WHERE WAS THE BIRTHPLACE OF POMPONIO LETO?

In the wake of past attempts to identify Pomponio Leto’s birthplace in different locations in Southern Italy a fresh review of the evidence is offered, including the lives by the Pomponian disciples Petrus Marsus, Michael Fernus and Marcus Antonius Sabellicus; Giovanni Pontano’s and Pietro Ranzano’s accounts; records by contemporary diarists; a heading in a manuscript; and sixteenth-century histories. It is suggested that Pomponio’s own phrase ut Calaber noster Ennius was intended to give news of Ennius’ origins thanks to the rediscovery of Silius’ Punic. The sources for Pomponio’s origins are then reassessed and a strong case is made for Teggiano in Campania.

In this article I examine whether the earlier of the two subscriptions in Pomponio Leto’s manuscript of Lucretius (N, f. 155v), which suggests connections with southern Italy for Pomponio before 1459, sheds light on the somewhat scanty evidence for his origins. Tradition has it that he was born an illegitimate son of Duke Giovanni of Sanseverino in Teggiano (olim Diano) in what is now southeastern Campania. But since no documentary evidence for Pomponio’s life...
before 1457 has survived, over time various persons and places have laid claim to the great humanist scholar as their scion: Pomponio’s friend Petrus Marsus (1441-1511) assigns him to the Sanseverino family and their stronghold of Teggiano; a selection of other fifteenth-century and some sixteenth-century sources to the ager Picentinus, Amendolara and Pisticci in present-day Campania, Basilicata and Calabria; other contemporaries of Pomponio’s refer to ‘Calabria’. Most recently a Calabrian ‘self-reference’ has been detected in his earliest known work, De praeteritis et supinis (composed between 1 August 1457 and 31 July 1458), which is preserved in Ven. f. 94r-99v. But attempts to ascertain the authenticity of these reported origins have faced a lack of concrete evidence; the reports mostly derive from pupils’ and friends’ reminiscences, which are not the most objective of accounts and require careful analysis. Yet it is profitable to investigate how these tales about Pomponio’s early life were born, since in analysing how particular stories come into being we sometimes find threads of evidence. I therefore propose to contextualise the new evidence from N with a fresh evaluation of these accounts, so that we are better placed to interpret and apply the new data to our knowledge of Pomponio.

Even before the studies of Isidoro Carini (1894), Arnaldo Della Torre (1903), and Vladimir Zabughin (1909-1912), historians argued about Pomponio’s origins precisely because there is no solid evidence for where he came from or how his career developed before 1457. Naturally Pomponio’s own reticence has fuelled speculation concerning the stories about his Sanseverino descent and the variety of reported birthplaces without confirming their veracity. Let us review the evidence.

First, there is the heading POMPONI LAETI DIANIEN. DE REGIONIBUS ET VRBIS VETUSTATIBUS DESCRIPTIO in the late fifteenth-century manuscript Barb. (unsigned and undated), which is not the authoritative proof of provenance from Teggiano that Zabughin supposed it to be. Scribal headings do not guarantee authenticity.


1 Petrus Marsus, Funebris oratio habita Rome in obitu Pomponii Laeti (HR 10792; IGI IV, 6210; GW M21197), assigned to Petrus de Turre and dated after 10 June 1498 by Tommaso Accurti, according to Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Incunabula, ed. W.J. Sheehan, II, Città del Vaticano 1997 (Studi e testi, 381), 836 n° M-144. BSB-Ink (M-187) assigns to Johann Besicken not before May 21 1497. The oratio is edited in M. Dykmans, L’Humanisme de Pierre Marso, Vatican City 1988 (Studi e Testi, 327), 79-85 n. 69-82; see Accame, Pomponio Leto, 72-74.

2 For these Sanseverino feudal holdings see P.L.M. Leone, ‘La patria di Giulio Pomponio Leto’, Annali del Dipartimento di Scienze storiche, Università di Lecce, 2 (1983), 129-36: 133.


5 For the manuscript see Codices Barberiniani Latini: Codices 1-150, rec. S. Prete, Vatican
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truth: for example, we do not know on what grounds the scribe included the toponym Dianiensis. Was his source Pomponio? Or had he read Marsus’s attribution and considered it authoritative enough to be worth following? Or was he simply repeating hearsay? And was his reason for including the toponym simply to appear more authoritative (as was many scribes’ wont when supplying information in headings)? While it is pointless to speculate, we should remember that all paratextual remarks of scribes, including titles, headings and attributions of authorship, should be treated with caution until endorsed by strong evidence.

Next, there are the ‘lives’ written by three of Pomponio’s friends and disciples, all of whom considered him to be of southern Italian stock. Petrus Marsus, a lecturer on poetry at the Studium Vrbis, crafted a hypertrophic Funeris Oratio; Michael Fernus (c. 1465-1513), a Pomponian protégé and antiquarian at Rome, wrote an Elogium Pomponii as a letter to his friend Jacopus Antiquarius of Milan; the historian Marcus Antonius Coccius Sabellicus (1436-1506), who had left Rome in 1472 and had resided in Venice since 1484, included a Vita Pomponii in the letter dedicating his edition of Pomponio’s ‘Caesares’ to Marcantonio Morosini in Julius Pomponius Laetus, Compendium Historiae Romanae, Venice: Bernardinus de Vitalibus, 1499 (GW M16674, BMC V 549). These three pupil-biographers offer consensus on Pomponio’s noble pedigree but not on his birthplace: they suggest Dianium Lucaniae oppidum... in cutis veluti sacrario quodam et luco... Pomponius noster... natus est, inclyto quidem patre Ioanne, Sancti Severini et Marsci (ut nunc appellant) comite (Marsus); the Sanseverino barons are again nominated by Fernus in: [Pomponius] natus erat... Salernorum principum clarissimo de sanguine. Sabellicus, who does not name the family has: ortus est Pomponius... in Calabris... Clarum in familia stemma sed in quo tantus vir non sit legitime natus. The assigning of Pomponio to Giovanni Duke of Sanseverino by Marsus, and its possible echoes in Fernus and Sabellicus, fits well with the birthplaces of Diano (Teggiano) and the province of Salerno, but less so with Sabellicus’s ‘Calabri’.


3 See Marsus, Funeris oratio, ed. Dyxmans, 81 n. 72; Fernus, Elogium historicum, ed. Fabricius, 629; Accame, Pomponio Leto, 24.

The assignings to birthplaces continue. A few years after the publication of Sabellicus’s *Vita*, the Neapolitan scholar Giovanni Gioviano Pontano refers to Pomponio’s origins in *De Sermone* (c. 1503), naming the Sanseverino family and their territories within *Lucania* and *Brutia* (sic). Another of Pomponio’s contemporaries, the Sicilian Pietro Ranzano (1426/7-1492/3), who had studied in Rome and claimed to know Pomponio, Lorenzo Valla and Pietro Odo well, reports Amendolara (on the borders of modern-day Calabria and Basilicata) but does not substantiate any grounds. Nor does Leandro Alberti (1479-1553), repeating Ranzano’s suggestion. Nor do Giovanni Pietro Russo and Giacomo Alfieri in their *Libro negro della Terra di Pisticci* of 1567 (preserved in Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, 4479), nominating Pisticci (p. 162, 283). Paolo Giovio (1483-1552) in *Elogia doctorum viorum* (Antwerp 1557) suggests *Iulium Pomponium Laetum Sanseuerina illustri familia in Picentinis natum ferunt*, probably indicating the *ager Picentinus*, a Sanseverino possession near the Vallo di Diano.

The main problems with these sources lie in the fact that the heading in Barb. proves little; that most of the contemporary sources (except for Ranzano’s *Annales*) are biographies composed after Pomponio’s death; that the sixteenth-century writers may all of them be speculating on the basis of the Sanseverino story reported by Pomponio’s pupils; and that the variation in topographical names used complicates the task of analysis. The most recent contribution to the argument is the idea that Pomponio’s phrase *noster Calaber Ennius* in his grammatical work *De praeteritis et supinis* means he considered himself Calaber. This interpretation, as we shall see, is flawed. Since we have not one clear word from Pomponio on his origins, anyone assessing what Pomponio’s contemporaries chose to say about him should favour caution, and subject preassumptions to critical analysis.

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12 Ioannes Iovianus Pontanus, *De Sermone* VI, Naples 1509, f. g5v. The text has been edited in Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *De sermone libri VI*, ed. S. Lupi - S. Risicato, Padua 1954.


1. Questions of ancient and medieval geography

Pomponio’s listing of Neapolitan dominions in lines 5-7 of the freshly transcribed subscription in N (im<perit>a<n>e et magnificentissimo Ferdi<nan>do Campanorum, Apulorum, Lucanorum, S<ale>n<tinoru>m, Calabrorum Brutiorumque rege) has an impact on the evidence for his origins, particularly on the nocter Calaber argument. In this listing Pomponio not only suggests his connection with the Neapolitan kingdom but also identifies its territories with ancient ethnonyms. But when these are considered alongside the topographical references in the other sources, the variation in nomenclature that emerges raises fundamental questions concerning the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century usage of the ancient and medieval names for regions in Southern Italy. For example, by the Middle Ages the name ‘Calabria’ had been used for two entirely different regions, with the result that considerable ambiguity can arise: does a simple mention of ‘Calabria’ refer to ancient Calabria (in the ‘heel of the boot’) or to new Calabria (in the ‘toe of the boot’), which had been recognised since the eighth century\(^1\)? Does a simple use of the ethnonym Calaber refer to ancient Calabria or to new Calabria\(^1\)? Are all references to the ancient region of Lucania (now shared between Basilicata and Campania) accurate? Although Pomponio observed the contours of the ancient regions and generally observed ancient topography, his peers did not\(^1\). It therefore seemed sensible to consult the historical-geographical Italia Illustrata (c. 1448-1453) of Biondo Flavio, the most prominent fifteenth-century Italian learned historian of geography, in order to ascertain how he described the Southern Italian regions, how he handled the problems arising from conflicting ancient and medieval appellations, and whether he provides a benchmark for gauging his contemporaries’ observation of different names\(^2\). Given Biondo’s influence generally, one may reasonably assume that his readers will have attempted to use Italia Illustrata as a guide.

When perusing the editio princeps of Italia Illustrata I spotted that Biondo’s configuration of ancient southern regions at the beginning of his first section on

\(^{17}\) For the name-shift see Pomponius Mela, Description of the World, trans. F.E. ROMER, Michigan 1998, 87 n. 61. BIANCHI - RIZZO, ‘Manoscritti’, 639-40 and n. 142-43, distinguish only once between ancient Calabria (present-day Puglia and the penisola Salentina) and the area we today call Calabria (known in Antiquity as the territory of the Bruttii); hereafter they do not consistently apply the distinction. Scholars of Antiquity such as Pomponio observed ancient appellations.


\(^{19}\) For example, the Roman diarist Stefano Infessura, writing in both the vernacular and in Latin, refers to modern Calabria as ‘Calabria’ in both languages and to Puglia as ‘Puglia’ in the vernacular and ‘Apulia’ in Latin: e.g. Del 1477...a di 23 di iugnio lo duca di Calabria venne ad Roma; A di 2 d’agosto [1482] lo Turco venne con tante fuste in Puglia; [1482] barones auxilium a dicto rege ac duce Calabriac eius filio impetraverunt; [1492] eodem mense in Apulia apud Brandium miraculose repertus liber quidam sub terra clausus cum tabulis plumbeis; see S. INFESSURA, Diario della Città di Roma, ed. O. TOMMASINI, Rome 1890 [= Turin 1966] (Fonti per la storia d’Italia, 5), 82, 85, 90, 272.

\(^{20}\) It would be interesting to investigate Biondo’s influence on his readers’ perceptions of where places were and what their ancient names had been. The history of individual regional names tends to be particular to each region and falls outside the scope of this article.
Southern Italy (book 7.1: *Aprutium Regio Duodecima*) matched that in Pomponio’s subscription: *breuis... est traiectus ut alias a nobis describendas septem regiones aggrediamur: Samniun, Campaniam, Apuliam, Lucaniam, Salatinos, Calabros, et Brutios*. Here, Biondo orders his *septem regiones* – in fact he uses four ancient regional names and three ethnonyms whereas Pomponio uses only ethnonyms – in a zigzagging way along a medieval east-west axis, which contradicts the circular clockwise direction of the ordering of the Augustan Regions I (Latium and Campania), II (Calabria and Apulia), and III (Lucania and Bruttium) reported by Pliny the Elder. Prominently placed at the beginning of the Southern Italian section, the configuration of these ancient *septem regiones* provides an organisational underlayer that threatens to subvert Biondo’s division of Southern Italy into *Aprutium Regio XII, Campania Regio XIII* and *Apulia Regio XIV* as part of the overarching structure of *Italia Illustrata* into fourteen medieval regions (many of them based on ancient Roman provinces). Thus medieval geography often predominates over ancient geography in the structuring process of *Italia Illustrata*, but not in an orderly way. However, in giving the ancient *septem regiones* the common denomination of *regio* along with the official medieval regions, Biondo seems to treat them all equally, until one reads on to find that Lucania and the Salentini, Calabri and Brutii are accorded little weight. In fact Biondo never completed the Southern books – the work tails off and the regions of Basilicata, Calabria (modern), Sardinia and Sicilia are not even included in the overall structure – and one wonders what role Lucania and the Salentini, Calabri (ancient) and Brutii would have played in a more complete version. But the fact remains that the reader is offered a variety of different structuring systems for the Southern Italian provinces (i.e. medieval provinces, ancient Augustan regions, and ethnonyms introducing ancient peoples such as the Salentini who were overlooked by the Augustan system) without being presented with many obvious ways of connecting the different layers or resolving toponymic conflicts.

The effective hierarchy of medieval geography over ancient in Biondo’s *Italia Illustrata* was surely designed to meet a wider readership’s ideas of where boundaries were based on the restructuring of the geographical and cultural


22 Pliny, *Historia Naturalis*, III.70 (Campania), 71-74, 95-98 (Lucania and Bruttium), 99-102 (Calabria). *Samnium* (Regio IV Pliny, III.71 and 107) was excluded from the circle of southern regions in the Augustan system. For a stimulating account of relationships between ancient ethnonyms and Augustan geography see R. LAURENCE, ‘Territory, ethnonyms and geography: the construction of Roman identity in Roman Italy’, in *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, ed. R. LAURENCE - J. BERRY, London 1998, 95-110. Had Pomponio read Biondo? Or did they both independently follow ancient convention?

23 E.g. Romandiola, *Aprutium*, Marchia Tarvisina (all of which are medieval names).

24 A fuller examination of Biondo’s attempts to marry the ancient geographers’ modes of organizing the Southern Italian landscape with medieval geographers and of how far Biondo’s idea of Italian geography is medieval and how far ancient falls outside the scope of this article.

landscapes of Italy in the Middle Ages. Medieval names (albeit ancient in origin) were the commonest currency. However, for the scholars of Antiquity such as Pomponio, who always prioritised ancientness, Biondo’s application of the ancient geographers’ methodological and structural approaches (e.g. use of the coastline, description of cities within ancient ethnic localities) to the fabric of the individual regions and revival of ancient ethnonyms in his Italia Illustrata took precedence. It is the representations of Italian geography and ethnicity of Strabo, Pliny, Ptolemy and Pomponius Mela (Biondo’s ancient sources) that are reflected in Pomponio’s use of ancient ethnonyms to describe the Neapolitan realm in the fifteenth century. But since the organising structure of Italia Illustrata straddles two or three topographical taxonomies from different epochs, we should expect to find imprecisions in other writers.

2. Pomponius Calaber?

Having raised these questions concerning nomenclature, let us bring Pomponio’s use of ancient ethnonyms for describing the Neapolitan territories to bear on the ‘Calaber’ hypothesis.

As part of their argument that Pomponio wrote De praeteritis et supinis in the Venice manuscript (f. 94r-99v) Bianchi - Rizzo offer a deduction from two questionable premises: since (1) the author of De praeteritis considered himself a Calabrian like Ennius (“è evidente che con la qualifica di noster Calaber ci si riferisce a Ennio che segue subito e sembra ragionevole dedurre che chi scrive considerava il poeta antico suo conterraneo”), and since (2) “più fonti collocano la nascita di Pomponio in Calabria”, it is reasonable to deduce that Pomponio is the author of De praeteritis. Support for Pomponio’s ‘Calabrian’ self-reference is then sought from Sabellicus’s report Ortus est Pomponius... in Calabris in his Vita Pomponii and from the scholar Raffaele Maffei Volterrano, Commentarii urbani (1506), who (following Sabellicus?) calls Pomponio natione Calaber. Bianchi - Rizzo do not, however, address the problem of whether Sabellicus and Maffei refer to the ancient Calabri in ‘the heel’ of Italy, or to new Calabria in ‘the toe’, or perhaps to the south of Italy generally. Furthermore, Bianchi - Rizzo do not consistently observe the distinction between Ennius’ Calabria in the heel and modern Calabria in the toe when examining the other fonti, or the complex history of regional names within southern Italy that the issue raises. Accordingly, although the contextual reasons for attributing the De praeteritis et supinis to Pomponio are convincing, the grounds concerning his ‘Calabrian’ compatriotism are less so. Let us consider them.

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26 For Biondo’s medieval sources (e.g. Paul the Deacon, Historia Langobardorum and the Ravenna Cosmography) see Biondo Flavio, Italy Illuminated, ed. and trans. J.A. White, Cambridge Mass.-London 2005 (The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 20), xiv-xv.
27 See Raphael Voltterrano, Commentariorum rerum urbanarum libri XXXVIII, Basel 1559, 492.
28 BIANCHI - RIZZO, ‘Manoscritti’, 640-41 n. 143, and ACCAME, Pomponio Leto, 25 n. 5, acknowledge the ethnonym issue but blur the chronology of the regional boundaries in their arguments.
29 Given the location of De praeteritis between Pomponio’s Romulus and Compendiolum in Ven., the structure and style of its composition, and its preface addressed to a fellow disciple of Valla Marcello Capodiferro, the author is unlikely to have been anyone other than Pomponio; see BIANCHI - RIZZO, ‘Manoscritti e opere’, 638-50; RUYSSCHAERT, ‘Trois premières grammaires’, 69-70.
Bianchi - Rizzo’s first premise supposes that Pomponio would not have called Ennius *noster Calaber* unless he felt a particular affinity with him as a ‘Calabrian’ compatriot. Does this premise stand up to scrutiny?

The first problem encountered in the assumption that *noster Calaber* means ‘my fellow-countryman from Calabria (and herein I allude to my own geographical origins)’ is the diagnosis of Pomponio’s use of *noster* in the formula of *noster* + ethnonym: Bianchi - Rizzo observe that in the *opusculum* dedicated to Marcello Capodiferro he calls no other ancient author *noster* save Ennius, and that when he twice describes Pietro Odo as *noster Montopolita* using the *noster* + ethnonym formula, “diverso è il valore di *noster*”30. Here is the full sentence: *pario quoque peperi, quod antiqui in tertia coniugatione producta declinare solebant*, ut *noster Calaber Ennius*. Granted, in naming an ancient writer whom he has read as *noster Calaber Ennius* and alluding to a living writer whose pupil he was as *noster Montopolita*, Pomponio deals with two different relationships, but without further qualification there is no proof that his formula *noster* + name indicates a shared local origin. Ancient writers such as Cicero and Columella had saluted both forebears and contemporaries as ‘*noster*’ to express mutual engagement within a shared literary and cultural heritage and pursuits32. Italian *litterati*, who enjoyed practising this kind of ‘dialogue’ with ancient ancestors as if still living, followed suit. Pomponio’s other references to Ennius capture the ancient practice exactly: *Ennio nostro teste* (in *De praeteritis* in Ven. f. 96v) and *ut noster Ennius* (Ven. f. 98v) echo Lucretius 1.117 (*Ennius ut noster*) and Cicero, *Pro Archia* 18 and 22 (*noster ille Ennius... noster Ennius*)33. Elsewhere, Pomponio calls the ancients *maiores nostri clari uiri* in his *Romulus* (V, f. 1r) and *maiores nostri* (V, f. 7v)34. In all of these examples it seems that the ancients and early-moderns alike used the formula of possessive adjective *noster* + name to indicate shared cultural interests. The difference between Pomponio’s phrases *noster Montopolita* and *noster Calaber Ennius* and


31 Note the different use of *noster* in Pomponio’s *De praeteritis* (Ven. f. 99v): *ut Laurentius noster praeceptor inquit* (‘as our teacher Laurentius says’).

32 E.g. Cicero: *noster Varro... Calvus noster* (*Brutus de oratore*, 60, 205, 284); *Carneades noster* (*Orator*, 51), *Pompeius noster* (*Ad Quint. fr. II.4, Ad. Att. II.19*); Columella: *ut noster Maro... sicut noster poeta... quod noster Vergilius* (*De re rustica*, 2.2, 7.5, 9.2); *Marcus Trebellius noster* (*5.1*).

33 See BIANCHI - RIZZO, ‘Manoscritti’, 640 n. 142.

34 Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo, Bishop of Calahorra and custodian of Castel Sant’Angelo, in his letters (1468) to the imprisoned Pomponians, calls fellow Spaniards Seneca and Lucan *noster Seneca* and *noster Lucanus*, but he also refers to *noster Christus* and *nostri doctores*. For the prison correspondence see T. GONZÁLEZ ROLÁN - J.M. BAÑOS BAÑOS - A. LÓPEZ FONSECA, *Ex Castro. Cartas desde la prisión papal de Sant’Angelo entre los humanistas de la Academia Romana y su alcaide, Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo: introducción, edición crítica, traducción y notas*, Madrid 2008. Poliziano, by contrast, in his letters uses *noster* only for friends. In both cases a kind of familiarity is implied, but not necessarily one based on geographical origin.
ancient practice is that no ancient writer seems to have used the formula *noster* + ethnonym. But is the significance of the formula *noster* + ethnonym (+ name) really so very different from that of *noster* + name? If there is a difference, what unique thing does *noster Calaber Ennius* imply that *noster Ennius* does not, save the fact that Ennius was from *Calabria* (in the heel)?

Our second problem concerns use of the ethnonym *Calaber*. As with *noster* the same argument holds: where ancient authors led, fifteenth-century letterati followed, though the obscured or lost references to Ennius’ ethnicity were initially difficult to follow. In Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 3.409: *Ennius emeruit, Calabris in montibus ortus*, the reading ‘hortos’ (*in plurimis codicibus* obscured Ennius’ origin until Ianus Parrasius (1470-1522) restored *ortus*; the opacity of Horace’s allusion to *Calabrae Pierides* in *Odes*, IV.8.19-20, together with Martian’s mistaking the phrase as a reference to Horace himself, left fifteenth-century readers none the wiser. Silius Italicus at 12.393-7 salutes Ennius as Calabrian, Messapian and *Rudiae*-born, but his *Punica* was lost to view until 1417 and did not begin circulating beyond Poggio’s coterie until the late 1450s. While Vergil (e.g. *Aeneid* 8.71f. and 8.126f.) and Lucretius (e.g. 1.117-26) show respect for Ennius through their own textual engagements with *Annales*, they do not mention his origins. How Pomponio came to know in 1457 that Ennius was *Calaber* is a question worth asking.

Poggio had discovered Silius near Constance in 1417 and had sent a partially corrected copy to Francesco Barbaro in Venice, who was supposed to finish correcting, copy it, and send it on to Niccolò Niccoli in Florence. But although Niccoli and Poggio in Florence and Leon Battista Alberti (apostolic secretary at Rome in the 1430s) appear to have seen *Punica* by 1438, the text was slow to circulate. Of the 32 extant humanistic manuscripts only five predate 1458 (GKMNL: Delz’s sigla). Furthermore, all of Pomponio’s copies postdate 1469: the notes in *Borg. Lat. 417* (II) and *Vat. lat. 1651* (Q) are coeval with a copy of *Q*, Vatican City, *Vat. lat. 3302* (Y), which was written for Fabio Mazzatosta c. 1469-70 in his second-phase hand (as Muzzioli). Pomponio’s notes in *Vat. Inc. I 4

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39 M. A. Bassett et al., ‘*Silius Italicus*’, 350; Reeve, ‘*Silius Italicus*’, 389. Poggio’s copy of Silius, which once accompanied his copy of Statius’ *Silvae* and Manilius in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, 3678 (*olim M. 31*), is now lost.
are much later. Pomponio had perhaps taught Silius in Venice in 1467, as Delz suggests, on the grounds of Pietro de Celano’s *collecta* and the notes in Paolo Marsi’s manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. class. lat. 116 (B). But Bianchi-Rizzo’s reports of citations from Silius in *De praeteritis et supinis* (Ven. f. 94r-99v) and in *Compendiolum* (Ven. f. 99v-101v) show that Pomponio had access to *Punica* as early as 1457/8.

Pietro Odo, the first lecturer on Silius in the *Studium Vrbis* according to Petrus Marsus, must have played an important role in introducing *Punica* to students at Rome. Furthermore, his note *Rudiae patrie (sic) Ennii at Punica* 12.397 in his own annotated copy, Vatican City, Ottob. lat. 1258 (Γ), f. 141v, and the student’s note *Ennus | Rudiae | oppidum in Calabria (ad loc.*) in Vat. lat. 2779 (W), f. 130r suggests that he pointed the passage out to students. But since Pietro’s teaching at the *Studium* spanned from 1450 to 1462, it is not clear whether Γ or W predate the *De praeteritis et supinis* in Ven. The absence of Odo’s hand from M, the manuscript produced for the library of Nicholas V (1447-55), together with the lack of Silius citations in the manuscripts of Ovid, Claudian and Lucretius that he did correct for Nicholas, suggests a date after 1455 for his Silian studies.

The question of whether Pomponio in 1457/8 obtained his knowledge from Odo from W or from another source (e.g. a manuscript) is more difficult to answer as QYII are all too late. The fact remains, however, that in whatever

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Bassett et al., ‘Silius Italicus’, 374-5; *Punica*, ed. Delz, x-xi. Paolo Marsi wrote the text in Canon. Class. lat. 116, but I am not sure that either of the annotating hands is his: a contemporary annotator in a round Roman hand struggles to write Latin; a later annotator supplies the bulk of the notes in a fluent cursive hand.


I warmly thank Anna Bellettini for checking TW and Q for marginalia at *Punica* 12.393-397 in the Vatican Library in October 2010.


Delz reports in *Punica*, ed. Delz, xxvii-xxxiii, xxxii-xxxiii, that Q (Y’s exemplar), descends from W. See also R. Bianchi’s section on Pomponio’s Silius manuscript Vat. lat. 3302 in *Vedere i Classici: l’illustrazione libraria dei testi antichi dall’età romana al tardo Medioevo*, ed. M. Buonocore, Rome 1996, 476.
form Pomponio encountered Silius before 1457/8, he had evidently spotted the reference to Ennius’ Calabrian origins. There is a strong possibility that he intended *Calaber Ennus* to be news.

We can conclude that *noster Calaber Ennus* both connects with Cicero’s and Lucretius’ references to Ennius as their high-status fellow *auctor* in a shared literary and cultural canon, and at the same time reports Ennius’ origins.51

A third point: Pomponio cites Ennius and Pietro Odo during a discussion about supines. Having just referred to the opinion of *noster Montopolita* (f. 95v) on one verb, Pomponio turns to *noster Calaber Ennus* as an authority on another (f. 96r). This style of balancing may partly be designed to single the pair out for comparison and to stress the challenge to the teacher from Montopoli posed by the superior authority of the ancient poet.

Fourth, there is no evidence that Pomponio ever reused the phrase *noster Calaber* after 1458. In a late version of his opusculum *Romulus* in V (c. 1479), when Pomponio explains Ennius’ contribution to the development of the Latin language, he does not take the opportunity to call him *noster Calaber*.52 Instead Ennius is given the toponym *Rudiensis*. Another possible reason for this is that Pomponio shunned southern affiliations after he began fashioning himself as Roman.

Finally, Pomponio’s list of Neapolitan dominions in N observes the ancient (pre-Augustan) ethnonyms of southern Italy: in distinguishing between the *Campani*, the *Apuli*, the *Lucani*, the *Salentini*, the *Calabri* and the *Brutii*, Pomponio here overlays ancient localities on the contemporary regions of the Neapolitan kingdom,53 following Biondo Flavio’s outline of southern regions at *Italia Illustrata* 7.1. It is unlikely that Pomponio, with his good knowledge of ancient geography, failed to appreciate which contemporary places these ancient localities corresponded to, e.g. the *Brutii* to the toe and *Calabri* to the heel of Italy, especially given his knowledge of Silius and acknowledgement in *Romulus* that Ennius came from the ancient Calabrian town of *Rudiae*, whose location is attested by a number of ancient geographers.54 In calling Ennius *noster Calaber*, then, Pomponio knew he was referring to ancient Calabria in the heel. But what evidence is there to suggest he associated himself with this area? For unless it can be proved that Sabellicus (*in Calabris... ortus*) and Raffaele Maffei (*natione Calaber*) refer to ancient

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52 For the date see MUZZOLI, ‘Due nuovi codici’, 248.


54 Strabo, 6.3.5; Pliny, *HN* III.102; Pomponius Mela, *De situ orbis*, 2.66, and Ptolemy, *Cosmographia*. Pomponio’s knowledge of (ancient?) geography is praised by Fernus: *qua oculis subieisset variar orbis loca apud Cosmographos castigata demonstrabat* (Elogium Historicum, ed. Fabricius, 629); and by Ranzano: *de situ terrarum* tam exactam fertur habere noticiam, ut multorum judicio veteri Pomponio videatur coaequandus (Annales, III.I.XIV, f. 354r, ed. Figliuolo, *Cultura a Napoli*, 148 n. 90).
Calabria – and given contemporary references to new Calabria as Calabri and Calabria and to ancient Calabria as Apulia there is no reason to think that they do –, no source locates Pomponio’s origins in the heel of Italy. Amendolara (vide Ranzano and Alberti) in the north of new Calabria (olim the border of Bruttium and Lucania), Pisticci (vide Russo-Alfieri) in southern Basilicata (olim Lucania), the ager Picentinus (vide Paolo Giovio) and Teggiano (vide Marsus, Barb.) in southern Campania (olim Lucania), and the vast majority of holdings of the principes Salernitani (Fernus, Pontano) were in the province of Salerno, Basilicata and northern Calabria (i.e. in ancient Lucania). All of these sources attest places within or bordering on the ancient territory of Lucania and, as we shall see below, their combined evidence carries considerable weight. Since Ennius came from Rudiae in the heel, miles from any of these spots in ancient Lucania, if Pomponio did think of himself as a compatriot of noster Calaber Ennius he would need to confuse the ancient ethnonym with the eighth-century adoption of the name Calabria for the toe of Italy. Given his appreciation of ancient geography generally and his use of the ancient ethnonyms in N in particular, the likelihood of his making this mistake is remote.

For these five reasons, then, Pomponio is most unlikely to have referred to himself in the phrase ut noster Calaber Ennius.

For the second premise (“più fonti collocano la nascita di Pomponio in Calabria”) to work, the Calabria to which the sources refer must be that of Ennius. But it is unclear whether the sources attest the ancient or modern region.

First, the claims of Sabellicus and Raffaele Maffei, the only two writers to call Pomponio Calaber explicitly, are not authoritative. Not only is it difficult to ascertain which Calabria and which part of Italy either writer thought he was referring to, but there is no guarantee that either of them is right. Since Maffei’s testimony cannot be proven to be independent of his predecessor, support for the ‘Calabrian’ argument hangs on Sabellicus alone. His Vita Pomponii, however, is known to contain mistakes: e.g. the wrong ordering of Pomponio’s mentors (Petro Montopolitano aliquamdiu dedit operam... mox sub Laurentio Vallense... profecit) and placing of Pomponio’s house in Exquiliis instead of on the Quirinal.

55 Incidentally, Horace speaks of adding the Lucani to the Calabri in Epistles, 2.2.177-178 (Quid vici prosunt aut horrea quidve Calabris | saltibus adiecti Lucani si metit Orcus | grandia cum parvis non exorabilis auro), but only does so to illustrate the futility of striving for improvements in pasturing (the amalgamation of Calabrian and shadier Lucanian estates) and thus in profit: death will still get you in the end. See also Horace, Epodes 1.27-28: pecusve Calabris ante sidus servidum Lucana mutet pascuis; Varro, De re rustica, 2.1.16; Horace, Odes 1.31.3f.

56 BIANCHI - RIZZO, ‘Manoscritti’, 641 n. 143, suggest that Pomponio may have considered ancient Lucania as part of ‘Calabria’ (but what ever would have happened to his local patriotism?): “in età augustea la Lucania fu accorpata alla Calabria per formare la terza regione d’Italia e Pomponio potrebbe aver fondato su ciò la sua origine calabrese”, whence grounds for Pomponio to be Calabrian are supported by Pietro Ranzano’s and Leandro Alberti’s testimony of Amendolara. Here the argument comes unstuck: the statement ‘in età augustea... origine calabrese’ is anachronistic. Ennius’ Calabria cannot be meant because Augustus had united the ager Lucanus with the ager Bruttius in Regio III (Pliny, HN, III.71), which was not called ‘Calabria’ until the eighth century. How can Pomponio, who observed the ancient usage, have based any shared ‘Calabrian origins’ with Ennius on Augustus’ third region? Ancient Calabria was in the second region with Apulia.

57 Sabellicus, Vita Pomponii (§12, 14), ed. DELL’ORO, 208. Sabellicus’ claim commendavit mihi per litteras suos Caesares Pomponius Laetus, iis paucis diebus quibus vita decessit (§1) lends a deceptive air of authority to his Vita. On Sabellicus’ errors see ACCAME, Pomponio Leto, 42 n. 37,
Sabellicus himself admitted that his long absence from Rome had made it difficult to compose *haec de Pomponio* and that he had relied on information from others to supplement his personal memories: *et enim, diu absens, pleraque didici ex iis qui post meum ex urbe digressum vixerunt cum eo viro coniunctissime*. If Sabellicus refers to ancient Calabria, his testimony supports Bianchi - Rizzo’s argument. To this end one could argue that there is an echo of Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, 3.409 in the phrase *in Calabris... ortus*, but since most manuscripts and incunables of Ovid’s text read *in montibus hortos* (see above), an echo of *ortus* in Sabellicus is doubtful at best. If Sabellicus refers to modern Calabria, as is not impossible given his topographical errors, he has transferred the ethnonym *Calaber* from one end of the boot to the other and there can be no authentic Calabrian compatriotism between Ennius and Pomponio. In any case, it is not clear whether Sabellicus was using *Calabri* to refer to the ancient or to the modern region.

A more serious problem with the second premise is that, as we have observed, all of the other sources attest birthplaces in modern Calabria, Campania and Basilicata, which on an ancient map fall within southern or western *Lucania*. But for the second premise to work, the majority of these sources would need to provide locations in ancient *Calabria*.

A third objection derives from the second. Petrus Marsus’s insistence on Pomponio’s Sanseverino descent, which constitutes strong evidence because it is specific, repeated and consonant with all of the other sources (*pace* Sabellicus and Maffei), suggests that Pomponio was born in Sanseverino territory, i.e southwestern and southern ancient *Lucania*. In his oration Marsus explicitly names Giovanni Duke of Sanseverino and Roberto Sanseverino as Pomponio’s father and brother and thrice associates Pomponio with *Lucania*: *Dianium Lucaniae oppidum... in [quo] Pomponius noster... natus est, inclito quidem patre Ioanne Sancti Severini* (f. a2r); *paternas et auitas Lucaniae opes atque Salerni fortuna saepe afflxit* (f. a4r); *excipite ne Lucanos Roma sibi adoptet ac celebret filios [sc. Pomponium], uos autem ueluti desides priuignos atque degeneres auersetur et damnet* (f. a4v). It is surely no coincidence that the birthplaces suggested by all the other sources are also Sanseverino holdings in the former region of *Lucania*. In the fifteenth century the Sanseverino family possessed *rocche* in what are now the provinces of Salerno, Basilicata and Calabria, their principal base being Teggiano in the Vallo di Diano (also known as *Vallis Sancti Sanseverini*).

If Pomponio was from a Sanseverino holding in *Lucania*, as the confluence of sources suggests, given that he knew and used the ancient appellations for the southern regions as he did in N, in whichever of the Sanseverino territories he was born, he would have called himself not *Calaber* but *Lucanus*. For the same

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59 Marsus, *Funebris oratio*, ed. Dykmans, 81 n. 72, 84 nn. 80 and 82.

reason Bianchi - Rizzo’s view that if Pomponio had been born in Amendolara (on the borders of the ancient regions of Lucania and Bruttium) he would be much more Calaber than if he had been born in Lucania does not hold. Pomponio’s distinctions between the ancient ethnonyms of south Italy in the colophon in N are crystal clear. There is no proof that Pomponio thought he was from Calabri territory in Augustus’ Regio II.

What can be concluded from Pomponio’s phrase ut noster Calaber Ennius? Evidently an interest in Ennius, no doubt stimulated by the rediscovery of the Ennian fragments transmitted in the Festus Farnesianus and perhaps also by Pietro Odo’s lectures. By adding Calaber to the formula of noster + name Pomponio displays esteem for Ennius together with knowledge of the poet’s origins at a time when these were still obscure to the majority of readers of the Latin Classics. On yet another level he may express his regard for the poet as an ancestor of Latin poetry from the deep south of Italy. Pomponio was not from Rudiae, but in 1458 he considered himself a southerner. That much the first colophon in N – and its subsequent erasure when he began fashioning himself as Roman – makes clear. He could have felt kinship with Ennius both in literary terms and as a ‘southerner’.

3. The Lives by Marsus, Sabellicus and Fernus; Pontano, De sermone VI

With the Calabrian compatriotism theory collapsing under scrutiny and under the weight of the testimony of the other sources, which point compellingly to the area of ancient Lucania, the latter merit closer inspection. I now examine the lives written by the three pupils, the passage from Pontano’s De Sermone, which is almost contemporary, and Barb.

By far the most detailed source is Petrus Marsus, who delivered the oration at Pomponio’s funeral on 10 June 1498. At the time he was Pomponio’s oldest surviving friend. A slight threat to Marsus’s authority rises from the fact that the version of his oration published without a date in Petrus Marsus, Funebra oratio habita Rome in obitu Pomponii Laeti, may differ from the extemporaria quidem sed elegans et luculenta oratiuncula that Fernus in his letter of 11 June says Marsus delivered at the funeral; speeches given in Latin have been polished up for publication since Cicero’s time, and Marsus’s published oratio hardly seems extemporaria. In fact there is no guarantee that its appearance in print anticipated Sabellicus’s Vita Pomponii published on 23 April 1499. Accordingly it is not clear whether Marsus’s published version is independent of Sabellicus’s Vita. However, despite the absence of proof that what Marsus said at the funeral or in print came directly from Pomponio, and although allowance should be made for the eulogistic tone, their friendship from the 1460s until Pomponio’s death puts

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61 Amendolara is on the border of the ancient regions of Lucania and Bruttium.
63 See Fernus, Elogium Historicum, ed. Fabricius, 632: Ablatus est nobis iam septuagenarius V Id [1498]. Postero die in Ara Coeli... traditus est; commendavit ad sepolchrum Petrus Marsus extemporaria quidem, sed eleganti et luculenta oratiuncula. Like other scholars Accame, Pomponio Leto, 25 and n. 6, assumes that Marsus’s published version was what he actually delivered on 10 June 1498.
Marsus in a stronger position to pronounce on Pomponio than anyone else in 1498, and than Pietro Ranzano in 1490. Ranzano, like Pomponio, had been educated in Rome in the 1450s, but the impression of intimacy with Pomponio, Valla and Pietro Odo that he seeks to impress on readers of his Annales may go no deeper than that. There is no proof that he knew private details about Pomponio or even that he knew him particularly well or for longer than a few years in the '50s. What authority, then, does his report of Amendolara have forty years later? By contrast Marsus had known Pomponio for over 30 years, had been imprisoned in Castel Sant’Angelo with him in 1468-9, and had taught together with him in the Studium Vrbis for over 25 years.

Marsus, like the other pupil-biographers, focuses more on family than on patria. He explains that Pomponio was born to Giovanni Sanseverino, Duke of Marsico, at the Sanseverino stronghold of Teggiano: *Dianium Lucaniae oppidum*... *in cuius luco Pomponius noster... natus est, inclyto quidem patre Ioanne, Sancti Severini et Marsici (ut nunc appellant) comite*66. No doubt reporting what he had heard Marsus say the previous day, Fernus wrote to Jacopus Antiquarius that Pomponio was *natus, id quod non ignoras, Salernitanorum principum clarissimo de sanguine*. In fact, as Marsus tells us, the first Sanseverino to be made prince of Salerno (in 1463) was Roberto, Giovanni’s son and Pomponio’s brother67. Whilst this brief comparison suggests that Fernus relied on Marsus for information here, he does already seem to have been aware of Pomponio’s southern provenance: the dedication of Fernus’s publication of Felinus Sandeus’s *Epitoma de regno Apuliae et Siciliae* and the accompanying *De genealogia Alphonsi I et censu* [Rome: Sigismundus Mayer with Johann Besicken, after 13 Apr. 1495] (GW M40034, BMC IV 140), to Pomponio strongly indicates that Fernus had reason to believe Pomponio would find the work interesting. Moreover, unless it is merely rhetorical etiquette, Fernus’s comment to Antiquarius, *id quod non ignoras*, also implies that a noble connection for Pomponio was common knowledge amongst his friends.

By contrast Sabellicus is as vague about Pomponio’s family as he was about his patria: *clarum in familia stemma sed in quo tantus uir non sit legitime natus, ipse (quod miror) genesim suam semper in occulto habuit aut certe ignorauit. Sed cur ignorasse credi possit?* In the claim *tantus uir non sit legitime natus*, if he had read Marsus’s oratio, Sabellicus may have been interpreting the phrase *odia atque insidia nouercalia*68. But since he does not provide specific details it is difficult to divine whether he followed particular sources or general hearsay in suggesting that Pomponio tried to keep his *clarum in familia stemma* hushed up. Marsus presents a different picture (illos imitatus qui ut disciplinas toto paene

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64 This may be why he was asked to give the eulogy in addition to his being canon of S. Lorenzo in Damaso and to his being accustomed to giving orations; see Dykmans, *L’Humanisme*, 7-48, 69-77.
67 As part of the pardon after Ferdinand’s succession to the Neapolitan kingdom – opposed by the Sanseverino, who had favoured the Anjou claimant. On Pomponio’s legitimacy see Marsus’ remark about *odia atque insidia nouercalia* (perhaps echoing Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.2: *si sueta coniunx rediret, haudquaquam novercalibus odis visura Britannicum*).
68 See Sabellicus, *Vita Pomponii* (§8), ed. Dell’Oro, 206.
orbe fugientes tandem assequeruntur, perpetuum sibi exilium indixerunt) suggesting that Pomponio’s leaving his family was due solely to the desire to pursue a scholarly life. In any case, Marsus’s primacy as a source is confirmed. Sabellicus’s mistakes and his vagueness, the distance between him and his sources, and the difficulty in identifying them, all count against him.

Giovanni Pontano’s story in De Sermone (c. 1503) that Pomponio did not disclose his birth to outsiders and that he played it down to those in the know (Iulius Pomponius... nobilitatem generis ita dissimulauit, cum e familia esset Sanseuerina quae hauquaquam exiguam partem Lucanie imperitaret ac Brutiae, ut neque ipse genus fateretur et cum illis quibus notum id esset ita loqueretur ut videri posset nobilitatem contemnere) may draw on Sabellicus’s and Fernus’s depictions of Pomponio’s trying to keeping his noble birth a secret and publicly condemning nobility. Like Marsus he names the Sanseverino (but not a specific birthplace) and recognises the extent of their rule: hauquaquam exiguam partem Lucanie imperitaret ac Brutiae.

This examination of the four accounts has revealed that only Marsus provides specific family details and a specific birthplace, and that the other two pupils, together with Pontano, reveal nothing that challenges him. For this reason, and because Marsus had known Pomponio for longer and because his oral oration is the earlier source, even allowing for revision between delivery and publication, I am inclined to accord his published account more authority. Since the title Pomponius Dianiensis in Barb. may or may not be independent of Marsus, one is hard pressed to know how to evaluate it.

Although Marsus’s account is more authoritative than that of Sabellicus, who had left Rome in 1472 and was no longer abreast of Pomponio’s life to judge by his factual errors (see above), not because of these slips should we dismiss the rest of Sabellicus’s Vita out of hand. One detail only Sabellicus provides: he reports that when Pomponio’s career at Rome began to flourish his family begged him five times by letter to help them but their pleas fell on deaf ears. Here Sabellicus alludes to the Sanseverinos’ plight after Roberto’s son Antonello (Pomponio’s nephew) led the revolt of the barons against King Ferdinand I in 1486 and a second rebellion backed by Charles VIII of France in 1494. Marsus too mentions the struggle: [Robertus erat] pater huius principis, Pomponii nepotis, quem fortunae iniuria e principatu deturbauit – turbio bellicus bis expendit...

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69 Marsus, Funebris oratio, ed. Dykmans, 81 n. 72.
70 Fernus, Elogium Historicum, ed. Fabricius, 629: caeterum studio literarum et virtutis fragrantia, nec regias unquam quaesivit aut opes aut honores. For Pontano’s De sermone see n. 12 above.
71 Sabellicus, Vita Pomponii (§8), ed. Dell’Oro, 206: quum a suis quinque per litteras et nuntios ad id missos multis precibus domum accersitus ut tantas necessitudines non ignoraret in hanc resc ripsit sententiam: “Pomponius Laetus cognatis et propinquis suis salutem. Quod petitis fieri non potest. Valete”.
crebris tamen exiliis diuexatum; afterwards family-members were executed or punished by confiscations. Marsus is also well informed about Antonello’s most recent goings-on: fortuna... Gallicos olim panes quasi mendicare coegit [sc. a reference to his collaboration with Charles VIII], et nunc ad Senogalliam detectum, Venetos favores ambire compellit. Whilst Marsus reveals a wealth of detail in comparison to Sabellicus’s more general remarks, the letter anecdote occurs only in Sabellicus. But its details seem too particular for someone to have bothered to invent and to easy for another person to denounce as untrue. Why would the Sanseverino ask Pomponio to help them as a cognatus and propinquus if they did not consider him a relation? No member of the Sanseverino family seems to have stepped forward to contest this. The story is moreover accommodated by Marsus’s and Fernus’s depiction of Pomponio’s estrangement from his family. A nugget of truth does seem to glisten here. It seems safe to conclude that the Sanseverino dukes were connected with Pomponio since the stories about them are too numerous and too detailed to disregard. Let us not forget, however, that Pomponio and his circle were not unpractised in inventing stories: for example, ‘Modestus’ as the name for the epitomiser of Vegetius was the creation of a Pomponian.

Let us return to our original question: where was Pomponio from? We can conclude that in his story about Pomponio being the son of Giovanni Duke of Sanseverino, Petrus Marsus reported what he thought was the truth or knew to be the ‘right version’ of it, drawing on Pomponio himself or from stories circulated by Pomponio. Certainly, we have no source closer to Pomponio than he: for whether the title Dianensis in Barb. is independent of Marsus or not, it does not constitute proof that the Teggiano patria is true; and except for Ranzano, all of Pomponio’s contemporaries depended on Marsus or on his sources.

Let us conclude that although the combined evidence does not irrefutably prove where Pomponio was born or indeed to whom, Marsus’s testimony of Pomponio’s Sanseverino connection is compelling, not only because of evidence of its wide acceptance amongst Pomponio’s friends in Fernus’s, Sabellicus’s and Pontano’s accounts, but the details are too specific for someone to have bothered to invent (e.g. Pomponio leaving and the Sanseverino family trying to contact him during desperate times). Furthermore, no one seems to have disputed them. As for the specific geographical location of his birth, until further evidence comes to light it seems unwise to do more than observe the geographical confluence of the suggested birthplaces with Sanseverino holdings in the Lucanian region and to consider two alternative hypotheses. On the one hand one might suppose that, regardless of the veracity of the pupil-biographers’ story about Pomponio’s

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73 Marsus, Funebris oratio, ed. Dvkmans, 84 n. 80.
74 Marsus, Funebris oratio, ed. Dvkmans, 81 n. 72; Fernus, Elogium Historicum, ed. Fabricius, 629.
‘Sanseverino’ origins, the Sanseverino fiefdoms of Pisticci and Amendolara got wind of it and appropriated Pomponio for themselves. On the other hand, it is possible that the Sanseverino connection is true and is independently borne out by the contemporary and later claims by Sanseverino fiefdoms to own the figure of Pomponio as one of their *uomini illustri*ssimi. Whether Pomponio was born and bred in Teggiano or Amendolara or Pisticci, no extant written record proves. In fact it little matters. These towns were all Sanseverino holdings. The Sanseverinos, like the other Neapolitan baronial families, held fiefdoms scattered throughout the Neapolitan kingdom as well as houses in Naples. Their principal *rocca* being Teggiano, Teggiano naturally recommends itself as the main setting for Pomponio’s early years.