

ACADEMY FLORENTINE — the Platonic Academy in Florence (which should not be identified with the University of Florence) arose under the inspiration and patronage of the Medicis as a gathering of those who shared an enthusiasm for Plato. They met for disputations at the villa of Careggi (Montevecchio) that was given to Ficino. It referred directly to the former Platonic Academy and was inseparable from the person of Marsilio Ficino and the history of Florentine Renaissance culture.

We may mention some important dates in the history of the Florentine Academy. In 1438 George Gemistus Plethon with his lectures on Plato inspired Cosimo Medici to found an academy. In 1454 the peripatetic academy of Rinuccini, Acciaiuoli, and Argyropoulos was established. In 1459, Marsilio Ficino directed his studies and works definitively to Platonism under the inspiration and patronage of Cosimo Medici. In 1462 the Florentine Academy was established when Ficino received the villa of Careggi and its possessions. Ficino's friends began to gather there in order to carry out their patron's wish and work on a translation of the *Pimander* of pseudo-Hermes Trismegistus and certain Platonic works. From 1469 to 1492 Lorenzo Medici reigned in Florence. He was a patron and an academic (a disciple of Ficino). This was the period of the Florentine Academy's greatest growth. In 1494, Piero Medici, Lorenzo's son and successor, was driven out of Florence. In the same year the deaths of Angelo Poliziano (Politian) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola had the effect of slowing the growth of the Academy. After the death of Ficino (November 1, 1499), his work was continued by his faithful disciple, Francesco Zanoli Cattani da Diacceto. In 1522, many of the members of the Florentine Academy were involved in a plot against Giulio de' Medici, and this is also the date of the definitive end of the Florentine Academy.

Ficino was fascinated by Plato and tried to imitate him in almost all respects. He made his estate in the Florentine countryside like that of Plato's near Athens. The stone pines at Montevecchio were intended to play the role of the platanus trees in the Academy's groves. The Terzolle brook corresponded to the Cephissus River. On the walls of the lecture hall where the members gathered, over time various fitting maxims appeared (just as in the Athenian Academy): "*A bono in bonum omnia diriguntur*" ("Everything comes from the good and returns to the good"), "*Fuge excessum, fuge negotia, laetus in praesens*" ("Avoid excess, flee from troubles, rejoice in the present moment"). In the hall there was also a bust of Plato before which burned an eternal lamp. Like Plato, Ficino opened his home to his friends, whom came to be called academics (*Academici*). Their master was called *princeps Academicorum*. The place where they met came to be called the *Accademia Carregiana*. With Ficino's growing fame, he was called the "second Plato" (*alter Plato*), and the title of academic was an honorary distinction bestowed by Ficino himself. In this way he gathered around himself a circle of persons known as Ficiniani (at the Academy there were also the Pichiani or disciples of Pico, and the Savonaroliani or disciple of Savonarola). He created a community of "brothers in Plato" (*fratres in Platone*) who were the "Platonic family" (*Platonica familia*). He became the "father" (*pater Platonicae familiae*). They greeted each other with the words "*salus in Platone*" ("good health in Plato"). The basic conditions for membership were erudition, moral probity and friendship with Ficino.

Ficino himself (already advanced in years) in a letter to Marcin Uranio (Marcin Prenninger) listed eighty of his disciples and friends who formed the Academy (M. Ficino, *Prooemium in Commentaria Platonis* in: *Opera omnia*, Bas 1576; there are extensive commentaries on each name in: A. Della Torre, *Storia dell'Accademia Platonica di Firenze*). The list is incomplete since the circle of academics who met at the Villa Carregio was not closed (the

list does not mention important figures such as Alberti and Landino). Some names mentioned by Ficino: Andelo Poliziano, Alessandro Braccesi, Carlo Marsuppini, Leonardo da Colle, Bernardo Vettori, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Bernardo de' Medici, Pietro di Marco Parenti, Bernardo di Simone Canigiani, Piero Compagni, Pier Saderini, Oliviero Arduini, Piero Guicciardini, Piero and Bernardo del Nero, Bindaccio Ricasoli, Bartolomeo, Nicollo and Filippo Valori, Demetrio Calcondila, Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici, Domenico Benivieni, Antonio di Paolo Benivieni, Girolamo Amazzi, Bastiano di Antonio Foresi, Antonio d'Agostino da S. Miniato, Francesco Bandini, Girolamo Rossi, Pietro di Leonardo Leoni da Spoleto, Cherubino di Bartolo Quarquagli, Baccio di Luca Ugolini, Riccardo di Marco Angioleri d'Anghiari, Lorenzo di Silvestro Guiducci, Antonio di Bellincione degli Agli, and Francesco Cattani da Diacceto. Other names on the list: Comandi, Nuzzi, Lippi, Colucci, Martini, Calderini, Dovizi, Cocchi, Michelozzi, G. Guicciardini, A. Albizzi, F. Rinuccini, G. V. Soderini, B. Rucellai, F. Carducci, A. Lanfredini, and G. Canacci.

Among the "co-philosophers" and "brothers in Plato" as Ficino called them, we find not only philosophers, but also poets, rhetoricians, lawyers, politicians, priests, physicians and musicians. This was not an accident but was fully intended by Ficino (M. Ficino, *Prooemium in Commentaria Platonis*, in: *Opera Omnia*, Bas 1576). His inspiration was to seek out a special bond and spiritual community of persons in the intellectual order, and to host a unified and inseparable selection of topics considered and discussed were unified and inseparable that included overlapping elements from philosophy, theology, medicine, philology, literature, law and political science. This approach was a special feature of the culture of the Italian Quattrocento. The meetings at the Villa Careggi cannot be regarded as purely academic, nor can the place be regarded as an academy in the strict sense of the world as an institution with its own statutes, rules and plenary official meetings, but it was a center for cultural life, a unique "intellectual salon" in which all the participants kept in constant contact with Ficino even if they were unable to take part in the gatherings, all were fascinated by his unique personality, and many felt solidarity with the program of his philosophy. which took in all the above-mentioned elements and was expressed in various slogans such as *prisca theologia*, *catena aurea*, *pia philosophia*, and *docta religio*. The collective work of the Florentine Platonic Academy was limited to three planes. First, there were learned colloquiums and lectures, recitations, and free-ranging philosophical and literary discussions. Second, there were festive symposiums (erudite banquets modeled after Plato's *Symposium*) connected with an official celebration of Plato's birth and death set for the seventh of November. Third, there were quasi-didactic activities including private lectures, courses in rhetoric, the translation of texts, probative disputations, speeches for special occasions and disputations on preestablished themes.

Under Ficino's direction (especially after 1469), the views and program of activities of the members of the Florentine Academy were consolidated and focused on two basic motifs in Ficino's creative work. The first was a thought borrowed from Gemistus Plethon, that from Hermes to Plotinus there is a single great philosophical and theological tradition of eternal wisdom (*prisca theologia*, *catena aurea*), which Ficino tried to make agree as much as possible with orthodox Christian thought. For this reason he also inserted Christian authors into this tradition (including St. Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite and others up to Cusanus). In this way he created an original theory of "learned religion" and "pious philosophy" (*docta religio* and *pia philosophia*). Ficino was transformed from "a pagan into a soldier of Christ" and in the propagation of the thought of Plato and Plotinus he saw a true service for Christ and the best defense of the Christian religion (*theologia platonica*). He

also wanted to contribute in a real way to the establishment of one state in Latin *Christianitas* in which the ideals of a pure Platonic-Christian spiritualism would be realized. He tried to realize this idea in Hungary (where he intended to travel) through his friendship with King Matthias Corvinus and a circle of Hungarian and Italian humanist friends who resided in the royal court. He regarded them as the builders of a new exemplary political community, a state of love. The first framework had been built by Socrates, the precursor of Christ, who built a true human community by making strong the bonds of love (Swieżawski DF III 201). This was the source of his broadly conceived Renaissance philosophy of love. This philosophy became an exceptionally important element of reflection for Ficino (his two commentaries on Plato's *Symposium*) and for his "brothers in Plato". The theory and practice of friendship was inseparably joined with the theory of love. Friendship was conceived as a desire to acquire the ancient but already "Christianized" version of wisdom by which they could resolve not only individual problems, but also problems of the collective happiness of people in general. The concept of Platonic love that was developed in this milieu was strictly connected with a spiritualistic conception of man. It emphasized freedom and the special dignity of the human person. It was opposed to all forms of Epicurean hedonism, which was widely propagated among many Renaissance humanists.

The second theme in Ficino's creative work is his profound conviction, derived from Argyropoulos, Bessarion, Filelfo and others, that Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies are in real agreement and harmony (they agree as to principles, and disagree only in verbal formulas). In this respect, Ficino was in complete agreement with his "brother in Plato", Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and he thought that this agreement (*concordia*) must be fully presented and justified. He was firmly opposed to the Averroistic and Alexandrian interpretation of Aristotle. The result was that their collective work initiated the philosophical current known today as Renaissance Platonism (or according to some, neo-Platonism), and they saw themselves as a continuation of the ancient Platonism. Without the collaboration of his circle of enthusiasts of Plato, it would certainly have been difficult for Ficino to undertake the enormous work of making the texts of Platonic literature in the broad sense accessible to the western world, namely Latin translations of the works of Plato and Plotinus, minor neo-Platonic writings, patristic writings, hermetical works (*Corpus hermeticum*) and Orphic hymns (*Orphica*). Ficino wrote commentaries to many of this works, including Plato's *Symposium* and *Parmenides*, and Plotinus' *Enneads*, which he regarded as his greatest accomplishment beside his philosophical and religious summa, the *Theologia platonica de immortalitate animae*, which was dedicated to a defense of the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the human soul. In this milieu Ficino also composed other treatises (*De triplici vita*, *De religione christiana*, *De vita coelitus comparanda*; *Apologia*; *Epistolarium*; *Vita Platonis*), writings which well reflected the interests and the evolution of the intellectual orientation of the whole academic community around Ficino.

The views that enlivened the Florentine Academy spread and influenced many scientific centers in Europe at the time (including Kraków, Budapest, Paris, Tübingen, and Leipzig) and inspired the work of many humanists of the time (including Aegidius Viterbo, Leone Ebreo, Lefèvre d'Étalpes, Symphorien Champier, Paracelsus, Celtes, Marcin Prenninger, Philip Kallimach, Nicholas Copernicus, Giordano Bruno; cf. Swieżawski DF III 213-217). One of the most eminent disciples of Ficino was Francesco Zanolli Cattani da Diacceto (d. 1522), who continued and developed in his writings (*De amore libri tres* and *Panegyricus in Amorem*) the neo-Platonic philosophy of wisdom. After Ficino's death he tried to continue his work as faithfully as possible. He took over the direction of the Florentine Academy and

moved the Academy and its meetings to a new location, the Orti Oricellari, a gift to him from the great patron of the arts, Bernard Rucellai. At this stage in its history, the Florentine Academy tried to remain faithful to tradition in a legal sense. It was not institutionalized nor did it possess any statutes or rules, but still wanted to play the role of the center of Italian culture. The orientation of the circle which participated in its meetings began to change (there were many new participants, including Niccoló Machiavelli). The general tenor of their common interests also began to change systematically. Departing from the mysticism and abstract philosophical and religious speculations that were typical of Ficino's school, the meetings were aimed at practical discussions in history, philology, literature, and issues of society and politics. The Florentine Academy ended in 1522, when a large number of its members were politically involved in a plot on the life of the Cardinal and Archbishop of Florence, Giulio de' Medici, later Pope Clement VII (1523-1534).

A. Della Torre, *Storia dell' Accademia Platonica di Firenze*, Fi 1902; M. Heitzman, *Studia nad Akademią Platońską we Florencji* [Studies on the Platonic Academy in Florence], KF 10 (1932), 197–227, 257–305; 11 (1933), 60–88; 93–125, 193–239, 13 (1936), 1–44; B. Kieszkowski, *Platonizm renesansowy* [Renaissance Platonism], Wwa 1935; E. Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano. Filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento*, Bari 1947, 1965<sup>3</sup> (*Filozofia Odrodzenia we Włoszech* [Philosophy of the Renaissance in Italy], Wwa 1969, 111–175); R. Marcel, *Marsile Ficin (1433-1499)*, P 1958, 235–678; Swieżawski DF III 180–217; M. Schiavone, EF I 37–38.

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