

**LES ENLUMINURES, LTD**  
2970 North Lake Shore Drive 11B  
Chicago, Illinois 60657

tel. 1-773-929-5986  
fax. 1-773-528-3976  
chicago@lesenluminures.com

**LES ENLUMINURES**  
Le Louvre des Antiquaires  
2 place du Palais-Royal  
75001 Paris

tél : 33 1 42 60 15 58  
fax : 33 1 40 15 00 25  
info@lesenluminures.com

**MARSILIUS FICINO, *Opinioni de philosophi di dio e de l'anima***  
**In Italian, manuscript on paper**  
**[Italy (perhaps Florence), c. 1480-1500]**

iii + 16 + iii, complete (collation: i<sup>8</sup>), paper size (202 x 140 mm), watermarks (Briquet 3390, "Chapeau," Florence, 1481-1485), modern foliation in Arabic numerals in pencil, written in a flamboyant and perhaps notarial cursive in brown ink, single column justified in pencil (justification 150 x 85 mm.), 34 lines per page, headings throughout in pale rubric, first and last words in capitals, blank space left for initial on f. 1r with guide letter, sporadic marginalia in brown and rubric throughout from the original scribe, ff. 14-16 blank, some browning to edges and first folio otherwise clean. Bound in limp vellum over cardboard, two fragment ties of blue thread appear on front and rear cover fore edge, front and rear flyleaves in heavy paper, pastedowns use paper of the flyleaves, tail of front cover worn and breaking, lower right corner of front cover bumped and split. Dimensions 210 x 145 mm.

An attractive copy of one of Ficino's earliest texts, addressed to Francesco Capponi in 1457 and relatively rare in manuscript form. No other copies are bound alone. The work attempts to summarize the beliefs of all ancient philosophers on God and the human soul. This present copy is a fine example of Ficino's interest in blending Platonism and Christianity to create a new philosophical view, combining all the traditions of philosophy.

**PROVENANCE**

1. Written in Italy, perhaps Florence, late fifteenth century based on watermark and on the script, although there is no evidence of original ownership.

**TEXT**

ff. 1r-13v, Marsilius Ficino, *Opinioni de philosophi di dio e de l'anima*, incipit, "Opinioni de philosophi di dio e de l'anima [title]...La nostra singulare amitizia amicho charissimo [text]"; explicit, "elle lucenti stelle...aquelo della quale sepuì luongo tempo stato amicho. finis. AMEN."

Marsilius Ficino (1433-1499) was the leading authority on Plato in the Renaissance. A famous humanist he founded the second Platonic Academy in Florence with the backing of Cosimo de Medici. Ficino gathered together the complete corpus of Plato's works in Greek, edited them into what he considered to be the best edition, and then translated the entire corpus into Latin. He also translated and edited the corpus of the Hermetic tradition. Ficino attempted to make a synthesis of Christianity and Platonism; however, his work led to accusations of heresy, mostly due to the

inquisitor's unfamiliarity with Plato's works. His work on the immortality of the soul led to a brief condemnation. Ficino's vast correspondence was considered to be a model of Latin prose, which was edited for teaching Latin among humanist scholars.

The present manuscript is one of Ficino's earliest texts. It is addressed to Francesco Capponi (1452-1520), and notable banker and politician in Florence and Lyon. Francesco Capponi was the son of Niccolò di Giovanni di Mico and Selvaggia, the daughter of Bernardo di Lorenzo Ridolfi. Capponi came from a very wealthy banking family in Florence. In 1466, he founded a bank in Florence with Francesco Nasi and Guglielmo de' Pazzi. From 1480 onwards, he held several important political posts in Florence, being named to the high court in 1518. He was married to Camilla di Andrea di Francesco Quaratesi, and died without heirs. We do not know how Capponi became one of Ficino's friends. However, the Capponi family was close to Ficino, with his cousins and uncles forming part of this group.

The *Opinioni de philosophi di dio e de l'anima*, also known as the *Tractatus de deo et anima vulgaris*, is a minor work by Ficino composed midway through his academic career. In this work, Ficino attempts to summarize the beliefs of all ancient philosophers on God and the human soul. Given that it was written for a young man, it represents a form of pedagogy indicative of Ficino's desire to emulate the original Platonic Academy. Ficino paints several metaphorical pictures of the relationship between the soul and God. He offers the venerable Christian view of man as *viator*, the pagan view of man as an Orpheus with his lyre strung to the planetary modes, a Hermetic seal, a Zoroastrian magus, a spark struck from the flinty of Dionysian matter, a starry charioteer, and the *oiga* of the soul. Ficino engaged in a life long quest not only to blend Platonism and Christianity, but to create a new philosophical view combining all the traditions of philosophy, astrology, and alchemy that he knew.

There are only twelve known complete copies of Ficino's *Opinioni de philosophi di dio e de l'anima*. Eleven copies exist in Italy: nine in Florence, one in Lucca and one in Venice. There is only one known copy in the United States, Yale University, Beinecke Library, Marston MS 247. Kristeller's critical edition of the text used neither the Yale copy nor this copy. Interestingly, this is the only copy that is bound as a separate text, the rest are either bound in a collection of Ficino's works or in miscellanies.

## LITERATURE

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Kristeller, Paul Oskar. *Marsilio Ficino and His Work after Five Hundred Years*, in *Quaderni di "Rinascimento."* 7, Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 1987.

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#### ONLINE RESOURCES

International Ficino Society

<http://www.ficino.it/index.htm>

Online works by Ficino

<http://history.hanover.edu/early/ficino.html>

Bibliography of Ficino

<http://homepage.mac.com/eeskenazi/bibl3.html>