

MARSILIUS FICINO, *Opinioni de philosophi di dio e de l'anima*

In Italian, manuscript on paper

Italy (perhaps Florence), c. 1480-1490

iii + 16 + iii, complete (collation: i⁸), 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 contemporary (?) 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.

A manuscript of one of the earliest compositions by one of the intellectual giants of the Italian Renaissance. Rare in manuscript form, transcribed in a neat unadorned humanist cursive, the present copy may have been written in the author's lifetime and perhaps even in his circle. No other copies are bound alone, and all but one other of the 13 copies is in an Italian collection. The work is an example of Ficino's interest in blending Platonism and Christianity to create a wide-ranging 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.
2. Joost Ritman (b. 1941--), Dutch businessman and book collector, founder of The Ritman Library, Stichting Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, Amsterdam, their shelfmark BPH 215 (pencil note on the back pastedown), deaccessioned in 2011.

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 sepui luongo tempo stato amicho. finis. AMEN." (ed. Kristeller, 1937, II, pp. 128-158).

Marsilius Ficino (1433-1499) was the leading authority on Plato in the Renaissance. He saw his work as the philosophical arm of humanism and claimed that his century "like a golden age, restored to light the liberal arts that were nearly extinct: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music ... and in Florence it restored the Platonic doctrine from darkness to light," doing for philosophy what Giotto had done for painting and Dante for poetry (Kristeller, 1943, p. 23).

A devout Christian, Ficino founded the second Platonic Academy in Florence with the backing of Cosimo de Medici. He 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. In his attempt to make a synthesis of Christianity and Platonism, he went far beyond Platonism, introducing into orthodoxy an encyclopedic range of unorthodox spiritual, magical, and occult beliefs keyed to the theme of the soul's ascent (Allen, 2005, p. 366). 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), 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," was defiantly written in 1457, when Ficino had been banished from Florence by its archbishop. The study of ancient philosophical texts and dissemination of their ideas ran the risk of appearing to be a revival of the religious beliefs of Antiquity, and Ficino was accused of heresy and ordered to read Thomas Aquinas instead of Plato. In this work, Ficino attempts to summarize the beliefs of all ancient philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, Diogenes, Seneca, Zeno, Socrates, and Pythagoras, 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 lifelong 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 thirteen 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. The present manuscript is further significant in that it may have been written in his lifetime and perhaps within his circle.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

International Ficino Society

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

Online works by Ficino

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

Bibliography of Ficino

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

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