

AENEAS REDIVIVUS: PICCOLOMINI AND VIRGIL

Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini was elected pope on 3 September 1458¹ and chose the name Pius, thereby becoming Pius II. The first pope to have this name was Pius I, in the second century. Most assume² that Piccolomini chose the name Pius not, as usual, with his predecessor in mind, but rather the epithet of Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*³. In this way Piccolomini was perhaps the only pope who, in choosing a new name, also confirmed his old name, that is, Aeneas.

Piccolomini's choice raises some questions about its ideological and political significance, and also about his reception of Virgil. It was unusual for a pope to adopt a name inspired by a pagan author, and even though Piccolomini's choice does not seem to have aroused critical reactions or remarks, reading Virgil had been criticized by some Christian theologians in the fifteenth century. Piccolomini knew these positions, and in his *Commentaries* he recalls an episode of religious hostility towards Virgil, when a statue of the poet in Mantua was destroyed in 1397 on orders from Carlo Malatesta, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga's tutor (10, 13)⁴:

Cum Mantuae degeret, Iohannis Francisci tutelam gerens, magni Maronis statuam, quam suo civi Mantuani quondam erexerant, sub obtentu religionis evertit. Quod Paulus Vergerius Iustinopolitanus, eius temporis orator insignis, scriptis suis detestatur et dolet atque ad hipocresim transfert, sive rudem hominis ignorantemque mentem, qui gentilis hominis statuam putaverit in christiano populo idolatriam gignere.

When Carlo was living at Mantua as guardian of Giovanni Francesco, he overthrew (under the pretense of religious scruples) the statue of the great Vergil which the Mantuans had once erected to their fellow-citizen. This act Paolo Vergerius of Capodistria, a distinguished orator at that time, condemns and laments in his writings. He attributes it to pretended piety or to ignorance and lack of culture in a man who thought that the statue of a pagan could beget idolatry among a Christian people (GRAGG trans.)⁵.

¹ The most important biography of Pius II is still that of G. VOIGT, *Enea Silvio de' Piccolomini, als Papst Pius der Zweite, und sein Zeitalter*, Berlin 1856-1863 (repr. 1967). For a more recent bibliography on Piccolomini, see C. KALENDORF, *Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini*, in *Oxford Bibliographies Online* (<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com>).

² See e.g. C.M. ADY, *Pius II (Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini). The Humanist Pope*, London 1913, p. 151; A.A. STRNAD, *Studia piccolomineana. Vorarbeiten zu einer Geschichte der Bibliothek der Päpste Pius II. und III.*, in D. MAFFEI (ed.), *Enea Silvio Piccolomini, papa Pio II. Atti del convegno per il quinto centenario della morte e altri scritti*, Siena 1968, pp. 295-390, in particular p. 295. On Piccolomini's interest in Virgil see F. Tateo, *Piccolomini, Enea Silvio*, in *Enciclopedia Virgiliana IV*, Roma 1988, pp. 90-91.

³ See, e.g., the first occurrence of the epithet in 1, 378: *sum pius Aeneas* ("I am the loyal Aeneas"), where Aeneas presents himself to Venus, not knowing her true identity.

⁴ On the episode, see A. FISHER, *Three Meditations on the Destruction of Vergil's Statue. The Early Humanist Theory of Poetry*, in *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 (1987), pp. 607-635.

⁵ *The Commentaries of Pius II*, translated by F.A. GRAGG, with an introduction and historical notes by L.C. GABEL, Southhampton, MA [= *Smith College Studies in History* 22 (1936-37), 25 (1939-40), 30 (1947), 43 (1957)].

He mentions a letter dated 18 September 1397 from the humanist Pier Paolo Vergerio to Ludovico degli Alidosi, the papal vicar of the city of Imola⁶; this may have been Piccolomini's only source of information about the episode. Vergerio discussed the charges against Virgil and argued that they were groundless, defending the value of humanist studies⁷. Another humanist, Coluccio Salutati, who commented on this episode in a letter, defended the legitimacy of poetry in Christian culture and recalled that St. Augustine used the pagan poets against the pagan religion⁸. Pius, instead, does not discuss the question, but simply attributes Malatesta's decision to his coarseness and ignorance, and seems to consider the latter's opinion that the statue of a pagan man would encourage the idolatry of the people to be ridiculous. Pius's attitude reflects the success of Humanism from the time of Vergerio and Salutati and the revaluation of the classical authors that occurred in the last decades, particularly under the pontificate of Nicholas V.

We can assume that by the middle of the fifteenth century such reactionary zealotry as exemplified by Malatesta had faded away and virtually nobody disputed the reading of Virgil. But it is in any case opportune to explore the implications of Piccolomini's decision to take up the name "Pius" and to clarify what the choice of a Virgilian name implied.

We can wonder, in particular, if by becoming Pius, Piccolomini indicated a rejection of his previous identity as Aeneas, emphasizing only the virtue of *pietas* as a value consistent with Christianity, or if he considered *pius* a positive aspect of Aeneas' character, proposing to fashion himself as Aeneas the Pius. These alternatives obviously pertain to the message the pope wanted to convey, and how he wanted his new name to be interpreted. We can therefore reword the alternatives in these terms: should the name chosen by Piccolomini be interpreted in opposition to Aeneas, his previous name, or as complementary with and the completion of it? It should be borne in mind that the *pietas* of Virgil's Aeneas was also appreciated by Virgil's Christian critics, for example by Lactantius, who polemicalized with Virgil not because Aeneas is called *pius*, but because in the poem, the hero does not always obviously exemplify *pietas*, for example when he is killing Turnus⁹.

Both strategies were adopted by Piccolomini, in the different contexts of his political and rhetorical communication. The first one is the best known, thanks to his famous statement "Reject Aeneas, accept Pius" (*Aeneam reiicite, Pium suscipite*). It was proposed in the so-called *Bulla Retractationis (In minoribus agentes)*, of 26 April 1463 addressed to the University of Cologne:

*Seni magis quam iuveni credite, nec privatum hominem pluris facitis quam pontificem. Aeneam reiicite, Pium suscipite. Illud gentile nomen parentes indidere nascenti, hoc Christianum in apostolatu suscepimus.*¹⁰

Follow what we now say. Believe the old man more than the youth, nor count the private man of more value than the pontiff. Reject Aeneas; accept Pius! The

⁶ *Epistolario di Pier Paolo Vergerio*, ed. by L. SMITH, Rome 1934, 215-216 (n. 81).

⁷ See J. MCMANAMON, *Pierpaolo Vergerio the Elder. The Humanist as Orator*, Tempe, AR 1996, p. 73.

⁸ C. SALUTATI, *Epistolario*, ed. by F. NOVATI III, Rome 1911, p. 296. A third letter on the episode was attributed to Leonardo Bruni or to Vergerio himself: see D. ROBEY, *Virgil's Statue at Mantua and the Defence of Poetry. An Unpublished Letter of 1397*, in *Rinascimento* n.s. 9 (1969), pp. 183-189.

⁹ See F. STOK, *L'Eneide nella scuola tardoantica*, in G.M. MASSELLI-F. SIVO (eds.), *Il ruolo della scuola nella tradizione dei classici latini. Tra Fortleben ed esegesi*, Foggia 2017, pp. 165-193.

¹⁰ F. GAUDE (ed.), *Bullarum, diplomatum et privilegiorum sanctorum Romanorum pontificum Taurinensis editio* V, Turin 1860, pp. 173-180. On the *Bulla*, see D.L. D'AVRAY, *Medieval Religious Rationalities. A Weberian Analysis*, Cambridge 2010, pp. 64-70.

pagan name our parents gave at birth, the Christian one we took in the apostolate. (revised, based on IZBICKI, CHRISTIANSON, KREY trans.)¹¹

With this statement Pius was inviting people not to attribute to the pope what he had written before his election. But he was not referring to his juvenile literary works, as was sometimes believed¹²: what Pius considered more problematic among his previous publications was mostly the *Libellus dialogorum de auctoritate Concilii*, published in 1441¹³. In this book Piccolomini was supporting the conciliarist position, i.e., the theory according to which the authority of the council is higher than that of the pope. During the Council of Basel, Piccolomini supported this view, and in 1439, when the council deposed Pope Eugenius IV, he became the secretary of the Anti-Pope Felix V.

In the following years, however, Piccolomini modified his position, and in 1445 he came to Rome and asked Eugenius for forgiveness. The pope granted this request and even entrusted him with a delicate mission to Germany, to obtain the submission of the German princes to the pope's authority. The mission was successful; Aeneas was rewarded and in 1447 appointed Bishop of Trieste.

In the following years, Piccolomini's opponents frequently used his old conciliarist position to denigrate him, forcing him on various occasions to confirm his rejections of the conciliarist theory: in 1450 he published a revised history of the council, *De rebus Basileae gestis stante vel dissoluto Concilio*, where the participle *dissolutus* underscores that Piccolomini considered that experience to be completely concluded. On 18 January 1460, papal authority was sanctioned by the *Bulla Execrabilis*, and again in 1463, in the above-mentioned *Bulla Retractationis*, Pius retracted the view he had held when he was young and wrote the statement I quoted above, "reject Aeneas, accept Pius"¹⁴.

Piccolomini adopts a different approach to the names Pius and Aeneas in the work he wrote in the last years of his life, the *Commentaries*. It is a bulky autobiography, but also a history of the political events of his time, which includes geographical, ethnographical, and historical digressions¹⁵. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the *Commentaries* are divided into twelve books, like the *Aeneid*. In the last months of his life, Piccolomini dictated a thirteenth book encompassing events from the first half of 1464 (the twelfth book ends by recounting the events up to 31 December 1463)¹⁶. We can only imagine that Piccolomini, when dictating the incomplete thirteenth book, was thinking of the completion of the *Aeneid* written some decades before by Maffeo Vegio.

¹¹ See T.M. IZBICKI-G. CHRISTIANSON-P. KREY (eds.), *Reject Aeneas, Accept Pius. Selected Letters of Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (Pius II)*, Washington D.C. 2006, p. 396.

¹² See, e.g., C. MOHRMANN, *Die Rolle des Lateins in der Kirche des Westens*, in *Theologische Review* 52 (1956), pp. 1-8, repr. in *Études sur le latin des Chrétiens II*, Rome 1961, pp. 37-62, in particular 54-55.

¹³ See S. IARIA, *Diffusione e ricezione del 'Libellus dialogorum' di Enea Silvio Piccolomini*, in *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 44 (2003), pp. 64-114; and the edition of the work published by the same IARIA (Rome 2015).

¹⁴ On the historical context of the pope's position, see A. MODIGLIANI, *Manifestazioni ideologiche del potere papale da Niccolò V a Paolo II*, in *Reti medievali* 10 (2009), pp. 89-109.

¹⁵ The main model of the work was obviously the *Commentaria* by Julius Caesar: see E. O'BRIEN, *Arms and Letters. Julius Caesar, the Commentaries of Pope Pius II, and the Politicization of Papal Imagery*, in *Renaissance Quarterly* 62 (2009), pp. 1057-1097. On the *Commentaries*, see also ENEA SILVIO PICCOLOMINI PAPA PIO II, *I commentarii*, ed. by L. TOTARO, Milano 1984, repr. 2008, pp. XLVIII-LI; C. VIVANTI, *I "Commentarii" di Pio II*, in *Studi Storici* 26 (1985), pp. 443-462; E. O'BRIEN, *The Commentaries of Pope Pius II (1458-1464) and the Crisis of the Fifteenth-Century Papacy*, Toronto 2015.

¹⁶ See ENEA SILVIO PICCOLOMINI, *op. cit.* (2008), pp. XLV-XLVI.

In Piccolomini's autobiographical work, Virgil and the *Aeneid* are frequently echoed, and it is not possible here to examine in detail the modalities of this reception¹⁷. I prefer to focus on the overall inspiration of the *Aeneid* for the *Commentaries*: Aeneas Piccolomini, like Virgil's Aeneas, is the protagonist of a mission and has a providential role. The role of Virgil's *Pius Aeneas* is to prepare the foundation of Rome and its empire. The role of Aeneas Pius II is to strengthen and refound the Roman Church.

Rome is an important link between the two Aeneases: the first is Rome's mythical founder, the second, Piccolomini, in his role as pope affirms his Roman origins. In fact, in the first lines of the *Commentaries* we read that the Piccolomini family came from Rome (1, 1):

Familia Piccolomineorum ex Roma in Senas translata, inter vetustiores ex nobiliores civitatis habita.

The Piccolomini came to Siena from Rome and were counted among the oldest and noblest families in the city. (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve])¹⁸

Piccolomini was born in Siena, a city in Tuscany and, at that time, Florence's rival (it was conquered by the Florentines in 1555). The Piccolomini are referenced in historical sources from the eleventh century¹⁹, in which sources no definitive link to a Roman origin can be found. The biographers of Pius II state that the names Aeneas and Sylvius, which were given to him by his parents, were suggested by the name of a Florentine relative, Giulio Piccolominis Amideis, who claimed a Julian descent. The Florentine Leonardo Dati wrote that the pope's ancestor was a certain Bacchus Piccolominis, an ally of the Etruscan king Porsenna; other imaginative genealogies were proposed later²⁰. Piccolomini himself, basing his inferences on nomenclature, is somewhat more circumspect in his *Commentaries*. He follows up the citation quoted above from book 1 with further information in the fifth book. Therein he confirms that the Piccolomini had migrated from Rome to Siena and adds that this origin is demonstrated by the frequency of the names Aeneas and Sylvius attributed to members of the family (5, 4):

Nam et nos ab origine Romani sumus. Piccolominea domus, quae nos genuit, Senas ex hac urbe migravit, sicut Aeneadum Silviorumque nomen in familia nostra frequentissimum indicat.

For we too are originally Roman. The house of Piccolomini, to which we belong, moved to Siena from this city, as the names Enea and Silvio so frequent in our family show (GRAGG trans.).

Not only the Piccolomini family but also the town of Siena has a Roman origin, as Pius states in another chapter of the *Commentaries* (2, 13, 1):

¹⁷ Virgil's influence on the Latin of the *Commentaries* is explored by N. SEEBER, *Enea Vergilianus. Vergilisches in den "Kommentaren" des Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pius II)*, Innsbruck 1997.

¹⁸ PIUS II, *Commentaries*, ed. by M. MESERVE-M. SIMONETTA, Cambridge, MA and London 2003 (Books 1-2), 2007 (Books 3-4).

¹⁹ See R. MUCCIARELLI, *Piccolomini a Siena. XIII-XIV secolo. Ritratti possibili*, Pisa, 2015.

²⁰ See R. MUCCIARELLI, *L'Archivio Piccolomini. Alle origini di una famiglia magnatizia: discendenze fantastiche e architetture nobilitanti*, in *Bollettino Senese di Storia Patria* 104 (1997), pp. 357-376.

Urbs Senarum in Etruria admodum nobilis est, et agrum late patentem possidet. De conditoribus eius multa referuntur fabulosa; verum origo gentis a Romanis est atque ab his insigne Lupae receptum et infantes gemini pendentes ab ubere.

Siena is a celebrated city of Tuscany. Its territories are extensive. There are various marvelous tales of its foundation, but the truth is that the people trace their origins back to Rome and it is from there that they took their device of the she-wolf suckling twins. (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve])

The link between Piccolomini and Virgil's Aeneas highlights their common Roman mission. Both Aeneases begin their mission with a trip: that from Troy to Italy told by Virgil and the trip of the young Piccolomini to the Council of Basel. Both journeys are characterized by wandering, geographical but also moral. In the *Aeneid* the storm pushes the Trojans to Africa, where Aeneas is seduced by Dido and for a certain period of time forgets his mission. Enea Piccolomini began his career as the secretary of Cardinal Domenico Capranica and went with him to Basel to take part in the council. As it was not possible to take the land route from Siena, they decided to go by ship from the Tuscan port of Piombino to Genoa through the Tyrrhenian Sea²¹. But the ship was caught in a violent storm and driven toward Africa in sight of the Libyan coast. This presents an obvious parallel with Virgil's Aeneas and Carthage. In spite of the apparent inevitability of a shipwreck, a miraculous wind pushes the ship northward so that Piccolomini and the other passengers were able to reach Porto Venere, not far from Genoa (1, 3):

At cum Genuam tenderent, ingentis iactatis procellis, in conspectum Libiae delati sunt, timentibus admodum nautis ne barbaris portibus redderentur. Quamvis mirabile dictu et auditu prope incredibile, certum tamen est una die ac nocte ab Italia solventes Ilvam et Corsicam in Africam propulsos, rursus mutatis ventis retrovectos inter Corsicam et Sardiniam, fluctuantes magis quam navigantes ad Italiam reversos, Portum Veneris appulisse.

As they were making for Genua, however, violent gales blew up and drove them off their course to within sight of the African coast. The sailors were terrified, sure they would end up in a barbarian port. Marvelous and almost incredible as it sounds, it is nonetheless true that after leaving Italy, in a single day and night they were driven between Elba and Corsica to Africa and then, when the wind changed, drifted rather than sailed back again between Corsica and Sardinia, to put in at Porto Venere. (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve])

Piccolomini had already described his trip many years earlier, in the letter of 28 February 1432, written after the trip and addressed to Tommaso della Gazzazia, *podestà* of Piombino. In this letter he had spoken of storms and deviations, but notably not of Africa:

navem igitur ingressi ventorum inopportunitate Corsicam partemque Sardiniae circumivimus nocte non amplius una et summo mane applicuimus ad portum Veneris²².

²¹ On the trip, see A. WHITE, *Plague and Pleasure. The Renaissance World of Pius II*, Washington D.C. 2014, pp. 65-66.

²² R. WOLKAN (ed.), *Der Briefwechsel des Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini*, Wien 1909, p. 4 n. 4.

Having embarked, we were driven by the wind and went around Corsica and part of Sardinia for most of a night, and, late the next morning, we reached Porto Venere²³.

The version provided in the *Commentaries* is clearly suggested by the wanderings of Aeneas in the first book of Virgil's *Aeneid*²⁴. A similar use of the same episode of the *Aeneid* was also adopted by Bartolomeo Facio in his *Rerum gestarum Alfonsi regis libri*²⁵, describing the voyage undertaken by King Alfonso of Naples to Tunis in 1432²⁶.

What is the meaning of the evident similarity between Piccolomini's journey and that of Virgil's Aeneas, and what was Pius suggesting to his readers? In Virgilian exegesis, the African sojourn and the love affair with Dido were usually considered an error committed by Aeneas, a deviation from his moral mission. In the case of Piccolomini, the error is the conciliarist view he adopted in Basel, a position he repudiated in the years that followed, as we have seen. The miracle that happened to Piccolomini when he avoided a shipwreck and consequent capture by the Saracens is the Christian equivalent of the protection accorded by Venus to Virgil's Aeneas. Thus, it is by no means insignificant that Piccolomini mentions Porto Venere, where he lands, a name that reminds the reader that Venus was the mother of Aeneas and that she watched over her son's mission.

The genealogical descent of Aeneas from Venus is mentioned by Piccolomini himself some chapters later, where he observes that his election as pope assured peace for the Church and Rome, formerly troubled by conflicts, and adopts Venus as the symbol of peace, and Mars as that of war (1, 36, 32):

max ut certior factus est populus Aeneae pontificatu obvenisse, deposita sunt arma adeoque mutata Urbis facies ut quae paulo ante Martis, evestigio, non dicam Veneris – Troiani quondam Aeneae matris – sed pacis et quietis civitas effecta est, ubique laeta et secura.

But now, with the news that the papacy had gone to Aeneas, the atmosphere was completely changed. What had been a city of Mars all at once became a city of – well, I will not say of Venus, mother of Aeneas of Troy – but a city of Peace and of quiet. Everywhere, joy and tranquility reigned. (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve])

The first Aeneas mentioned here is Piccolomini, the second is the hero of the *Aeneid*: the close proximity of the references reminds the reader not only of their homonymic similarity, but also of the parallel of their mission of peace, and invites him/her to read the whole *Commentaries* as a new *Aeneid*, an *Aeneid* of the fifteenth century.

There are in fact in the *Commentaries* several episodes similar to those of the *Aeneid*, which can be considered more or less directly allusive. This narrative technique aimed at enriching Piccolomini's biography with episodes that echoed those of Virgil's Aeneas.

²³ IZBICKI, CHRISTIANSON and KREY, *Reject Aeneas*, cit., p. 61.

²⁴ ENEA SILVIO PICCOLOMINI, *op. cit.* (2008), p. 1196, thinks that Pius echoed an episode of Livius (known to Biondo Flavio) in which the consul T. Claudius leaving from Populonia is pushed by a storm to Corsica and Sardinia (30, 39).

²⁵ BARTOLOMEO FACIO, *Rerum gestarum Alfonsi regis libri*, ed. by D. PIETRAGALLA, Alessandria 2004, p. 132 (the work was written between 1450-1457).

²⁶ See G. ABBAMONTE, *Considerazioni sulla presenza dei modelli classici nella narrazione storica di Bartolomeo Facio*, in *Reti Medievali* 12, 1 (2012), pp. 107-130 (pp. 123-126).

Also, before his election as pope, Piccolomini had sometimes referred to the *Aeneid* in relation to his own political career. In a letter to Cardinal Juan Carvajal, written in 1433, he compares himself to the hero Aeneas and Pope Eugenius to Anchises:

Erat animus meus, postquam ex Basilea recessi, super rebus ecclesie perpetuo uti silentio, cum eas non ex divini spiritus ductu regi, sed hominum gubernari passionibus viderem. Tu nunc me cogis aliqua dicere, qui armatum Aeneam imitari me suades [...]. Hec volui tibi dixisse cum venia tua, quia aut non loquor, aut ver loquor. Hic est armatus Aeneas, hunc geram, ille mihi Anchises erit, quem universalis ecclesiae consensus dederit, dum Germania, que orbis Christiano major pars est, here²⁷.

It was my intention after I had left Basel to observe a lasting silence about ecclesiastical affairs when I saw they were ruled not by the leading of the Holy Spirit but by human passions. You now force me to say something, you who advise me to emulate the armed Aeneas. [...] I wanted to say these things to you with your indulgence, this is Aeneas armed. I will play him; he will be my Anchises whom the consensus of the universal Church will have selected, while Germany, which is the greater part of the Christian world goes along (IZBICKI, CHRISTIANSON, KREY trans.)²⁸.

Though the comparison between Piccolomini and Virgil's Aeneas seems to have been proposed by Carvajal, Piccolomini himself enriches the simile with that of the pope and Anchises, useful in his adherence to the pope's policy²⁹.

In the *Commentaries*, although the *Aeneid* is rarely mentioned, its presence is massive. It can be felt, for instance, in the account of the pope's meeting with the duke of Urbino Federico di Montefeltro, held near Tivoli in July 1461³⁰. The duke asks the pope if the weapons of the ancients were similar to those used in the present day. Pius replies affirmatively and says that poets like Virgil and Homer, although inventing some things, are not too far from the truth (5, 26)³¹:

Federicus, qui multa legisset, interrogare Pontificem an prisca duces aequae ac nostri temporis armati fuissent. Pontifex et in Homero et in Virgilio genus omne armorum inveniri descriptum dicere, quibus nostra utitur aetas, et alia multa quae obseverunt. Poetas, etsi fingunt aliqua, ea tamen plerumque describere quae in usu aliquando fuerant, neque prorsus a vero discedere.

Federico, who was well read, asked the Pope whether the captains of antiquity had been armed as ours were. The Pope answered that in Homer and Vergil could be found descriptions of every kind of weapon which our age used and of many others which had gone out of fashion (GRAGG trans.).

²⁷ WOLKAN, *Der Briefwechsel*, cit., pp. 209-211 (n. 92).

²⁸ IZBICKI-CHRISTIANSON-KREY, *Reject Aeneas*, cit., pp. 171-174.

²⁹ On the political context of the letter, see T.M. IZBICKI, 'Reject Aeneas'. *Pius II on the Errors of His Youth, in Pius II, "el più expeditivo pontifice." Selected Studies on Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini (1405-1464)*, ed. by Z. VON MARTELS-A. VANDERJAGT, Leiden 2003, pp. 187-203.

³⁰ On the episode, see G. FRANCESCHINI, *Quattro brevi di Pio secondo a Federico da Montefeltro*, in ENEA SILVIO PICCOLOMINI, *op. cit.* (2008), pp. 133-175 (p. 154); C.-E. NAVILLE, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini. L'uomo, l'umanista, il pontefice*, Locarno 1984, pp. 260-261.

³¹ Piccolomini presupposes the distinction between *historia* ("history") and *fabula* ("fiction") he read in the Virgilian commentary of Servius (see F. STOK, *Servio, l'epica e la storia*, in *Rationes rerum. Rivista di filologia e storia* 8 [2016], pp. 99-117).

In the same chapter Pius is happy to watch the performances of some armed youths, an episode clearly based, as Enekel has observed³², on the *lusus Troiae* in the fifth book of the *Aeneid*.

Other episodes of the fifth book are used by Pius in the descriptions of the games organized in honour of the pope on the Lake of Bolsena and at Pienza, Piccolomini's birthplace. In Pienza there are horse and donkey races, and on the lake there is a game of boats organized by the Farnese family (8, 10):

Gabriele Farnesius, qui loci dominus esset, ut festum redderet celebrius, his praemia posuit qui navium cursu certaturi adventarent.

Gabriele Farnese, lord of the place, to make the feast more numerously attended, offered prizes for any who would come and engage in boat races (GRAGG trans.).

The use of the *Aeneid* in the description of these games is extensive.³³ It will suffice to provide a few examples of Piccolomini's reprise of Virgil in the episode of the boat race.

The oarsmen are virtually naked and gleam with oil; their arms strain at the oars as they wait for the starting signal (8, 10):

remiges: nudi omnes praeter obscenas partes, et oleo perfusi nitentes, extentiis ad remos brachiis, signum in transtris expectant.

The rowers, who were naked except for loin cloths and glistening with oil. On their benches, with arms extended toward the oars, they awaited the signal (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve]).

Almost the same words are to be found in the *Aeneid* (5, 135-37):

*nudatosque umeros oleo perfusa nitescit [scil. inventus].
Considunt transtris intentaque brachia remis;
intenti expectant signum...*

and their bare shoulders glisten once drenched with oil. They sit upon their thwarts, and they stretch out their arms to the oars; as they listen intently for the signal... (FRATANTUONO/SMITH trans.³⁴).

Piccolomini also draws from Virgil in the following line, *pulsat corda pavor et ingens arripit mentes cupido laudis* (8, 10) ("their hearts beat fast with excitement and they were carried away with a mighty longing for glory"), which echoes the following line of Virgil: *corda pavor pulsans laudumque arrecta cupido* (*Aen.* 5, 138). And so on in the whole episode.

³² K.A.E. ENENKEL, *Die Erfindung des Menschen. Die Autobiographik der frühneuzeitlichen Humanismus from Petrarca bis Lipsius*, Berlin and New York 2008, pp. 328-329.

³³ See SEEBER, *Enea Vergilianus*, cit., pp. 20-41.

³⁴ L.M. FRATANTUONO-R.A. SMITH, *Virgil, Aeneid 5: Text Translation and Commentary*, Leiden 2015, p. 94.

It is noteworthy that in both the episodes of games the pope watches them gladly and with pleasure, but at the same time he is also looking after public affairs with the cardinals (he seems to allude, with these notations, to the ancient notions of *otium* and *negotia*):

Pontifex, quamvis procul a portu, loco reducto, cum cardinalibus de republica loqueretur, scapharum tamen contentionem et cursum non sine iucunditate et animi relaxatione spectavit (8, 10).

Although the Pope was in a quiet spot some distance from the harbour discussing political matters with the cardinals, still he beheld the boat race with pleasure and amusement (GRAGG trans.).

Haec Pontifex ex altissima fenestra cum cardinalibus non sine iocunditate spectavit, quamvis interea de publicis negotiis consultaret (9, 26).

The Pope watched these contests from a very high window with a good deal of pleasure though while they were going on he was consulting with the cardinals on public business (GRAGG trans.).

One of the most impressive analogies between the *Aeneid* and the *Commentaries* is the long list of prodigies and prophecies concerning Virgil's Aeneas and Aeneas Silvius³⁵. Piccolomini's providential role is highlighted by episodes of this type. The first, already mentioned, occurred during the sea trip to Genoa. Another episode took place during the Council of Basel. Aeneas caught the plague: he knew that physicians could not cure this illness, but he was saved by the *pietas* of God (1, 9, 4-5):

Sed neque sibi pestis ignovit [...] Aeneas fortunam scientiae praetulit, quia morbi pestiferi incertam esse curam sciebat [...] Sed, miserante divina pietate, post sex dies Aeneas convaleuit.

The Plague did not spare Aeneas either [...] Aeneas preferred luck to learning—reflecting that no one really knows how to cure the plague [...] But after six days, by God's mercy, he recovered. (Gragg trans. [rev. Meserve])

Pius echoes two episodes of the *Aeneid*: in book 3 the Trojans are surprised by a plague on the island of Crete and are forced to leave after the Penates appear to Aeneas (3, 135-42): in book 12, Aeneas is wounded, but the physician Iapyx cannot cure his wound (12, 391-406) (The hero is instead healed by Venus (12, 411-19).

I will only mention a few other examples. Pius had to visit a Franciscan monastery on an island in Lake Trasimene. There was a storm, but when Pius approached the boat, the wind suddenly became calm, by a sort of miracle (*quasi divino nutu*):

Exagitaverat pluribus diebus, cum eo pervenit pontifex, aquas lacus valida tempestas ita ut navigandi nulla pateret facultas. Tum vero, quasi divino nutu, repente vis omnis ventorum conquievit et intranti navigijum Praesuli velut animal domitum sese praeibuit mare, et undique sedatis fluctibus mira tranquillitate oborta, adeo ut ingens captura piscinum facta sit dum navigatur in insulam, in qua Pontifex apud religiosos divi Francisci monachos pernoctavit. (2, 19, 2)

³⁵ See L. TOTARO, *Pio II nei suoi Commentarii*, Bologna 1978, pp. 22-29.

For several days before the pope's arrival the lake had been stirred up by a storm so severe that it made sailing impossible but now, as if in deference to divine will, the violence of the winds subsided. When the pope stepped on board his ship, the sea submitted to him like a tamed beast. As the waves died down, the lake grew so extraordinarily still that they took a huge catch of fish as they crossed over to the island where Pius spent the night with the Franciscans. (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve])

A similar situation occurred on another occasion, during the celebration organized for the transfer of the body of St. Andrew from Greece to Rome. On 11 April 1462 the body was brought to the Milvian Bridge. Pius had organized a solemn procession for the following day to escort the Saint's body into town, but it had been raining for several days and continued to rain during the night. In the morning the sky suddenly became serene, and Pius, in commenting on the miracle, recalls an epigram erroneously attributed to Virgil, but at that time considered authentic (8, 2)³⁶:

Rogabant autem universi Deum ut serenitatem in crastinum elargiretur. Quos non audire noluit divina miseratio. Et verosimile est impetrasse beatum Andream suo capiti placidum tempus, qui exauditus est pro sua dignitate. Subito enim paulo ante solis exortum, sive Aquilo fuit, sive Boreas aut alius ventus, nubes omnes pepulit et coelum nitidum serenumque reddidit. Et sol ipse splendidus ac supra modum fulgidus apparuit in Orienti, ita ut meminerint multi, et praecipue Pontifex ipse, illius distichi: "Nocte pluuit tota, redeunt spectacula mane. / Divisum imperium cum Iove Caesar habet". Sed mutavit Pius carmen dixitque circumstantibus: "Nocte pluuit tota, redierunt tempora nostra. / Nox fuit acta hostis, lux erit ista Dei". et subiunxit: "Humida praeteriit tempestas, sicca reversa est. / Nox inimica abiit, luxit amica dies".

But now the whole city began to implore God to vouchsafe clear weather on the morrow and the Divine Mercy was not deaf to their prayers. Indeed, it is probable that St. Andrew was listened to as befitted his dignity and obtained calm weather for his head. For suddenly a little before sunrise Aquilo or Borea or some other wind scattered the clouds leaving the sky bright and clear and the sun himself appeared in the East extraordinarily dazzling and radiant, so that many, especially the Pope himself, recalled the couplet "It rained all night; the shows are resumed in the morning. Caesar divides his empire with Jove." But Pius altered the verses and said to those about him: "It rained all night; now our weather has returned. The past night was the enemy's; the day will be God's." And he added: "The wet weather is past; the dry has returned. The hostile night has gone; the friendly day has shone." (GRAGG trans.).

Pius not only quoted the epigram attributed to Virgil, but he himself proposes on this occasion a Christian variation of the distich, where Caesar is replaced by God: *Nox fuit acta hostis, lux erit ista Dei*, giving the distich a marked allegorical meaning, according to which the night becomes a symbol of paganism, and the light represents the Christian Age. Pius himself adds another variation of Virgil's distich, *Humida praeteriit tempestas* and so on, less allegorically characterized. Here, Piccolomini seems obliquely to remind the reader that in 1443 he was crowned poet laureate in Germany by the Emperor Frederick III.

³⁶ The epigram is included in the *Anthologia Latina* published by RIESE (n. 256) and by SHACKLETON BAILEY (n. 250).

Pius recalls the same epigram on another occasion, a sort of repetition of the miracle that occurred some days later, on Easter Day. Further, in this case the rainy night is followed by a sunny morning and the Pope proposes a new Christian variation of the epigram (8, 3): *Nocte pluit tota reddit sed mane serenum. / Nox fuit en Sathanae lux erit ista Dei* (“It rained all night, but in the morning there was clear weather. / The night was the Devil’s, the day will be God’s”).

It should be noted that in rewriting the first line Pius was indebted to a version of the pseudo-Virgilian epigram different from the one reproduced in 8, 2 (see above): *Nocte pluit tota, redeunt spectacula mane: / divisum imperium cum Iove, Caesar, habes*. This version is probably more ancient than that of the Salmasian manuscripts published by Riese³⁷ and was spread in the fifteenth century by several manuscripts. It was clearly known to the work of Pius³⁸, who used it in his further rewriting of the epigram.

Besides miracles the mission of Pius in the *Commentaries* is also characterized by prophecies. One of them regards the election of Aeneas to the papacy, which was predicted by a man of Catalonia, who before the election had dreamed that Aeneas would become pope (1, 37, 2):

Mirabilis illud fuit: Catbelanus quidam, dum essent in conclavi cardinales electiones celebrantes, accersitis ex familia cardinalis Senensis Iohanne physico et nonnullis aliis: “Haec – inquit – dominus vester eligitur”. Percunctantibus, quo pacto id sciret, respondit: “Vidi hac nocte per quietem cardinales sacellum intrantes, in quo fit electio, omnesque vestrarum dominum introducere tamquam pontificem futurum [...]. Estote boni animi, mox cardinalem Senensem pronuntiarum audietis!”. Prophetiam paulo post secuta est res.

Even more extraordinary, when the cardinals were still in the conclave celebrating the result of the election, a certain Catalan summoned some of Aeneas’s servants and his doctor Giovanni to his side and said: “Your master will be chosen this very hour”. When they demanded to know how he knew this, he replied: “Last night I had a dream. I saw the cardinals entering the chapel where the votes are taken. They all led your master in, as though he would be pope [...] So be of good cheer: soon you shall hear the name of Siena proclaimed!”. And shortly thereafter, the prophecy was fulfilled (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve]).

Another prophecy regards the congress of the Christian princes organized by Pius in Mantua. The aim of the meeting was to prepare the crusade against the Turks, who six years earlier had conquered Constantinople. Pius organized the meeting in northern Italy to accommodate the arrival of the European princes and initially took into consideration two possible locations, Mantua and Udine, but he soon became sceptical about Udine, considering the ambiguous politics of Venice towards the Turks (Udine was in the territory of the Republic of Venice). But in choosing Mantua Pius of course bore in mind that it was Virgil’s birthplace.

That the meeting had to be held in Mantua was foreseen, affirms Piccolomini, in an “ancient prophecy” on future popes, where it was written that Virgil of Mantua celebrated Aeneas of Troy, and that Aeneas of Siena would enrich the town of Virgil (2, 2, 3):

³⁷ See F. STOK, *Gli epigrammi virgiliani del Salmasiano*, in press.

³⁸ See P. DE PAOLIS, *Sic vos non vobis. A proposito di un episodio sospetto della biografia virgiliana del Donatus auctus*, in *Sileno* 39 (2013), pp. 97-114, in particular p. 105.

Ferunt in scriptis vatum pervetustis, in quibus Romanorum praesulum tempora praedicuntur, cum Pii secundi propheta subnectitur, haec verba reperiri: "Et tu, Mantua, exaltaberis. Ita Deo placitum, nec falli numina possunt. Virgilius Mantuanus Aeneam Troianum cecinit; Aeneas Senensis Virgilii patriam ditavit".

It is said that in the ancient books of prophecies where the reigns of the popes are foretold, the oracle on Pius II proclaims: "And thou, Mantua, shall be exalted. So it has pleased God. The spirits cannot be wrong, Virgil of Mantua sang the tale of Aeneas of Troy, and Aeneas of Siena enriched the city of Virgil" (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve]).

The importance of Mantua in Piccolomini's autobiography is highlighted by the narrative of his journey to the city in May of 1459, described as a sort of pilgrimage to the birthplace of Virgil. Pius knew the medieval identification of Andes, the toponym mentioned by the ancient commentators of Virgil, with the village of Pietole, which he saw from the boat before arriving in Mantua (2, 43, 1):

Postera die ad ostium Mintii fluminis perventum et in stagnum usque navigatum, in cuius sinistro litore tumulus ostenditur sacer habitus, in quo divini Maronis fuisse lares affirmant. Villa circum parva iacet, quae tantum peperit vatem.

The following day the pope arrived at the mouth of the Mincio and sailed up-river as far as the lake. On the left-hand shore there is a hill that the Mantuans hold sacred, for they say that this was where the divine Vergil made his home. At the base of the hill lies the little village where the great poet was born (GRAGG trans. [rev. Meserve]).

The *tumulus* where he locates the home of Virgil was the so-called *mons Virgilii*, "mount of Virgil"³⁹.

The Congress of Mantua was the most important political initiative undertaken by Pius to promote a crusade against the Turks. The Christian states were rather circumspect regarding the pope's initiative, and in the *Commentaries* Pius frequently polemicizes about France, Florence, Venice and others. The relationship between the pope and the Republic of Venice was complicated by the latter's expansionism in central Italy, into territories owned by the Church. Moreover, the political relations offer Pius opportunities to use Virgil's *Aeneid*: in his polemic against Venice's government he presents the Venetians as the heirs of Antenor, who desire to replace the empire founded by the heirs of Aeneas with a new Antenorid empire (11, 16):

Novam fondare monarchiam Venetus satagit, et iam iam sibi Romanam persuadet fortunam. Aeneadam genus, a Troia profectum, olim rerum potitum, succedere iam Antenoridas, quorum filii sunt Veneti.

The Venetian is bent on founding a new monarchy; he is already convinced that the destiny of Rome is his; the descendants of Aeneas, who of old set out from Troy and became the masters of the world, were succeeded by the Antenoridae whose sons the Venetians are (GRAGG trans.).

³⁹ See B. NARDI, *Mantuanitas vergiliana*, Rome 1963, pp. 118-119.

Pius obviously knew of Virgil's mention of Antenor in the first book of the *Aeneid* (1, 242-44) and from the Virgilian commentaries he knew that Antenor was accused of having betrayed Troy and had agreed to escape from the city with the help of the Greeks. The descent of the Veneti from Antenor is also mentioned by Pius in the ethnographic digression about Venice (5, 26).

The antagonism between Aeneas and Antenor in the twelfth book was re-proposed by the ambassador of Florence, who was against the crusade. He warns Pius that the real winner of the crusade would be the Republic of Venice, the enemy of the other Italian states and of the pope himself. He adds that the Venetians are the heirs of Antenor, rivals of the heirs of Aeneas (12, 30):

Nosti superbiam gentis et insatiabilem dominandi cupiditatem. Succedere Romanis se iactitant et imperium orbis sibi deberi. Aeneae Troiani suo tempore imperasse; nunc Antenoris posteritati, quam sibi arrogat, monarchiam deberi.

You know that people's pride and insatiable greed of power. It is their continual boast that they are the successors of the Romans and that the sovereignty of the world belongs to them. They say that the successors of Trojan Aeneas ruled in their time but that now the sovereignty belongs to the descendants of Antenor and they claim it for themselves (GRAGG trans.).

It is difficult to know if the ambassador really used this argument, or if the speech was modified by Pius, as he frequently did in the *Commentaries*, imitating the usage of the ancient historians. The argument was in any case in line with Pius's view, who at this time showed a more positive attitude toward Venice, which was now more worried about the expansionism of the Turks in the Balkans and was organizing military actions against them in Greece. The alliance between Venice and the pope was handled by Cardinal Bessarion, resulting in the doge promising the pope the ships necessary for the crusade. These developments justify Pius's reply to the Florentine ambassador: in fact, he responded that an improbable conquest of Italy by the Venetians would in any case be preferable to a conquest by the Turks (12, 30):

Esto subigat Italiam Venetus, quod factu difficillimum est: quid ais? Venetis an Turchis parere mavis?

Are you going to wage war on the Turks that you may force Italy to be subject to the Venetians? (GRAGG trans.).

The choice of Mantua as the seat of the congress gave Pius the opportunity to present himself not only as the heir of Aeneas, but even of Virgil himself. A comparison between Pius and Virgil had already been provided by the above-mentioned prophecy of Pius enriching Mantua. Other clues also validate the proposition of Piccolomini as a new Virgil: he too wrote his greatest work (the *Commentaries*) in old age, after some ludic and risqué works in his youth. The Virgilian figuration of Pius is discernible also in the speech to the Cardinals, which he delivered on 23 September 1463. In this speech Pius announced his intention to lead the crusade against the Turks himself, despite his old age (12, 31):

Ascendemus navem, quamvis senes morbisque conquassati. Dabimus vela ventis atque in Graeciam et Asiam navigabimus.

We will embark, old as we are and racked with sickness. We will set our sails and voyage to Greece and Asia (GRAGG trans.).

When he writes *in Graeciam et Asiam navigabimus*, Pius is echoing Donatus's *Life of Virgil* regarding Virgil's last voyage: *statuit in Graeciam et in Asiam secedere*, "decided to sail to Greece and Asia"⁴⁰. Pius also foresees, in the same speech, his own death (12, 31):

scimus rem senio nostro pergravem esse nosque ad certam quodammodo mortem profecturos.

we know that it will be a crushing burden for our old age and that we shall in a sense be going to certain death (GRAGG trans.).

Pius foreseeing his own death seems to confirm his own identification with Virgil: Donatus recounts that the poet died after his return from Greece, in the port of Brindisi. Pius also died in a port, that of Ancona, on 14 August 1464, but this occurred before his departure, not, as perhaps he would have preferred, upon his return from a successful crusade, fought not against Turnus but against Turks.

ABSTRACT

Nell'articolo è esaminato l'uso che Piccolomini fa di Virgilio e dell'*Eneide* nei suoi *Commentarii*. Egli non solo adatta alla propria autobiografia il ruolo provvidenziale che Virgilio assegna nel suo poema ad Enea, ma utilizza anche la biografia di Virgilio quale modello della propria biografia.

The article examines Piccolomini's use of Virgil in his Commentaries: he not only adapts and assigns to himself, in his own autobiography, the providential role attributed by Virgil to Aeneas, but also uses Virgil's biography as a model for his own biography.

KEYWORDS: Piccolomini; Aeneas; Virgil; Commentaries; *Aeneid*.

Fabio Stok
Università di Roma Tor Vergata
fabio.stok@uniroma2.it

⁴⁰ *Vita Vergili* 35 (p. 33, 6-7 Stok).