

Tertia lux finit venientes Vespere nonas
AN EXTRACT FROM FRACCUS' *SACRI FASTI* *

Résumé. – Cet article examine un extrait des *Sacri Fasti* d'Ambrosius Novidius Fraccus, humaniste italien du seizième siècle et auteur de plusieurs œuvres poétiques. Le surnom « Novidius », contraction de *novus* et Ovidius, indique une volonté de rivaliser avec le poète antique. Les *Sacri Fasti* (imprimés en 1547 à Rome) reprennent la forme des *Fasti* antiques, mais en christianisent le contenu. Il y eut, à la Renaissance, un véritable genre de poésie calendaire, que les noms de Ludovicus Lazzarellus et Baptista Mantuanus ont rendu célèbre. Notre étude porte sur le passage concernant sainte Agathe (fêtée le 5 février). Nous en déterminons, d'une part, le caractère ovidien et nous analysons, d'autre part, les traces païennes et les références aux prédécesseurs néo-latins. Nous essayons en outre de démontrer que la *Légende dorée* du théologien Jacques de Voragine (XIII^e s.), imprimée pour la première fois en 1470, constituait la source majeure pour la légende traitée par Fraccus.

Abstract. – This paper focusses on an extract from the *Sacri Fasti* of Ambrosius Novidius Fraccus, an Italian humanist of the sixteenth century who wrote several poetical works. The nickname « Novidius » is derived from *novus* and Ovidius, and indicates a desire to compete with the ancient poet. The *Sacri Fasti* (printed in 1547 in Rome) follow the example of the ancient *Fasti*, but they are written within a Christian framework. During the Renaissance, calendar poetry turned out to be a specific genre, which became famous through poets such as Ludovicus Lazzarellus and Baptista Mantuanus. We will analyse a passage about Saint Agatha (celebrated on February, 5th), enlightening its Ovidian characteristics and digging out pagan features as well as references to previous Neo-Latin poets. Furthermore, we will attempt to show that the *Golden Legend* of the theologian Jacobus a Voragine (13th century), printed for the first time in 1470, was the major source for the subject treated by Fraccus.

It is not the familiar *arma virumque cano* but rather *tempora sacra cano* that begins a long and hitherto unstudied Neo-Latin poem, the *Sacri*

*I am currently doing a PhD within the framework of the FWO project “Questions of life and death. An inquiry into the reception of Aristotle’s *De longitudine et brevitate vitae* in the Middle Ages”. This article was based on my unpublished master’s thesis “*Tempora sacra cano. De Sacri Fasti* van Ambrosius Novidius Fraccus” (KU Leuven, June 2016) written under the supervision of prof. dr. Dirk Sacré. I would like to thank him for reading this article carefully and putting forward interesting suggestions. Moreover, I am grateful to prof. dr. Russell Friedman for improving the English of this text.

Fasti by one Ambrosius Novidius Fraccus. In this article, Fraccus' life and oeuvre will be briefly introduced. An Italian humanist who named himself after the Roman poet Ovid is certainly worthy of our attention. We then will have a look at Fraccus' place within the Neo-Latin calendar poem tradition, comparing him to some other "Fastians" of the Renaissance so as to offer a rough sketch of the literary genre our poet adhered to. Finally, one passage from the *Sacri Fasti* will be presented and analysed. This will allow us to draw conclusions concerning the Ovidian content of the poem on the one hand, and the pagan elements and references to medieval and Neo-Latin predecessors on the other hand.

Ambrosius Novidius Fraccus: life and works ¹

Not much is known about Fraccus' life. Of humble origins, Ambrosius Novidius Fraccus (Ambrogio Fracco) was born and educated in the second half of the fifteenth century, probably around 1480, in the Central Italian town Ferentino, where a strong humanistic tradition reigned. He started to write poetry at an early age, and did not lack poetic ambition, as his taking of the surname "Novidius", a contraction of *nouus* ('new') and Ovidius, indicates. He thus strove to make compositions that would equal those of the Roman poet, author of the *Metamorphoses*, the *Fasti* and other works. Later in life, Fraccus became a clergyman.

Sometime before 1527, our poet settled in Rome, most probably since his younger days: his search for glory brought him to the Eternal City. As he seems to have failed to find a patron, he temporarily became a school-teacher by profession. Evidently, Fraccus stayed there a long while, because – as he himself tells us – he almost experienced the Sack of Rome (*il Sacco di Roma*) first hand in 1527. However, he succeeded in escaping the terror and the havoc. The edition of the *Sacri Fasti* (1547) is considered to be the *terminus post quem* of Fraccus' death.

Ambrosius Novidius Fraccus' oeuvre is preserved in two Roman manuscripts (Biblioteca Corsiniana 1327 and Biblioteca Alessandrina 190). These documents – the majority of which remains unpublished – show great poetical variety: they contain, among other things, love letters in imitation of Ovid's *Heroides*, elegies on the traumatic sack of Rome and (sometimes lascivious) epigrams and hendecasyllables. But Fraccus' major work is the *Sacri Fasti*, the full title of which runs as follows:

1. See F. PIGNATTI, "Fracco, Ambrogio", in A. M. GHISALBERTI (ed.), *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, volume 49, Roma, 1997, p. 566-567; B. PECCI, "Contributo per la storia degli Umanisti nel Lazio. Antonio Volsco - Giovanni Sulpizio - Novidius Fracco - Martino Filetico", *Archivio della R. Società Romana di Storia Patria* 13/3-4 (1890), p. 451-526.

*Ambrosii Novidii Fracci Ferentinatis Sacrorum fastorum libri XII cum Romanis consuetudinibus per totum annum, suisque causis, ac stellis, et numinum nostrorum introductionibus. Adhibitis XII mensibus XII Apost. tutelis, rebus gestis, necnon figuris, ac fabulis ad rem facientibus, a suis tenebris ad lucem, idest Christum, reductis, opus sane sic post natalem Domini a nullo antea scriptum aut editum*².

Ambrosius Novidius Fraccus of Ferentino's twelve books of the Holy Calendar with the Roman customs during the whole year, and their origins, and the stars, and introductions of our saints. Since upon the twelve months the protection of the twelve apostles has been bestowed, and since the deeds, and also the figures, and the stories pertaining to these, have been brought back from the darkness to the light, i.e., to Christ, a work of this kind has definitely not been written or published by anyone before, since the birth of the Lord³.

As it says in the preface, Fraccus started to write this work in his thirties, during the papacy of Leo X (1513-1521); he completed the composition quite some time after the sack, when Paul III was pope (1534-1549), and he subsequently dedicated it to this pontiff. In 1547, the *Sacri Fasti* were edited by Antonius Bladus (Antonio Blado) in Rome. Surprisingly, twelve years later, in 1559, the long and quite intricate poem was reprinted by Iohannes Bellerus (Johannes Beelaert) in Antwerp⁴. Fraccus intended to create a Christian equivalent to his Ovidian example, maintaining the ancient poet's structure, but replacing the pagan content with a Christian one.

Ovid's *Fasti*: a few poetic imitations⁵

Prior to Fraccus, a group of humanists writing Latin poetry had drawn their inspiration from Ovid's *Fasti*, a composition in elegiacs describing the Roman calendar on the basis of both mythological and historical elements. These poets adopted the form of a poetic calendar but gave it a Christian interpretation, focused on the ecclesiastical year with its festivals and days devoted to saints. So, there certainly was a tradition of such poetical and Christian almanacs. Its major representatives were Ludovicus Lazzarellus and Baptista Mantuanus.

The Italian humanist Ludovicus Lazzarellus (Ludovico Lazzarelli) wrote the *Fasti christianae religionis* in the second half of the fifteenth cen-

2. M. FAINI, "Riscrivere e moralizzare i *Fasti* nel Cinquecento. Una scheda per i *Sacrorum fastorum libri* di Ambrogio Fracco", *Res Publica Litterarum* 33-34 (2010-2011), p. 176-184 (p. 176).

3. In this article, every translation from the Latin is ours.

4. M. FAINI, *op. cit.* (n. 2), p. 176.

5. See J. F. MILLER, "Ovid's *Fasti* and the Neo-Latin Christian Calendar Poem", *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 10/2 (2003), p. 173-186.

tury, in elegiacs (just as Fraccus would). It consists of sixteen books: I-III are consecrated to the changeable feasts of the Church, IV-XV treat the holy days on a fixed date, and XVI deals with Judgement Day. According to the scholar John F. Miller ⁶, Lazzarellus partially modelled his work on Ovid. While the structure of his composition seems rather original, it nevertheless shows its Ovidian influence (especially in the twelve separate books IV-XV). Lazzarellus also emphasizes, as Miller says, the primacy of the Christian faith. Throughout the work, there are tensions between the ancient *Fasti* tradition and the prevailing Christian religion. Sometimes the author stresses the contrast, and at other times he opts for a middle course. In fact, this area of tension is a recurring problem within the Neo-Latin literature of the Renaissance.

Shortly after Ludovicus Lazzarellus, the Carmelite Baptista Mantuanus (Battista Mantovano) published his *Sacrorum libri XII* (1516). Miller devotes attention to this Italian poet as well ⁷, stating that he borrowed the title and also the structure of Ovid's calendar poem. Moreover, one can read the etymology of several month names in this sixteenth-century composition. With regard to these aspects (the title, the structure and the etymologies), Fraccus largely seems to correspond to Mantuanus. According to Miller, it was Mantuanus' aim to reveal the continuity between the ancient feasts and the Christian festivals. In comparison with the *Sacri Fasti*, a few points of similarity can be found: the scholar Franco Pignatti ⁸ states that Fraccus certainly did not condemn the pagan gods and rites. In fact, he even admitted certain traditions to the Christian faith. Neither Mantuanus' style nor his tone, however, seem to be very Ovidian. Neither did he apply elegiacs: he preferred hexameters, probably because he looked upon his work as a didactic poem. Mantuanus was a widely read poet.

Taking poets like these into account, it seems that Fraccus undeservedly laid claim to the newness of his work (cf. the lengthy title of the *Sacri Fasti*: "... a work of this kind has definitely not been written or published by anyone before, since the birth of the Lord"). The scholar Marco Faini ⁹ argues that the title of the *Sacri Fasti* is insincere: Fraccus is part of the medieval and humanistic tradition reformulating the classical examples in a Christian way. Moreover, Faini explicitly mentions Ludovicus Lazzarellus and Baptista Mantuanus here. Fraccus' claim, as Faini says, can only be justified partly, if the title refers to allegorical reading as a means to bring classical

6. J. F. MILLER, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 179.

7. J. F. MILLER, *op. cit.* (n. 5), p. 178-179.

8. F. PIGNATTI, *op. cit.* (n. 1), p. 566-567.

9. M. FAINI, *op. cit.* (n. 2), p. 176-177.

literature back 'from the darkness to the light' (cf. the title of the *Sacri Fasti*).

Translation and analysis: Saint Agatha's day ¹⁰

In order to illustrate Fraccus' style and the content of his calendar poem, we selected a fragment from his *Sacri Fasti*. It concerns the passage on Saint Agatha (book II), who is commemorated on the fifth of February – even though the text mainly refers to the fourth of February (cf. *infra*).

- Tertia lux finit venientes Vespere nonas:
Atque latet liquidas Urna tenentis aquas.
Tempus idem matres retinebit valle Quirini,
Munera lactiferis qua capit ara focus.*
5 *A penso, et telis igitur cessate puellae:
Nullaque sit calathis hac operosa die.
Nocte vocate Agatham: tulerint qua nomina vocem,
Lac veniet matri: flammaque nulla nocet.
Corpora nam flammis sacravit, et ubera ferro:*
10 *Testis erit Catane, virgo quid igne valet.
Scilicet eveniunt quoties incendia tectis,
Et furit, humana nec cadit ignis ope:
Virginis a velo sua per certamina victus,
Contrahit extincto Mulciber igne caput.*
15 *Sed nunc ignis abest: cures lactaria matres:
Poscat et hinc munus crebrius ara tuum* ¹¹.

With the Vesper the third day terminates the coming of the Nones.

Hidden is the Urn of the one who holds limpid waters.

At the same time, mothers will halt in Quirinus' valley,
where an altar receives gifts on its milk-bringing hearths.

- 5 Therefore, maidens, put wool and webs aside:
no one has to be industrious with wicker baskets on this day.

Call Agatha at night. Where her name will be invoked,
there will come milk to a mother. And not any flame does harm.

For her body she devoted to the flames, and her breasts to the sword.

- 10 Catania will witness the virgin's strength against fire.

10. See B. KÖTTING, "Agatha", in J. HÖFER und K. RAHNER (Hrsg.), *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche*, Band 1, Freiburg, 1957, col. 183-184; K. RATHE, M. SCADUTO e P. TOSCHI, "Agata", in G. PIZZARDO e P. PASCHINI (ed.), *Enciclopedia cattolica*, volume 1, Città del Vaticano, 1948, col. 432-436; SARTORI, "Agathe", in E. HOFFMANN-KRAYER und H. BÄCHTOLD-STÄUBLI (Hrsg.), *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Handwörterbücher zur deutschen Volkskunde, Abteilung 1: Aberglaube, Band 1), Berlin, 1927, col. 208-211.

11. See *Ambrosii Novidii Fracci Ferentinatis Sacrorum Fastorum libri XII. Ex eisdem mensium digestio*, Antverpiae, 1559 (available on Google Books). We decided not to modernize the orthography and punctuation of the sixteenth-century text edition. It has not been possible to consult (a reproduction of) the Rome edition in order to compare the Latin.

Indeed, every time fire strikes houses,
 and the flames rage and don't decrease by means of human intervention,
 Mulciber, defeated by the virgin's veil in his own fight,
 gets his head down when the fire has been extinguished.

- 15 But now the flames are gone. May you, saint of milk, take care of the mothers,
 and may the altar, because of this, wish more frequently for your gift.

Fraccus starts his account of Saint Agatha's feast in an Ovidian way. We see the combination *tertia lux* at the beginning of the hexameter in the ancient *Fasti* as well: *tertia lux (memini) ludis erat* (IV, v. 377a¹²). Further down in the first verse, our poet refers to astronomy by mentioning the Vesper. This celestial body, also known as the evening star or Venus, can be used metonymically; in which case, it might be translated simply as 'evening'. In accordance with the Roman calendar, the Nones mark the fifth day of the month with regard to February. In the text, Fraccus most probably concentrates on the Nones following the Kalends. As a consequence, there is *a.d. IV Non. Februarias* (2 February), *a.d. III Non. Februarias* (3 February) and *a.d. II Non. Februarias* (4 February), the latter being the third day (*tertia lux*, verse 1) in accordance with the Nones count. In fact, Fraccus indicates in a poetical way the end of the third day of the Nones, i.e., the end of the fourth of February. It seems that Ovid did not express himself in as sophisticated a way as Fraccus does in his *Fasti*: in the line mentioned above, for example, *tertia lux* simply denotes the third day of the games discussed there. At any rate, Mantuanus declares rather uncomplicatedly in his *Fasti* (II, p. 75, v. 1-3a¹³) that Agatha's feast is celebrated on the fifth of February:

*Gloria Sicaniae gentis pulcherrima virgo
 diva Agathe Nonas mensis tua festa secundi
 sacravere [...]*

Glory of the Sicilian people, fairest maiden,
 divine Agatha, the Nones of the second month your feasts
 did hallow [...].

In the second verse, Fraccus makes an allusion to Aquarius, the astrological sign of the Water Carrier (*liquidus tenentis aquas*), since he bears the *Urna*. Ovid mentions this constellation several times, e.g.:

12. For references to Ovid, the following text edition was used: *Ovid, Fasti*. With an English translation by J. G. FRAZER. Revised by G. P. GOOLD (The Loeb Classical Library, 253), Cambridge, Mass., 1996.

13. For references to Mantuanus, the following text edition was used: *F. Baptistae Mantuani carmelitae theologi, Fastorum libri XII. A mendis permultis, quibus hactenus scatebant, repurgati*, Coloniae, 1561 (available on Google Books).

*Haec ubi transierint, Capricorno, Phoebae, relicto
per iuuenis curres signa gerentis aquam [...]* (I, v. 651-652.)

When these things are over, after leaving Capricorn, Phoebus,
you will run through the signs of the young man who carries water [...]

Iam levis obliqua subsedit Aquarius urna [...] (II, v. 457.)

At this time, the light Aquarius sinks with his slanting urn [...].

The first distich selected from the ancient *Fasti* illustrates that Aquarius is not yet visible in the second half of January, as it follows the discussion of the sixteenth day of that month in the text. Ovid's poem informs his reader in the section discussing the fifth of February that Aquarius (also known as Ganymede) is visible:

*Iam puer Idaeus media tenus eminet alvo
et liquidas mixto nectare fundit aquas [...]* (II, v. 145-146.)

At this time, the Idaean boy stands out as far as the midst of his belly
and pours out limpid waters mixed with nectar [...].

Most probably, Fraccus states in his *Sacri Fasti* that Aquarius cannot be seen, because he wants to emphasize the fact that he actually treats the fourth of February, i.e., the eve of Saint Agatha's day.

In verse 3 of our passage from the *Sacri Fasti*, then, one can read about mothers (*matres*) in Quirinus' valley (*valle Quirini*). Here, an altar in honour of Agatha is raised, as is recounted in verse 4. It probably concerns the *Sant'Agata de'Goti* in Rome : this church is located in the modern Via Mazzarino and is therefore situated close to the slope of the Quirinal Hill. This reading involves a rather literal interpretation of the text. But also if it comes to a more metaphorical reading (i.e., Quirinus, the deified Romulus, as the personification of the city of Rome), the *Sant'Agata de'Goti* would be a more plausible option than, for instance, the church dedicated to her in the Via Aurelia. As a consequence, it becomes clear that the *Sacri Fasti* are fully embedded in a Roman context ; one may well wonder if the content of this poem was understandable to the transalpine reader buying the Bellerus edition. Fraccus subsequently calls the sanctuary milk-bringing (*lactiferis*); in this way, the mentioning of the mothers in verse 3 becomes clear. Saint Agatha was known for her help in case of breast diseases: women with painful breasts invoked her. The milk aspect may be a rather local element in her cult. People who suffered from breast cancer were given holy bread as a medicine, and infertile women went on a pilgrimage around this time of the year. Consequently, Agatha is portrayed holding a pair of pincers or a dish with cut off breasts (sometimes mistaken for loafs of bread) in iconography. These attributes are derived from the saint's legend, which can be read in the *Legenda aurea* of the thirteenth-century Italian theologian

Jacobus a Voragine¹⁴ (cf. infra). Besides, Agatha offered protection against fire; as part of that aspect, she is often depicted in the company of a burning torch or a house in flames. With that in mind, we return to the text of the *Sacri Fasti*. The gifts (*munera*) can refer to bread and torches, since those things constitute the typical votive offerings for Agatha. Mantuanus (II, p. 75, v. 3b-4a) writes about presents as well:

[...] *nurus illa votiva ferentes*
dona die veniunt [...]

[...] young women carrying votive gifts
 come that day [...].

In his *Sacri Fasti*, Fraccus subsequently associates the girls with wool and looms (*a penso et telis*, verse 5). Perhaps there is an allusion to the idea of Agatha as the Christian equivalent of Penelope, as the scholar Paolo Toschi¹⁵ says. In Greek mythology, Penelope remained faithful to her wandering husband Odysseus, as she tried to escape every proposal of marriage. In order to do so, she told her suitors that she first had to finish a shroud for her father-in-law. By day, she was weaving diligently, but, sneakily, she undid the textile at night. So, one could compare Agatha to Penelope in the sphere of chastity and fidelity, but towards Christ instead of Odysseus. However, sewing and weaving were considered typical tasks for girls and women in classical antiquity; this image of the Romans lived throughout the Renaissance as well. Moreover, breastfeeding mothers come into the picture here (verses 3 and 4). Thus, one cannot deduce from the mention of wool and looms that Fraccus specifically intended to evoke associations with Penelope. In verse 7, then, Fraccus informs us that the saint in question has to be invoked at night (*nocte*). Clearly, that element has already been announced by the word *Vespere* at the beginning of our passage. It is probable that our poet refers to an evening mass (viz. on the fourth of February, cf. verse 1), for in Sicily, Agatha's homeland, people went to church at night on the fourth of February; this may have been the case in the city of Rome as well. According to the scholar Sartori¹⁶, one could link this custom with the cult of the Bona Dea : this ancient goddess of fertility and chastity was worshipped with nocturnal rituals as well, although in the month of December¹⁷.

14. For references to Jacobus a Voragine, the following text edition was used: *Jacobi a Voragine Legenda aurea. Vulgo historia lombardica dicta*. Ad optimorum librorum fidem recensuit dr. Th. Graesse, Osnabrück, 1965.

15. P. TOSCHI, *op. cit.* (n. 10), col. 435.

16. SARTORI, *op. cit.* (n. 10), col. 208.

17. H. H. J. BROUWER, *Bona Dea. The Sources and a Description of the Cult* (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain, 110), Leiden, 1989, p. 349-350.

The second half of verse 7 requires some grammatical explanation. *Nomina* constitutes the subject of the predicate *vocem ferre*. Possibly, the word *nomina* ('names') is used in a metonymical way and refers to people, as 'head' in the English expression 'counting heads' denotes a person. The phrase *vocem ferre*, on the other hand, can be translated as 'raise one's voice'; in the text, it might be synonymous with 'invoking someone'. Consequently, we changed the literal translation 'where names will raise their voice' to a more free rendering, the result being 'where her [= Agatha's] name will be invoked'. Mentioning *lac* in verse 8, Fraccus subsequently associates Agatha with mother's milk again. He also repeats her protection against fire, an aspect which is resumed by Mantuanus (II, p. 76, v. 22-23) as well:

[...] *et pacare animos hominum, qui saeva per omnem
Italiam mittunt vesani incendia Martis [...]*

[...] and <think fit> to pacify the minds of men, who sent through the whole
the raging fire of the insane Mars [...]. [of Italy

One may wonder if the combination of a future tense (*veniet*) and a present tense (*nocet*) in verse 8 of the *Sacri Fasti* constitutes a weakness of the poet.

In the second part of our passage, Fraccus focusses on the fire element within Agatha's cult. He refers to the saint's legend, which can be read in Jacobus a Voragine's *Legenda aurea* (c. XXXIX), in verse 9. Agatha was born in the Sicilian town Catania, supposedly in the year 231. The fifth of February is usually considered the day of Agatha's death, but the year in which she died seems uncertain. Yet, it is assumed that she passed away during the persecutions in the time of the Roman emperor Decius (reigned 249-251). This ruler appointed one Quintianus king of Sicily. During his reign, Quintianus fell in love with Agatha, a beautiful woman of noble birth. However, she had already decided to remain a virgin, devoting her life to Christ. Quintianus was unable to accept this, which resulted in his desire to bring shame upon her. Firstly, he sent her to the brothel of one Aphrodisia, but Agatha persevered in her faith. The king got angry and he reverted to a cruel torture : he ordered that Agatha's breasts be cut off. Saint Peter would have healed her injuries at night, but she still died after a new series of torments the next day : Quintianus had her skin burnt by red-hot coals.

So, the flames and the sword in the *Sacri Fasti* are mentioned as the major sources of pain in the last days of Agatha's life. In that way, it becomes clear that Agatha is the subject of the verb form *sacravit* in verse 9. Mantuanus (II, p. 76, v. 7-11) speaks about the torture as well:

*Mitteris in rapidos ignes, tua lactea tortor
viscera truncavit ferro, tua forcipe adunca
ubera contrivit, laceroque a pectore traxit,*

*carnifici daris in praedam, velut alba voraci
agna lupo, primis tua membra tenerrima in annis [...]*

You are sent to fierce fire, your entrails full of milk
were cut off by a tormentor with a sword, with a bent forceps he ground
your breasts, and off your mangled breast he drew them,
to the executioner you are given as a prey, like a white lamb
to a voracious wolf, your limbs so delicate in the first years [...].

Then, Fraccus uses the word *Catanē* (verse 10) to refer to the Sicilian town Catania. It seems, thus, that our poet preferred, also for prosodic reasons, the older Greek name to the well-known one of his time (in Latin : *Cātānā* or *Cātīnā*): it sounds exotic and refers to Greek Sicily by its name. As the following verses of the *Sacri Fasti* (rather allusively) show, Agatha was the defender of Catania as well. According to the tradition in Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, Mount Etna erupted precisely one year after Agatha's funeral. The Sicilians were in danger, but they succeeded in saving the city by holding up her veil (*virginis a velo*, verse 13) acting as shield against the destructive lava. Likewise, Agatha was invoked in case of eruptions; later on, people also considered her relics a protection against fire hazard in general. For that reason, it is not very surprising that Fraccus mentions Mulciber (verse 13): this is the surname of Vulcan, the god of fire. Vulcan is identified with Hephaestus, whose workplace is situated inside Mount Etna. His name is also used metonymically in the meaning of flames. Ovid mentions this deity twice in his *Fasti*, focussing on the fire aspect only the second time:

*Dira viro facies, vires pro corpore, corpus
grande: pater monstri Mulciber huius erat [...]* (I, v. 553-554.)

The man had a fearful appearance, forces in proportion to his body, a body
of great size: Mulciber was this monster's father [...]

*Arserat hoc templum: signo tamen ille pepercit //
ignis; opem nato Mulciber ipse tulit [...]* (VI, v. 625-626.)

This sanctuary had been on fire: the figure, however, was spared by those
flames; aid to his son was given by Mulciber himself [...].

Eventually, Fraccus emphasizes the bond between Agatha and mother's milk once more : he addresses her with the word *lactaria* (verse 15) in his closing formula. So, according to the *Sacri Fasti*, providing mothers with milk, constitutes Agatha's principal activity : the word *lactaria* refers back to *lactiferis* (verse 4). The milk aspect provides the passage with structure and transforms the text into a coherent whole.

Conclusions

We can draw some conclusions about Fraccus' style and the content of his poem, but we have to be very careful with generalizing assertions about the *Sacri Fasti* as a whole, since our first analysis concerns only a minimal fragment of the poem. A thorough study of the entire composition is needed.

On the one hand, this paper has aimed to examine the Ovidian character of the passage under consideration. We can state that the ancient Roman poet influenced Fraccus, since verbal reminiscences of Ovid are found in the text. The choice of the meter, as opposed to Mantuanus, points towards Ovid as well. In some cases, literal repetitions are at stake, but our poet appropriates the verbal echoes in an original way as well. The phrases in the same verse place, for instance, can illustrate this. Furthermore, one can point out structural parallelisms. This can be found on the macro level, e.g. the division of the *Sacri Fasti* in twelve books which treat the feasts chronologically. We discover structural similarities in the details as well, viz. references to astronomy and more particularly to astrological signs, as the evening star and the Water Carrier in our passage. These elements frame the stories and bestow on them an Ovidian color.

On the other hand, we wanted to see whether pagan elements and references to medieval and Neo-Latin predecessors can be found in the extract discussed here. The answer seems to be 'yes' in both cases. In the first place, some unchristian elements can be pointed out. We saw for example the possible comparison of Agatha with the mythological Penelope, and perhaps our saint's cult can be linked with the worship of the ancient Bona Dea as well. Secondly, concerning the Neo-Latin authors, a comparison with the *Fasti* of the Italian poet Baptista Mantuanus seems very fruitful: it is probable that Fraccus regularly offers a variation on his predecessor. Moreover, our poet was almost certainly familiar with Jacobus a Voragine's medieval *Legenda aurea*, which was printed for the first time in 1470. In the *Sacri Fasti*, one finds several puzzling allusions to Agatha's legend, but many things become clear when the text of the thirteenth-century theologian is read. Jacobus a Voragine thus constitutes an indispensable tool for everyone who wants to understand the implicit references in Fraccus' poem. The allusive character of the *Sacri Fasti* is remarkable: they show neither the straightforwardness, the simplicity nor the clarity of Mantuanus. Fraccus often speaks in guarded terms and alludes to stories or a Roman context without further explanation. This leads one to wonder if this poem was intelligible to a non-Roman, transalpine public – bear in mind particularly the readers of the Antwerp Bellerus edition. Admittedly, the Catholic reader at

the time was well acquainted with the saints and their cults. For the connoisseur of Jacobus a Voragine, Fraccus' poem perhaps constituted a typical humanistic attempt to dress up that medieval work as classical-humanistic poetry.

Tilke NELIS
PhD student, KU Leuven
Blijde-Inkomststraat 5 (post box 3004), B-3000 Leuven
tilke.nelis@kuleuven.be