READING MARSILO FICINO IN QUATTROCENTO ITALY.
The Case of Aragonese Naples

MATTEO SORANZO

Summary: This essay focuses on the reception of Marsilio Ficino’s works and ideas in Naples at the time of the Aragonese domination, and it offers a preliminary discussion of this neglected area of Renaissance Neoplatonism. Based on a contextualization of Ficino’s letters to Giovanni d’Aragona, four manuscripts produced at the Aragonese library and other pieces of evidence such as Pierantonio Caracciolo’s *Farsa de l’Imagico* and Giovanni Pontano’s dialogue *Actius*, it argues that the works and ideas of Marsilio Ficino did circulate at King Ferrante’s court, but were criticized by Giovanni Pontano and his elite of followers. In particular, the essay provides new evidence about the existence of a Ficinian workshop based at the King’s library, and about some of its protagonists such as the scribe and scholar Ippolito Lunense.

Introduction

Around 1493, during the Kingdom of Ferrante of Aragon (1423-1494), Neapolitan playwright Pierantonio Caracciolo presented a *farsa* entitled *The Wizard (L’Imagico)* to the King and his court at Castelnuovo.² Farces and other theatrical genres such as the *gliommero* and the *intramesa* were commonly practiced at the Aragonese Court. Local poets such as Jacopo Sannazaro and Pietro Jacopo de Gennaro—as De Blasi and Bianchi have recently illustrated—composed successful farces and *gliommeri*, which voiced the multicultural and multilingual society of Aragonese Naples, and sometimes even channeled elements of social dissent.³ Farces, moreover, are important documents of the intellectual life of the court, and in par-

1 I would like to thank Valery Rees, Christopher Celenza, Teodoro Katinis and Dario Brancato for their comments and useful feedback on earlier versions of this essay.

2 Torraca, Francesco, *Studi di Storia Letteraria Napoletana*, 69. I would like to thank Gianni Cicili for having first introduced me to this interesting, yet poorly known, text.

ticular of the group of intellectuals gathered at Castel Capuano, the smaller residence of the king’s son and his entourage. By suggesting the social status of their fictional characters through a careful selection of linguistic registers, as Galasso has explained, courtly playwrights could raise issues and express controversial ideas without compromising their position at court. In line with this general trend, Caracciolo’s farce stages a wizard that unusually combines traditional features of ancient philosophers with rather precise references to astrology, magic and the legendary doctrines of Zoroaster and Pythagoras. More precisely, Caracciolo’s imago promises to reveal the secret of human happiness after positing himself in a lineage of ancient philosophers that seems to recall, albeit loosely, the ideas about the existence of a *prisca theologia* that circulated in Quattrocento Florence:

I am not one of them, because my art is written in precious papers; almost all these doctrines are divine. My first master was Zoroaster, and after him Hermippo, Agonace and Speusippo; and these spheres are made with the art of Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Pythagoras and Plato.

Boillet, in an interesting study that illustrates how magic was a widespread interest at the Aragonese Court, has compared Caracciolo’s wizard with analogous characters found, for example, in Sannazaro’s *Arcadia.* Rather than a generic interest in things supernatural, however, I would like to suggest that Caracciolo’s wizard precisely displays the features of a new figure of philosopher, theologian and “doctor of the soul” that Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) was spreading in Italy and Europe through the printed editions of his works and the complex network created through his letters. This recognition is problematic, as the actual diffusion of Ficino’s texts in Naples is hardly acknowledged by the few scholars who ventured into this neglected avenue of research. Whereas Ficino’s fortune has been thoroughly documented in the case of cities like Urbino or Rome, the diffusion of the Florentine philosopher in Quattrocento Naples has generally been discussed in elusive, and often contradictory, terms. If over fifty years

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4 Ryder, *The Kingdom of Naples*, 54.
6 Torraca, *Studi di Storia*, 433: “Io non so de quistoro che mia arte / E scripta in degne carte so doctrine/ Quasi tutte divine el primo mastro / Me fo Re Zoroastro, apresso Hermippo / Agonace et Speusippo; et queste sphere / sono delarte vere de Anaxagora/ De Empedocle Pythagora et Platone.”
7 Boillet, “Paradis retrouvé et perdus,” 125.
ago Giuseppe Saitta juxtaposed the spiritualism of Florentine Neo-
Platonists to the materialism of Neapolitan Aristotelians, Noel Brann has
recently used Naples as an example of the fortune of Ficino’s theory of
genius. And despite their opposite conclusions, neither of these scholars
managed to ground their grand claims on sufficient evidence, so that this
important moment in early modern intellectual history has only been the
object of not systematic, albeit illuminating, works. Francesco Tateo, for
example, has suggested that the imitation of Petrarch at the Aragonese
court might have been sensitive to the language and themes of Florentine
Neoplatonism.

Marc Deramaix, moreover, has often discussed the presence of Ficinian themes in the later works of Neapolitan poet Jacopo Sannazaro, which he has persuasively linked with Augustinian Friar Giles of Viterbo.

Following in the footsteps of Tateo and Deramaix, this article argues
that the Ficinian themes found in Caracciolo’s *Farsa dell’Imagico* are a prod-
uct of the Aragonese court in the 15th century. In my view, the diffusion of
Ficino’s books and ideas in Naples needs to be understood as a facet of the
diffusion of Florentine artists, objects, texts and ideas at the Aragonese
court that characterizes the kingdom of Ferrante. Moreover, the way
Neapolitan readers responded to Ficino’s ideas further documents the intel-
lectual exchange between Florence and Naples, and in particular the rela-
tionship between Giovanni Pontano, the Rucellai family in Florence and
Nicolò Machiavelli, an assiduous member of the Rucellai’s gardens and an
attentive reader of Pontano’s works. In this perspective, Caracciolo’s play
can be matched with four additional pieces of evidence, which are respec-

9 Saitta, *Il Pensiero Italiano nell’Umanesimo*, 653-6; Brann, *The Debate over the
origin of Genius*, 123-6.
12 For a general discussion of the historical context, see Galasso, *Il Regno di
Napoli*, 72-9. The relationships between Naples and Florence were not limited
to diplomacy and economics, but they also affected activities such as, for exam-
ple, architecture, and jewelry making and literature. For recent studies on these
specific subjects see, for example, De Divitiis, “Building in local *all’antica* style,”
505-522; Clark, “Transient Possession: Circulation, Replication and
13 For a thorough examination of the relationship between Giovanni Pontano, the
Rucellai family and the genesis of Machiavelli’s *Discorsi*, see Gilbert, “Bernardo
Rucellai and the *Orti Oricellari*,” 101-131; Richardson, “Pontano’s *De Prudentia*
and Machiavelli’s *Discorsi*,” 353-357; and, more importantly, Ginzburg,
Marsilio Ficino's letters to Cardinal Giovanni d’Aragona written in 1478-80; b. the manuscript copies of Ficino’s translations of Plato’s dialogues and Platonic Theology commissioned by Ferrante of Aragon in 1490-3; c. Ippolito Lunense’s translation of Ficino’s *argumenta*; d. Giovanni Pontano’s critical use of Ficino’s language in his dialogue *Actius* (written 1495-1499; first printed 1507). Although incomplete, this cluster of evidence is sufficient to suggest that the circulation of Ficino’s texts in Quattrocento Naples was connected with the culture of the court, and was not easily accepted by the elite of natural philosophers and astrologers gathered around Giovanni Pontano.

**Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni d’Aragona**

The first clear exchange between Marsilio Ficino and the culture of Aragonese Naples unfolded on the backdrop of a complex political scenario, which involved Lorenzo il Magnifico, King Ferrante and his son Giovanni d’Aragona, a young Cardinal at the time. In the sixth book of Ficino’s *Letters*, more precisely, there are two letters addressed to Cardinal Giovanni d’Aragona written in the aftermath of the Pazzi Conspiracy. This book covers a period comprised between 1478 and 1481, that is, the moment of political turmoil that followed the failed assassination of Lorenzo de’ Medici and culminated in the formation of an alliance between pope Sixtus IV and King Ferrante of Aragon against Florence.14 Consistent with Lorenzo’s attempt at resolving the crisis with a diplomatic mission to Naples in the winter of 1479, Ficino tried to use his connections with the Roman Curia as well as his rhetorical talent to exhort Sixtus IV and Ferrante to adopt a peaceful conduct. Valery Rees has noted how Ficino’s political letters betray his view of love and unity as the ideal forms of politics, ideas that he found in Plato as well as in his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.15 Rees, in addition, has shown how these letters revive a view of the relationship between temporal and spiritual power that applies Dante’s theory exposed in the *Monarchy* to the context of Quattrocento Italy.16 In my view, Ficino’s letters can also be matched with the broader Florentine strategy at influencing King Ferrante’s conduct by gaining the favor of his sons Alfonso, Federico and Giovanni through the donation of precious manuscripts.

15 Rees, “Ficino’s Advice to Princes,” 339-357.
Furthermore, Ficino’s letters betray an uncommon ability to reuse language and themes of the Aragonese political propaganda.

Ficino’s letters to Cardinal Giovanni parallel Lorenzo de Medici’s collections of love poetry sent to Federico and Alfonso. In the 1470s, Lorenzo commissioned two anthologies of Tuscan poetry enriched by Francesco del Chierico’s illuminations and edited by Angelo Poliziano. Lorenzo’s gifts were at the heart of a complex ideological operation addressed to the intellectual community of Ippolita Sforza, which was generally well disposed toward Lorenzo de Medici and Tuscan culture. More specifically, these anthologies constituted an extension of Lorenzo’s correspondence with Ippolita, which contributed to set the stage for the Florentine diplomatic mission that took place in the winter of 1479. While Lorenzo was using his connections at court, Ficino was harping on his affiliations with the Roman Curia and high prelates such as the new Archbishop of Amalfi Giovanni Niccolini, who was called to take care of Giovanni d’Aragona’s philosophical and religious education. In addition, Ficino tried to use Giovanni Niccolini as an intermediary with Sixtus IV, while he tried to draw on Giovanni d’Aragona to influence King Ferrante’s conduct. In doing so, Ficino could count on the Cardinal’s interest in theology as well as on his bibliographic taste. Giovanni’s amazing collection of theological manuscripts, some of which were eventually added to the Aragonese Library, included for the most part items copied and illuminated by the best scribes and illuminators available in Florence.

While Lorenzo’s Raccolta Aragonese was meant to instruct the young Federico about Tuscan love poetry, Ficino’s first letter to Cardinal Giovanni was originally intended to accompany three philosophical texts written in the genre of speculum literature. The purpose of Ficino’s gift was introducing his young addressee to a view of wisdom (sapientia) that is linked with Plato and strategically juxtaposed to Cicero’s teachings:

Some time ago, Reverend Father, I wrote three addresses, Platonic rather than Ciceronian, to deter my friends from vice and, as far as I could, to exhort them to virtue. The first describes the miserable shadow of evil life; the second recalls the happy image of the good life; the third expresses the divine form of goodness itself.

22 De la Mare, “The Florentine scribes of Cardinal Giovanni of Aragona,” 245-93.
Besides its obvious philosophical implications, I would suggest that Ficino might have decided to juxtapose Plato and Cicero in response to other advice books produced in Naples, and in particular Giovanni Pontano’s *De Principe* (*On the Prince*, written ca. 1464; first printed 1490). An advice book in Latin that used philosophy at the service of political propaganda, Pontano’s *De Principe* was based on a definition of wisdom related to the works of Plato filtered through the works of Cicero. In particular, *De Principe* betrays a notion of self-knowledge that is different from Ficino’s, and solidly related to Pontano’s views on the role of religion in princely education:

Blessed is the one who—as Plato affirms, and Cicero repeats—happens to be allowed to follow wisdom and truthful opinions in his old age. Most clearly, therefore, the foundations have to be grounded from a young age, so that we can follow through in the old age. Once the foundations are well grounded, we have no reason to be afraid to fall apart, as it happens in a well built house.

Differently from Ficino, Pontano envisioned wisdom as a form of self-knowledge that stems from experience and the attentive knowledge of classical texts; a practical virtue, that is, provocatively disconnected from religion. In *De Principe*, spiritual counseling is indicated as the work of professional theologians such as the Catalan Narciso Verdùn, whose role is praised but distinguished from that of a political advisor. Ficino’s knowledge of typically Neapolitan themes is further demonstrated by looking at the complex fiction staged in the second letter to Cardinal Giovanni.

Ficino’s second letter to Giovanni d’Aragona is a political exhortation formulated in the form of a prophecy (*oraculum*) originally pronounced by King Alfonso in angelic language for his son Ferrante. The letter seeks to

24 For a now classical interpretation of Pontano’s text, see Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 120-128 and Id. *Visions of Politics*, 135-7. More recent discussions of this work are found in Gaylard, “Re-Envisioning the Ancients,” 245-265 and Cappelli’s introduction to Pontano, *De Principe*.


26 As the King’s theological consultant, Narciso had sent a short theological meditation (*lucubratinuncula*) to King Ferrante in 1474, as discussed in De Marinis, *La biblioteca napoletana*, 48-49.

27 Ficino, VI (5): 23: “Reverend Father, the blessed King Alfonso, your grandfather, recently uttered from heaven a prophecy in the language of angels for your
persuade Ferrante to adopt a peaceful conduct in the aftermath of the Pazzi Conspiracy, thus abandoning the alliance with pope Sixtus IV against Florence. In doing so, it includes a synopsis of Plato’s theory of the soul, which is presented as a way by which Ferrante may use philosophical contemplation to heal his soul from the bellicose influx of Saturn and Mars. Also, the letter draws on Ferrante’s genealogy, and more specifically on the peaceful conduct of his father Alfonso il Magnanimo, characterized as a rex pacis. In doing so, Ficino not only paraphrased ideas found in his philosophical works, but he also intended to gain his addressee’s attention by astutely referring to a famous motif of Aragonese propaganda.28 More specifically, Ficino’s use of the angelic vision is a skillful reference to Antonio Panormita’s Triumphus Alphonsi Regis Neapolitanorum (written 1443; first printed 1538).29 A celebration of the restored peace pronounced by a pageant of allegorical personifications of virtues, Panormita’s Triumphus includes the prosopopea of an angel who speaks to King Alphonse and celebrates his role as a peacemaker after a period of war and political turmoil.30 What Ficino presents as his translation of a discourse originally pronounced in angelic language, therefore, tried to gain his reader’s benevolence by carefully reusing language and themes of the Aragonese propaganda.

Ficino’s letters to Giovanni d’Aragona, his veiled critique of Pontano’s De Principe and his reuse of Panormita’s Triumphus may stem from his blessed father, King Ferdinand. Marsilio Ficino, caught up by some spirit, was there. He heard and remembered that prophecy uttered by King Alfonso in the language of angels. Today he has translated it for you into the language of men with this advice: first, please read it yourself, then send it to His Serene Highness, your father, so that what Marsilio recently understood from Alfonso with the eyes and ears of the mind alone, he may through our care receive with the ears and eyes of the body as well.”

28 For a recent and thoroughly documented history of this motif, see Iacono, “Il Trionfo di Alfonso d’Aragona tra memoria classica e propaganda di corte,” 9-57.
29 Iacono, “Primi risultati delle ricerche sulla tradizione manoscritta,” 560-599.
knowledge of an important anthology of Neapolitan propagandistic texts available in Florence. Both Pontano’s *De Principe* and Panormita’s *Triumphus*, along with other products of Aragonese humanists, were well known to Florentine intellectuals in a manuscript commissioned by Antonio Ridolfi, Florentine ambassador in Naples, to the scribe Pietro Cennini in 1469-1471. An interesting figure of scribe and scholar, Pietro Cennini had personally collaborated with Pontano and Panormita in selecting and copying the texts included in his anthology. Solidly structured according to propagandistic criteria, this manuscript includes long excerpts from politically committed historical works produced by Alfonso’s humanists. As such, it played a major role in the diffusion of Aragonese texts in Florence and in spreading the myth of Alfonso il Magnanimo as a restorer of peace and a model of wisdom and learning.  

A Ficinian Workshop at the Aragonese Library

The positive outcome of the crisis that followed the Pazzi Conspiracy contributed to strengthen the diplomatic and intellectual relationships between Florence and Naples, officially sanctioned by a peace treaty signed in 1480. The seeds planted by Lorenzo de Medici and Marsilio Ficino, so to speak, could flourish in this renewed political scenario. Angelo Poliziano, for example, managed to strengthen his intellectual ties with Giuniano Maio, professor of Rhetoric and Poetics at the Neapolitan studio. A member of Ficino’s network of scholars, Roberto Salviati even involved Neapolitan intellectuals such as Maio in the rehabilitation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola after his brush with Innocent VIII, due to the failed attempt at discussing the 900 theses in 1486. A copy of Giovanni Pico’s *Heptaplus* was received by Maio, who enthusiastically replied in 1490 in a letter that also betrays his acquaintance with the Florentine ambassador in Naples, Piero Vettori. What best epitomizes this positive trend,

32 Galasso, *Il regno di Napoli*, 679. Naples’ friendly ties with Florence, which played a major role during the conflicts with the barons and the pope, were reiterated in the peace treaty signed in 1486. The text of this treaty can be read in Fedele, “La pace del 1486 tra Ferdinando d’Aragona ed Innocenzo VIII,” 481-503.  
34 Giovanni Pico, *Opera Omnia* (1557-1573), 408-409.
however, is the career of Poliziano’s pupil Francesco Pucci (1462-1512), a Florentine scholar who spent most of his life in Naples. Actively involved in the life of the Neapolitan studio, employed as a librarian at the Aragonese Library and well known in King Ferrante’s court, Pucci arrived in Naples in 1483.\(^35\)

A well trained humanist versed in eloquence, Latin poetry and classical exegesis, Francesco Pucci was the mastermind of a Ficinian workshop based at the King’s library. In 1490, Pucci became “librero mayor” of the Aragonese Library, and during his tenure he drastically improved King Ferrante’s collection.\(^36\) The tasks of an Aragonese librarian also entailed the commission and purchase of manuscripts, and Pucci had personal reason to make sure that the King’s collection acquired prestigious copies of Ficino’s works: Ficino himself had praised Pucci’s scholarship and rhetorical skills in a letter to Andrea Cambini in 1489.\(^37\) More specifically, I think that Pucci’s tenure at the King’s Library is closely related with the commission of three illuminated manuscripts of Marsilio Ficino’s works in Latin, and more precisely a copy of the *Platonis Opera Omnia* in two volumes, and a copy of the *Theologia Platonica*. Although useless for a critical edition as *codices descripti*, these three manuscripts produced for the Aragonese library document the diffusion of Ficino’s works at Ferrante’s court, and reveal the names of two other members of this workshop attached to the King’s Library, that is, the scribe Ippolito Lunense and the illuminator Matteo Felice.

Although scholars agree that Ippolito Lunense and Matteo Felice produced only two manuscripts of Ficino’s texts between 1491 and 1493, the items commissioned by King Ferrante were actually three. Based on two records of the Aragonese treasury (*cedole di tesoreria*) of 1491 and 1493, Mazzatinti and De Marinis have correctly identified the first volume of the Aragonese copies of the *Platonis Opera Omnia* and *Theologia Platonica* with mss. Harley 3481 and 3482 of the British Library, which both display Ippolito Lunense’s signature, Matteo Felice’s hand and King Ferrante’s coat of arms.\(^38\) In my view, however, there is a third item to be added to the list. Although a record of the Aragonese treasury dated 1492 does make reference to a second volume of the *Platonis Opera* illuminated by Matteo Felice

\(^{35}\) Santoro, *Un scolaro del Poliziano*, 33; De Marinis, *La biblioteca napoletana*, I, 186.


and transcribed by Ippolito Lunense, Mazzatinti and De Marinis have confused this item with the copy of Ficino’s *Theologia Platonica* that is now part of the Harley collection.\(^{39}\) I propose to identify the second volume mentioned in the records of the Aragonese treasury with manuscript Est. Lat. 469 of the Biblioteca Estense of Modena. First, Gennaro Toscano has recently argued that the illuminator of the Estense manuscript was Matteo Felice, and not an anonymous Sienese artist as cataloguers Fava and Salmi have erroneously claimed, followed by Kristeller and Hankins.\(^{40}\) Second, the Estense manuscript includes all the translations of Plato’s dialogues mentioned in the table of contents found in the Harley 3481, but not included in this manuscript.\(^{41}\) Third, Ippolito Lunense’s handwriting is very similar to that found in the Estense manuscript, and there are many other matching features such as the paper used, the size and the binding. Fourth, cataloguers Fava and Salmi attributed the coat of arms found in the first folio to Mathias Corvinus, although at close inspection this coat of arm is almost completely abraded and the item does not display any of Corvinus’ distinctive symbols (e.g. the raven holding a ring, the hourglass etc.).\(^{42}\) To sum up, the Ficinian workshop guided by Francesco Pucci provided the King’s library with a complete copy of Ficino’s *Platonis Opera* in two volumes, and a copy of the *Theologia Platonica*. Furthermore, a fourth item can be added to the list.

Kristeller and, more recently, Paola Megna have demonstrated that the copies of Ficino’s *Platonis Opera* and *Theologia Platonica* that are now part of the Harley collection are based on the printed editions of these texts, and their conclusions probably apply to the Estense manuscript as well.\(^{43}\) However, it would be wrong to believe that Ippolito Lunense and his collaborators merely reproduced a printed copy and embellished it with a rich apparatus of illuminations, without analyzing and discussing the texts. As he proudly claims in the frontispiece of Ficino’s translation of Plato’s dialogues, Ippolito was aware of the mistakes found in the exemplar used and

\(^{39}\) De Marinis, *La Biblioteca napoletana*, II, 297.
\(^{41}\) Megna, *Lo Ione Platonico*, 148.
\(^{42}\) For a specimen of Corvinus’ illuminations, see the photographic apparatus included in *Nel segno del Corvo*.
\(^{44}\) Ms. Harley 3481, fol. 1r: “Proemium Marsillii Ficini Florentini in Libros Platonis ad Laurentium Medicem Virum Magnanumum quos Felicissimi Musarum antistis sapientissimique virtutum ac populorum regus et pace bel-
claimed to have personally edited the text. Based on similar declaration disseminated throughout his copious production, moreover, I believe that Ippolito can be considered a scribe and a scholar, who combined his scribal duties with rather sophisticated skills in textual criticism. In addition, since he personally transcribed Ficino’s major works in their entirety, I would suggest that Ippolito, if not a Platonist, most certainly acquired some knowledge of Ficino’s ideas that he could have shared with other “Tuscanophile” intellectuals gathered at the Aragonese Library in Castel Nuovo in the 1490s.

Ippolito Lunense’s *Auree Sententie e Proverbi Platonici* (ca. 1493)

This hypothesis is confirmed by Ippolito Lunense’s *Auree Sententie e Proverbi Platonici*, a long anthology of philosophical sayings in the vernacular that includes a long selection of Ficino’s *argumenta* extracted from the two volumes of the *Platonis Opera*. Because of its material features, Ippolito Lunense’s *volgarizzamento* transmitted by ms. XII E 32 of the Biblioteca Nazionale of Naples can be considered the fourth product of the Ficinian workshop in Naples. First, the illuminated initial and the preciously decorated borders of fol. 7r display all the distinctive features of Matteo Felice, and if not his own work they were probably made under his supervision. In the 1490s, the white wine-stems with colorful birds, for example, along with figures of *putti* holding the coat of arms of the dedicatee surrounded by a laurel crown were the trademark of this artist, who proudly continued to offer his distinctive blend of Tuscan and Flemish influences on a market that was becoming increasingly sensitive to the new antiquarian taste coming from Veneto. Indeed, the rather stiff and simplified portrait of Plato found in the *Auree Sententiae* contrasts with Matteo Felice’s prodigious portrait of Plato in the *studiole* found in the illu-
minated initials of the Harley and Estense manuscripts, which betray the illuminator’s knowledge of the Saint Jerome painted by Jan Van Eyck for the Genoese merchant Lomellini. However, the doctoral hood and the sophisticated rendering of Plato’s facial complexion matches what is presumably Felice’s interpretation of a traditional Byzantine motif in Plato’s medieval iconography, that is, the portrait of the ancient philosopher under the Tree of Jesse found, for example, in ms. 15 of the Abbey of Mercogliano.

Rather than a translation in the modern sense of the word, the *Auree Sententie* is a typical example of *volgarizzamento* based on the manuscripts in Latin that Ippolito Lunense was copying for the Aragonese Library. Also, considering that Ippolito began to work on Ficino’s Latin manuscripts in 1491, and that he worked for the Aragonese Library until 1493, I would suggest that Ippolito’s collection was compiled within this time span and that Francesco Pucci might have played a determinant role in the conception of this project, which perfectly matches the diffusion of literature in the vernacular among the members of the Aragonese court. In 1488, for example, Neapolitan poet Jacopo Sannazaro had adapted the language of pastoral poetry in Tuscan vernacular to the Aragonese court in his *Libro Pastorale Intitolato Archadio*, the ancestor of his more popular *Arcadia*. In 1491, Florentine born Francesco Patrizi wrote a commentary of Petrarch’s *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta* for the intellectuals gathered at the King’s court. And I don’t think that it is a coincidence if immediately after Ippolito Lunense finalized his *Auree Sententie*, which includes a long translation of Ficino’s commentary of Plato’s *Symposium*, state bureaucrat and courtly poet Benit Gareth revised his *Endimione*, in light of Ficino’s theory of love. Once again, the circulation of Ficino’s texts and themes in Quattrocento Naples seems to be directly connected with the diffusion of literary texts in Tuscan vernacular and mainly connected with a specific area of Aragonese culture, that is, Ferrante’s court and the Aragonese library.

Although the room for the coat of arms in the illuminated bas-de page was left blank, and Ippolito Lunense’s scribal note was left incomplete, it is

48 Toscano, “Matteo Felice,” 216.
51 Soranzo, “Audience and Quattrocento Pastoral,” 53-4; Ricucci, *Il neghittoso e il fier connubio*, 190-204.
52 Paolino, “Per l’edizione del commento di Francesco Patrizi,” 53-311.
my conjecture that the manuscript of the *Auree Sententie* is a dedication copy addressed to a young member of a noble family connected with Ferrante's court. Although the manuscript was made by a scribe and an illuminator who generally worked for the Aragonese King, it was not probably part of the King’s personal belongings. After the descent of Charles VIII and the following downfall of the Aragonese dynasty, the books that originally composed the Aragonese Library were either stolen and brought to France, or transferred by the extant members of the family to Ferrara and then Valencia.\(^{54}\) It is hard to believe that such an item, illuminated in gold-leaf and preciously bound, would have been left behind in this process. Also, it was common practice that scribes and illuminators employed by the King worked for wealthy patrons connected with the Aragonese court.\(^ {55}\) Therefore, it is more plausible that Ippolito Lunense’s *Auree Sententie* were addressed to a wealthy patron affiliated with the court such as Aloysio Corellio, a member of the King’s entourage for whom Ippolito composed a *volgarizzamento* of a Latin text on precious stones that displays a very similar apparatus of illuminations.\(^ {56}\) Additional information about the addressee, moreover, can be inferred from the choices of Ippolito in composing his Ficinian anthology.

An early modern *volgarizzamento* is not simply the translation of a text, but it is also an interpretive tool tailored for a specific audience.\(^ {57}\) In line with this general principle, the opening section of the *Auree Sententie* translates the section of Ficino’s *Vita Platonis* entitled “Sententiae et Proverbia Platonis” by skipping the first sixteen lines, thus selecting only those information that may be interesting for a young audience (ms. XII E 32 fols. 7r; ms. Harley 3481 fols. 5v-6r). The passage selected by the translator, moreover, further demonstrates that Ippolito based his translation on the Aragonese copy of Ficino’s *Platonis Opera* now found at the British Library. Whereas in the printed versions this passage from the *Vita Platonis* reads “ad viventes,” in the Harleian manuscript as well as in his translation Ippolito adopts the *lectio singularis* “ad iuvenes,” which is translated in the Italian vernacular as “ali gioveni.” Moreover, in order to make his *volgariz- 

\(^{54}\) For a recent reassessment of this complex history, see Toscano, “La Biblioteca napoletana dei re d’Aragona,” 29-63.

\(^{55}\) Toscano, “Matteo Felice, un miniatore,” 107.


\(^{57}\) Folena, *Volgarizzare e tradurre*, 3-5. For a recent application of this general principle to the reception of Boethius in Italian vernacular culture, see Brancato, “Readers and Interpreters of the *Consolatio* in Italy, 1300-1500”; Brancato, “Appunti linguistici sul Boezio,” 133-38.
zam ento fitting for a noble reader affiliated with the prince, Ippolito Lunense does not hesitate to alter Ficino’s text by reassembling its parts in a new order. Instead of accurately following Ficino’s *Vita Platonis*, Ippolito integrates the few lines devoted to Plato’s interaction with princes in the original text with a long selection extracted from Ficino’s *argumenta* to Plato’s *Epistles* (ms. XII E 32 fol. 7v-9r), which are not translated in the remainder of the translation. In both cases, Ippolito’s alterations of the original texts are astutely camouflaged through the almost systematic exclusion of Ficino’s references to specific texts by Plato, as well as any kind of internal reference to the *Platonis Opera*. All the material extracted from the *argumenta* is thus adjusted to the medieval genre of the “sententia” and presented as a translation of Plato’s original opinions in the vernacular.

**Pontano’s rejection of Ficino’s ideas?**

The diffusion of Ficino’s texts at the Aragonese Court and the availability of his ideas in translation may suggest that Caracciolo’s *farsa* was the theatrical counterpart of a broader Ficinian revival based in Ferrante’s court at the beginning of the 1490s. The event, if this hypothesis is sound, would therefore need to be interpreted in the context of the diffusion of Tuscan cultural products at Ferrante’s court- a process that started at the end of the 1470s and paralleled the complex diplomatic relationships between the Kingdom of Naples and Florence. This reconstruction, moreover, would nicely agree with Noel Brann, who has recently claimed that Ficino was well known in Naples thanks to Giovanni Pontano and his circle. Conversely, it would undermine Saitta’s characterization of Neapolitan culture as anti-Florentine because of its “materialism.” Unfortunately, things are not as straightforward as these scholars presented them, especially if one looks at the material diffusion of Ficino’s texts and, more broadly, at the different attitudes toward Florentine culture that were available in the field of Naples.

Brann’s claim that Pontano’s dialogue *Actius* gives evidence of a theory that matches Ficino’s view of poetic frenzy sharply contrasts with Pontano’s often critical attitude toward Florentine intellectuals such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In the manuscripts versions of his treatises *De Rebus Coelestibus* (book 12) and *De Fortuna* (book 3), eventually altered by their editor Pietro Summonte, Pontano explicitly attacked Giovanni Pico della Mirandola by siding with Lucio Bellanti in a critique of the *Disputations against Astrology* as a product of Savonarola’s propaganda.58 Also, Pontano

had openly characterized Giovanni Pico’s discussion of the 900 theses as stemming from the aristocratic snobbery and dubious religiosity of his opponent, thus siding with pope Innocent VIII and other intellectuals from the Roman Curia.\textsuperscript{59} Notwithstanding two eloquent praises written in 1494, Angelo Poliziano never succeeded to start a correspondence with Pontano, while members of Pontano’s circle had harshly criticized the \textit{Miscellanea} with epigrams and slanders.\textsuperscript{60} As for the literature in Tuscan vernacular that was flourishing at court, Pontano’s attitude combined snobbery and pity toward an endeavor that he did not take seriously at all.\textsuperscript{61} Pontano’s approval of Ficino’s theory of poetic frenzy, therefore, would be the exception that confirms the rule.

Rather than matching Ficino’s theory of poetic inspiration, Pontano’s dialogue \textit{Actius} is in fact a subtle critique of Ficino’s interpretation of Plato’s \textit{Ion} and book thirteen of \textit{Platonic Theology}. Framed in a broader discussion on the causes of prophetic dreams and linked to the problem of the soul’s immortality, the dialogue \textit{Actius} constructs the personae of a natural philosopher (Johannes Pardo) and a poet (Jacopo Sannazaro) as respectively the theorist and the recipient of inspiration. Consistent with Pontano’s commentary of the pseudo-Ptolemaic \textit{Centiloquium}, Pardo presents prophecy as caused by the external influence (\textit{sympatheia, contagio}) of one immortal intellect (\textit{mens}) acting upon multiple human souls through the filter of stars (\textit{coelitus}).\textsuperscript{62} Pardo presents his view as stemming from his own interpretation of Aristotle, and juxtaposes his explanation to religious accounts of prophecy as resulting from ecstasy (\textit{vacatio}) and platonic frenzy (\textit{furor}). Heavily altered by its editor Pietro Summonte, who might have tried to soften its religiously controversial elements,\textsuperscript{63} this section of \textit{Actius} betrays an inclination to read Aristotle’s theory of the soul through the commentary of Averroes and an attempt at rationalizing prophecy through astrology. In doing so, Pardo’s persona also uses Ficino’s language to characterize religious explanations of prophecy, which natural philosophy and astrology—in his view—can more accurately explicate. Does this different attitude toward Ficino’s ideas underpin a broader competition between Pontano’s circle and Ferrante’s court?

\textsuperscript{59} Soranzo, \textit{Conjecture and Inspiration}, 255-273.
\textsuperscript{60} Gualdo Rosa, 61-82; Vecce, “\textit{Multiplex hic anguis},” 235-255; Gualdo Rosa, “A proposito degli epigrammi latini del Sannazaro,” 453-476.
\textsuperscript{61} Parenti, \textit{Benit Gareth}, 36-7.
\textsuperscript{62} Soranzo, “Giovanni Pontano on Astrology,” 23-29.
\textsuperscript{63} Tateo, “Per l’edizione critica dell’\textit{Actius},” 145-194; Mariotti, “Per lo studio dei \textit{Dialoghi} di Pontano,” 261-288.
Indeed, the portrait of Piero Caracciolo’s *Imagico* matches the diffusion of Ficino’s books at Ferrante’s court, and it is consistent with the success of Florentine cultural products in this specific sector of Aragonese Naples. In this context, Pontano’s interpretation of Aristotle’s theory of the active intellect (*mens*) as one and immortal displayed in the dialogue *Actius* is not only a polemical refutation of Ficino’s *Platonic Theology* on the basis of Averroes, but it can also be interpreted as a critique of Ficino’s popularity among Neapolitan intellectuals.64 Diverging attitudes toward Ficino’s ideas in the early 1490s, moreover, would provide a context for Pontano’s critical attitude toward Augustinian Friar Giles of Viterbo, who profoundly influenced the religious orientation and literary taste of members of Pontano’s circle such as Jacopo Sannazaro through the use of Ficinian themes in his apologetic sermons and theological commentaries.65 The discovery of a Ficinian workshop based at the Aragonese library, and the identification of a sharp divide between the “Tuscanophile” culture of Ferrante’s court and the highly exclusive elite gathered around Giovanni Pontano, in conclusion, lead to reconsider Giuseppe Saitta’s theses and call for a reassessment of Ficino’s diffusion in Aragonese Naples in light of new documentary evidence.

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