore, Milan 2017, pp. 231–249. More generally, on the Renaissance reception of these ancient ruins see also Louis Cellauo, "In Search of a Setting for Learning in Roman Antiquity: Renaissance Surveys of Varro's Garden *musaeum* at Casinum", in: *Renaissance Studies*, XXIX (2015), pp. 204–226. See also the article by Francesca Mattei in the present issue, pp. 106–125.

<sup>19</sup> On Fondi in the Renaissance period see especially Giovanni Conte Colino, *Storia di Fondi: cenni dei paesi formanti il suo ex stato e delle città limitrofe*

*Elena, Gaeta, Formia e Terracina*, Naples 1901; Bruto Amante/Romolo Bianchi, *Memorie storiche e statutarie del ducato, della contea e dell'episcopato di Fondi in Campania dalle origini fino a' tempi più recenti*, Rome 1903; Mario Forte, *Fondi nei tempi*, Fondi 1998, pp. 201–362, 649–766; *Fondi e la Signoria dei Caetani*, ed. by Francesco Negri Arnoldi/Amalia Pacia/Sandra Vasco Rocca, Rome 1981. See also Giovanni Pesiri, "Il tardo Medioevo a Fondi: cultura, società, istituzioni", in: *Fondi nel Medioevo*, ed. by Manuela Gianandrea/Mario D'Onofrio, Rome 2016, pp. 179–196.

<sup>20</sup> On the Caetani's artistic patronage in Fondi see *Fondi e la Signoria dei Caetani* (note 19). See also *Il Palazzo Caetani di Fondi: cantiere di studi*, ed. by Giovanni Pesiri/Pio Francesco Pistilli, Fondi 2013; *Fondi e la committenza Caetani nel Rinascimento*, conference proceedings Fondi 2012, ed. by Alessandra Acconci, Rome 2014.

<sup>21</sup> See Petrucci (note 5).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*; Forte (note 19), pp. 291–298.

<sup>23</sup> Leandro Alberti, *Descrittione di tutta Italia*, Bologna 1550, c. 123r, reports that Prospero's tomb was devastated by the corsair attack on Fondi in 1536.



2 Fondi, Varronianum,  
detail of the portal

came to Fondi the Florentine cardinal and collector of antiquities Francesco Soderini, who had been exiled from Rome for his involvement in the failed conspiracy of the cardinals Bandinello Sauli and Alfonso Petrucci against Pope Leo X.<sup>24</sup>

Soderini lived in Fondi until 1521, when Leo X's death allowed him to return to Rome.<sup>25</sup> A virtually unknown testimony to his sojourn in the city is an epistolary exchange between him and Pietro

Gravina, a Sicilian humanist who was a member of Pontano's circle in Naples and, like Peto, was a protégé of Prospero Colonna.<sup>26</sup> This exchange, published in 1589 in the posthumous edition of Gravina's epistolary correspondence, consists of four letters sent to Soderini, which contain praises of both Prospero and the addressee, together with a single response by Soderini from Fondi, dated 11 February 1519.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> On Soderini see above all Kate J. P. Lowe, *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy: The Life and Career of Cardinal Francesco Soderini (1453–1524)*, Cambridge 2002 (1993); the conspiracy episode is discussed on pp. 104–113.

<sup>25</sup> See *ibidem*, pp. 114–120.

<sup>26</sup> On Gravina see Monica Cerroni, *s.v.* Gravina, Pietro, in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, LVIII, Rome 2002, pp. 770–772.

<sup>27</sup> Pietro Gravina, *Epistolae atque orationes Io. Francisco Cognomento de Capua Pelignorum regulo dicatae* [...], Naples 1589, pp. 128f., 135–137, 140f., 141f. (Gravina to Soderini); 134f. (Soderini to Gravina).



3 Fondi, Varronianum, inscription with the coat of arms of Cardinal Soderini, 1519 (photo from the late 1970s)

In Fondi, Soderini could at least partially alleviate the bitterness of his exile by nurturing his interest in antiquities. It is known, for instance, from a pastoral journey made in 1599 by the bishop Giovan Battista Comparini, that the cardinal's urban residence, which was located at the eastern corner of the ancient city wall, included a well-preserved Roman tower, still visible today, known as the Torre delli Stracciati.<sup>28</sup> But the most important evidence for Soderini's antiquarian activity in Fondi is his restoration of a long stretch of the Roman wall in *opus reticulatum*, located slightly outside the urban perimeter of the city, southward along the via Appia, below a hill known in the sixteenth century as Colle delle Monachelle and today as Monte Vago.<sup>29</sup> This wall, still visible today (Fig. 1), borders one side of an extended area which once belonged to the diocese of Fondi and was, in that period, used as suburban residence by Soderini himself.<sup>30</sup> This area included a garden, a water source, a little church dedicated to Saint Barbara, and a building erected on some Roman ruins at the top of the hill, which had been a monastery until the fourteenth century – hence the denomination of 'Monachelle', i.e. 'nuns'.<sup>31</sup> The condition of the wall today is good along the whole of its remarkable length – about 153 meters. In the middle of the wall there is a rusticated portal (Fig. 2), at the top of which a rough section of brickwork has been built up (or modified) in quite recent times. From photos dated to around the late 1970s (Figs. 3, 4), we can see that in this upper part there were two marble panels bearing two early modern inscriptions recording Soderini's restoration of the wall in 1519.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Sacra visitatio totius fundanae dioecesis ab Ill.mo et r.mo episcopo Joanne Baptista Comparini peracta, anno 1599*, ed. by Dario Lo Sordo/Carlo Macaro/Giovanni Pesiri, Marina di Minturno 1981–1983, I, pp. 250f. This passage also tells us that the building belonged to the local church of Santissima Annunziata and that Soderini paid an annual rent of twenty-five *carlini* for it. On this Roman tower see Lorenzo Quilici, "Studi di topografia su Fondi", in: *Architettura pubblica e privata nell'Italia antica*, ed. by *idem*/Stefania Quilici Gigli, Rome 2007, pp. 193–318: 241f.

<sup>29</sup> A short discussion of the restoration can be found in Fabrizio M. Apolloni Ghetti, "Il cardinale Francesco Soderini restauratore nel 1519 a Fondi di un monumento classico", in: *Strenna dei Romanisti*, XXXVII (1976), pp. 258–270, and Lowe (note 24), pp. 219–223, though neither refers specifically to the cultural context in which Soderini operated.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 222f.

<sup>31</sup> The archaeological characteristics of the site are discussed in Lorenzo Quilici, "Santuari, ville e mausolei sul percorso della via Appia al

This date enables us to conclude that the portal, at least as it appears today, could not have been part of Soderini's restoration since its stylistic features, namely the rustication of the arch, should be dated to the late sixteenth century or even later, and not to 1519.<sup>33</sup> It is probable, however, that Soderini had already opened or restored a portal inside the wall, which was later modified to its present appearance.

The inscriptions on these two panels deserve careful analysis. The panel originally located on the left, above the portal (Fig. 3), shows Cardinal Soderini's coat of arms displaying three pairs of antlers and an inscription, which in effect is Soderini's 'signature' to the project: VARRONIANV(m) RESTITV|TV(m) P(er) F(ranciscum) DE SODERINI | CAR(dinalem) VULTER-RANVM | AN(no) MDXIX. Thus, according to what the cardinal says in the inscription (and as we shall see in greater detail below), the ancient buildings which Soderini restored were believed to be connected with Varro.

The panel on the right (Fig. 4), above the portal, displayed the coat of arms of the Colonna family, testifying to Prospero Colonna's involvement in the restoration. A small deer head, the symbol of Cardinal Soderini, is shown under the coat of arms, apparently signifying that the cardinal was under Prospero's protection. The following inscription can be read just to the right of the deer head: NON INVENI | TANTAM FIDEM | IN ISRAEL, i.e. a passage from Matthew 8,10, in which Jesus praises the charity of the Centurion Lucius as greater than that of the Israelites. The quotation from the Gospel can be read as a criticism of the pope and of Rome: it

valico degli Aurunci", in: *Viabilità e insediamenti nell'Italia antica*, ed. by *idem*/Stefania Quilici Gigli, Rome 2004, pp. 441–543: 444–456. The medieval period is discussed in Giovanni Pesiri, "Una committenza della famiglia dell'Aquila a Fondi: la chiesa di S. Barbara", in: *Annali del Lazio Meridionale*, VI (2006), pp. 80–98. On the history of the monastery see *Pergamene nell'archivio del Capitolo cattedrale di San Pietro in Fondi (1140–1494)*, ed. by *idem*, Rome 2015, pp. 50–52.

<sup>32</sup> These two panels are no longer in their original location and have



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4 Fondi, Varronianum, inscription with the coat of arms of the Colonna family, 1519 (photo from the late 1970s)

apparently been stolen. I wish to thank Gino Paparello for courteously sending me a new digital impression of the photographs he took in the late 1970s and which are now reproduced here. See also Apolloni Ghetti (note 29), illustrations at pp. 264 and 265.

<sup>33</sup> I am grateful to Bianca de Divitiis and Fulvio Lenzo who discussed this problematic point with me and suggested this conclusion. Of course, the rough structure of roofing-tiles above the portal (Fig. 2) is much more recent than the portal itself.



may be seen as an expression of Soderini's gratitude towards Prospero Colonna, here metaphorically identified with the 'centurion' as opposed to 'Israel', i.e. the pope; or, alternatively, it could be interpreted as a reference to Prospero's empathy with Soderini's condition, exiled by the pope, who is also in this interpretation identified with 'Israel'. Thus, quite apart from the question of who 'Lucius' might refer to, the negative role of 'Israel' is apparently played by Leo X and his court.<sup>34</sup>

The two inscriptions dating to 1519 are not the only ones that appeared on the wall: large and very irregular capital letters, still clearly visible today (cf. on Fig. 1 the letters 'R', 'O', 'N', 'T'), obtained by roughly removing the bricks of the *opus reticulatum*, are carved along the wall at a distance of no less than eight metres from each other, forming the inscription V VAR(Ŧ)ONIANVS PIFC.<sup>35</sup> It is clear that this puzzling inscription has some connection to Soderini's 'signature' discussed above. The first accounts we have of it, however, do not date to earlier than the late eighteenth century: the antiquarian Francesco Daniele transcribed the inscription in 1778, as did the English traveller Richard Colt Hoare in 1786.<sup>36</sup> A few decades later, local men of letters, like the physicians

Francescantonio Notarianni and Giovanni Sotis, put forward an interpretation of the inscription as evidence for a cult of Isis, and the name V(alerius) Varonianus as that of a priest or patron of this cult.<sup>37</sup> This hypothesis was probably connected to the discovery of ancient objects which could be interpreted, wrongly or rightly, as belonging to a cult of Isis.<sup>38</sup> In his *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Theodor Mommsen inserted the inscription among the genuine ones, without adding any comments on the date the inscription was actually made.<sup>39</sup> However, while the text taken by itself may echo some genuine ancient inscription, the odd rough way the letters have been carved cannot indicate an antique date but rather one in the early modern period.<sup>40</sup> It has been proposed that the inscription is part of Soderini's intervention,<sup>41</sup> but such a coarse piece of workmanship hardly seems in keeping with what we know to have been the cardinal's refined classical tastes; I would rather suggest – though in the absence of clearer evidence this is mere conjecture – that the inscription was probably inspired by Soderini's 'signature' and may be dated to approximately the same period in which the portal still visible today was made, i.e. the late sixteenth or the beginning of the seventeenth century, a period in

<sup>34</sup> Lowe (note 24), p. 221, note 143, does not discuss the reasons for the choice of this motto.

<sup>35</sup> A modern archaeological analysis of the inscription and of the archaeological data relating to the wall can be found in Giuseppe Lugli, *La tecnica edilizia romana con particolare riguardo a Roma e Lazio*, Rome 1957, I, p. 551; and II, pl. CXLIII, and above all in Quilici (note 31), pp. 444–447. See also Jean-Claude Lacam, "Fondi: Colle delle Monachelle. Lieu de culte?", in: *Regio I: Fondi, Formia, Minturno, Ponza*, ed. by Cristina Ferrante/Jean-Claude Lacam/Daniela Quadrino, Rome 2015, pp. 17–19, <http://books.openedition.org/cdf/4231> (accessed on 20 February 2018). The second 'R', which was already restored in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, X, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, Berlin 1963 (1883), no. 6280, is no longer legible, but the distance between the first 'R' and the following 'O' gives grounds to believe it was originally there: Raffaele Palmieri ("Silloge inedita d'iscrizioni fondane e minturnensi di Francesco Daniele", in: *Miscellanea Greca et Romana*, VII [1980], pp. 385–428: 420) detects traces of restoration where the letter was originally placed. More generally, on the problems arising from the text and on its variants see Quilici (note 31), pp. 445f., note 17.

<sup>36</sup> Francesco Daniele, quoted in Palmieri (note 35), pp. 418f., and in Quilici (note 31), pp. 444f.; Richard Colt Hoare, *Recollections Abroad, during the Years 1785, 1786, 1787*, Bath 1815, pp. 288f., who records his visit to Fondi in November 1786. In 1826, the wall and gate were represented in a drawing by the English traveller Sir William Gell (Lowe [note 24], p. 222).

<sup>37</sup> Francescantonio Notarianni, "Viaggio per l'Ausonia", in: *Giornale enciclopedico di Napoli*, VII (1814), 4, pp. 151–229: 224; Giovanni Sotis, *Cenno storico della Città di Fondi*, Naples 1838, p. 56. See also Conte Colino (note 19), pp. 46–49; Amante/Bianchi (note 19), pp. 16f.

<sup>38</sup> *Status quaestionis* in Quilici (note 31), pp. 447–454, who admits the possibility that the Colle delle Monachelle could be identified with a cult area; Lacam (note 35) also discusses the problem.

<sup>39</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (note 35), no. 6280.

<sup>40</sup> Lugli (note 35), I, p. 511; Quilici (note 31), pp. 444–446.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 446; however, it is clear that Quilici's aim here is not to give a precise date for the inscription but rather to refute the hypothesis that it is ancient.

which a local and more popular antiquarian enthusiasm may well have developed in the town.

The evocation of Varro in Soderini's inscription (and in the 'anomalous' inscription along the wall) makes it clear that, returning to the passage from Pontano's *Aegidius*, the Roman site restored by the cardinal is the one referred to in the dialogue and that led Pontano to call Fondi a 'Varronian city': the expression "in agris hodie quoque extent hortorum eius vestigia famaue sic teneat testenturque aedificia" seems entirely appropriate as a description of the area since it refers to "horti" (gardens) and "aedificia" (buildings), a fact that confirms the hypothesis that the entire ancient site, including the buildings on the Colle delle Monachelle, formed part of Soderini's project. Thus, Soderini did not 'invent' the supposed connection between the site and Varro but relied on a locally attested tradition which was also referred to by Pontano.

### 3. Soderini and Francesco Peto

The passage from the *Aegidius* clearly shows that the area was interpreted as a 'Varronian' place by 1503 and probably before then. When Soderini completed his restoration, this local tradition was at least twenty years old. The cardinal probably knew of Pontano's dialogue, which had circulated widely thanks to the Neapolitan printed edition of 1507 and the Venetian edition of 1518,<sup>42</sup> published in the very same period in which Soderini lived in Fondi. But it is not in fact necessary to assume that Soderini had direct knowledge of the dialogue since another, stronger factor connected him with Giovanni Pontano: it is to be supposed – though in the absence of direct evidence it must remain a hypothesis – that a leading role both in disseminating the 'Varronian' tradition within Pontano's circle in Naples and in in-

fluencing Soderini's restoration in Fondi was played by the humanist Francesco Peto, who was, as we have seen, among the characters in the *Aegidius*. It is highly plausible that Peto himself was the source for Pontano's claim about the city in the dialogue, and in this context it is also highly significant that in 1519, when the restoration of the wall was completed, Peto was still a close collaborator of Prospero Colonna and part of his entourage wherever he went.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, we can suspect that 'hidden' behind Soderini's restoration of the Roman ruins was none other than Peto, acting as a kind of antiquarian consultant. Soderini must have had local intermediaries who introduced him to the antiquarian heritage of the city, and, for such a purpose, no local humanist could be a better guide than the one who had already stimulated Pontano's interest in the city and who was always at Prospero Colonna's side. Peto's antiquarian interest in Fondi, furthermore, is shown by his reconstruction of the Virgilian myth of Amyclae, a legendary Laconian colony in southern Lazio, which appears in one of the two elegies for Ettore Fieramosca quoted above.<sup>44</sup>

It is more difficult to work out how and why Fondi came to be seen as a Varronian place – either by Peto or some humanists before him. Was this interpretation based on epigraphic testimonies *in situ* such as, for instance, an inscription similar to (or matching) the one that was later replicated along the wall? Whatever the case may be, the connection between Fondi and Varro was probably influenced by the following two factors: first, as mentioned above, the 'discovery' at Cassino of ruins assumed to be those of Varro's villa may have triggered an imitative search for Varronian vestiges across the whole of southern Lazio;<sup>45</sup> secondly, it was well known among Latin scholars that Varro dedicated the treatise *De re rustica* to his wife Fundania, daughter of Caius Fundanius. It is thus possible that

<sup>42</sup> Giovanni Pontano, *Opera omnia soluta oratione composita*, Venice 1518.

<sup>43</sup> Miletta (note 4). Giano Anisio and Matteo Bandello quoted above (notes 10 and 12) provide relevant accounts of Peto's devotion to Prospero.

<sup>44</sup> See Miletta (note 16), with a full discussion of Peto's interpretation of this myth.

<sup>45</sup> See De Divitiis (note 18).

this family name inspired some humanists to draw a connection between these Roman personalities and ancient Fundi; furthermore, in the opening chapters of his work, Varro reports that Fundania had recently bought a *fundus* in an unspecified location and asked him to take care of it, so it would be no wonder that someone formulated the hypothesis that Fundania's *fundus* was in Fundi.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the incipit of *De re rustica* may well have played its part in encouraging a local tradition to grow up, according to which the monumental relics on the via Appia were part of a villa originally owned by Varro's wife.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this article I have pointed to some aspects which may shed new light on the episode of the restoration of the *Varronianum*, which I summarise in conclusion. First, the mention of the ancient site in Pontano's *Aegidius* gave Soderini's intervention a firm antiquarian basis and thus promoted the tradition of a 'Varro Fundanus' from a merely local level to a supra-regional one. Second, since Francesco Peto of Fondi is the main connection between Soderini's activity, the baronial patronage of Prospero, and the cultural heritage of Pontano, it is probable that he also played some role in the restoration. Third, the involvement of Prospero Colonna, who saw Fondi as a strategic centre from which to look after his political interests in both Rome and Naples, also gives this ep-

isode political significance: in a single move, Prospero, at local level, displayed his baronial munificence by contributing to the embellishment of the city and, at a higher level, he sent a polemical and provocative message to Leo X by helping the exiled cardinal to achieve his architectural and antiquarian initiatives.

Antiquarianism, urban embellishment, and loyalty to the baron are all elements that resonate within the restoration project undertaken by Cardinal Soderini, in particular with what appears to be its ultimate purpose: through this intervention, and thanks to his powerful host, in Fondi Soderini followed a widespread trend of his time, namely to provide himself with a suburban residence featuring gardens, water, and antiquities, and to do so not by building a new villa in an 'all'antica' style, but by restoring an ancient Roman site.<sup>47</sup> The fact that a local tradition – no matter that it is now regarded as incorrect – connected the site with the memory of Marcus Terentius Varro was certainly a source of inspiration, especially when it enjoyed the authoritative backing of Giovanni Pontano.

Although most of the achievements of Soderini's intervention have been obliterated and/or adulterated over time, the episode of the 'Varronian' buildings in Fondi sheds light on a neglected aspect of the sixteenth-century antiquarianism in Italy. Since the reconstruction of Renaissance debates on ancient ruins has prevalently focused, until now, on North Italian and, above all, on Roman cases,<sup>48</sup> Soderini's activity

<sup>46</sup> Fundania is mentioned as the dedicatee in the first line of Varro's *De re rustica* (I.I.I), while her father Gaius Fundanius is mentioned in I.2.I and referred to as "socer meus". Varro's reference to his wife's *fundus* is at I.I.2: "Quare, quoniam emisti fundum, quem bene colendo fructuosum cum facere velis, meque ut id mihi habeam curare roges [...]". See Dieter Flach's commentary *ad locos* in: Marcus Terentius Varro, *Gespräche über die Landwirtschaft*, ed. and transl. by Dieter Flach, Darmstadt 1996, I, pp. 221, 229f.

<sup>47</sup> For examples of this phenomenon relating to the area of Rome see Kathleen W. Christian, "The De' Rossi Collection of Ancient Sculptures, Leo X, and Raphael", in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, LXV (2002), pp. 132–200: 137f.; for the Kingdom of Naples, see the case of Diomedea Carafa's villa in Pozzuoli: Bianca de Divitiis, *Architettura e committenza nella Napoli del Quattrocento*, Venice 2007, pp. 101–106. As for the

presence of such residences in the north-western area of the Kingdom of Naples, the province known as the Terra di Lavoro (*Terra laboris*), where there were important ancient Roman sites, see the episode of the Torre di Sant'Erasmo in Santa Maria Capua Vetere, built on the ruins of the capitolium of ancient Capua and used as a suburban villa by the Capuan *condottiero* Lelio Gentile: Lorenzo Miletto, "Classicismo ed élites locali nel Rinascimento meridionale: il caso di Lelio Gentile di Capua", in: *Aevum*, LXXXVII (2013), pp. 713–731. It is clear that, at least for the Kingdom of Naples, a major model of suburban villas 'all'antica' was constituted by the monumental royal villas of Duchesca and Poggioreale (see Paola Modesti, *Le delizie ritrovate: Poggioreale e la villa del Rinascimento nella Napoli aragonese*, Florence 2014).

<sup>48</sup> Scholarship on the antiquarian debates in Renaissance Rome is very

in Fondi is all the more interesting because it occurred in a city of the Kingdom of Naples and reveals how complex the debate underlying such operations could have been, inspired by a territory that could boast of an impressive display of antiquities.

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#### Abstract

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After being exiled from Rome in 1517 for taking part in Cardinal Petrucci's plot to assassinate Pope Leo X, the Florentine cardinal Francesco Soderini found refuge at Fondi, in the Kingdom of Naples, in what is now southern Lazio, where he was hosted by the powerful baron Prospero Colonna. During his sojourn at Fondi, Soderini restored a long Roman wall in *opus reticulatum* still visible today and part of an ancient monumental area used by the cardinal as his suburban residence. This area was locally known as the Varronianum, since it was believed to be the remains of an ancient villa belonging to Marcus Terentius Varro. Two inscriptions, today lost, bearing the coats of arms respectively of Soderini and Colonna, celebrated the restoration. Albeit only modestly investigated, this episode in itself is not totally unknown; yet it has never been pointed out that the area, before Soderini's intervention, is referred to in the dialogue *Aegidius*, written by the humanist Giovanni Gioviano Pontano between 1501 and 1503. The article analyses the episode in the light of this source, underscoring how this dialogue encouraged the growth of the 'myth of Varro' at Fondi, and that the *trait d'union* between Pontano and Soderini was the humanist Francesco Peto of Fondi, who was one of the *personae* in Pontano's dialogue and was a member of Prospero Colonna's close entourage. It thus appears that Francesco Peto acted both as a source for Pontano and, later, as an antiquarian consultant for Soderini's restoring of the Varronianum.

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Gino Paparello, Fondi: Figs. 1–4.

extensive; for a synthetic overview see Leonard Barkan, "Rome", in: *The Classical Tradition*, ed. by Anthony Grafton/Glenn W. Most/Salvatore Settis, Cambridge, Mass., et al. 2010, pp. 839–850; see also, among several studies, Kathleen W. Christian, *Empire without End: Antiquities Collections in Renaissance Rome, c. 1350–1527*, New Haven et al. 2010; and the essays collected in *Rome across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas*, ed. by Claudia Bolgia/Rosamond McKitterick/John Osborne, Cambridge 2011.

Umschlagbild | Copertina:  
Santa Maria Capua Vetere, anfiteatro, dettaglio di una delle due chiavi  
d'arco ancora in situ  
(Abb. 13, S. 79 | fig. 13, p. 79)

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