

## Reviews

Francesco Filelfo. *On Exile*.

Ed. Jeroen De Keyser. Trans. W. Scott Blanchard. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 55. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013. xxvi + 486 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-674-06636-6.

Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481), the bad boy of fifteenth-century Italian humanism, produced a considerable corpus. Amid quarrels with fellow humanists, imprisonments for slander, exile, attempts on his life (and a counterplot of his own), and a dizzyingly peripatetic career, he found time to produce Greek and Latin verse, philosophical dialogues and treatises, orations, a Virgilian epic on Francesco Sforza, Latin translations of Greek works, and a forty-eight-book letter collection. Despite his fame (and infamy) during his lifetime, however, aside from some snippets, Filelfo has lacked modern editors for his writings until recently. In 2005 a first volume of his *Satires* appeared from Silvia Fiaschi, and four years later Diana Robin published a bilingual edition of his *Odes* in Harvard's I Tatti series. Now Jeroen De Keyser and Scott Blanchard have issued from this same excellent series Filelfo's *Commentationes Florentinae de exilio*, only portions of which had been previously edited. De Keyser's expert edition reconciles the three authoritative manuscripts, two of which contain corrections in Filelfo's hand; Blanchard provides a faithful and elegant translation accompanied by notes indicating classical and biblical sources and historical references.

The circumstances of Filelfo's writing his dialogues on exile result from the turmoil in Florence in the 1430s, when Cosimo de' Medici, having been banished in 1433, returned in 1434 to orchestrate his own purge. The oligarchs who opposed his more popular faction included Palla Strozzi, Rinaldo degli Albizzi, and Ridolfo Peruzzi, and when they were expelled from Florence, so also was Filelfo, who had thrown in his lot with theirs. The *Commentationes*, written around 1440, depict a series of conversations set in 1434 in Florence just before the exiles actually left. The discussions center on exile in general (book 1) and its attendant ills, infamy and poverty (books 2 and 3): although Filelfo announces a ten-book work, the remaining seven were never written, presumably because he became absorbed with other projects as Milanese publicist. The *Commentationes* are an odd genre. As De Keyser and Blanchard suggest in their introduction, the work should be seen in the context of the consolatory tradition, but in fact it delivers nearly as much *vituperatio* as *consolatio*, as Filelfo spends considerable time defaming Cosimo (e.g., as a "vulgar, lowborn, miserable thief" [355]), makes merciless fun of Poggio Bracciolini (as a decadent gourmand and "ignoramus in Greek literature"[323]), and denigrates Carlo Marsuppini and Niccolò Niccoli (as mediocrities in Greek and Latin and, in the latter case, also a sot).

The dialogues feature a varying cast of political principals (notably Palla Strozzi and Rinaldo degli Albizzi in all three books) and humanists such as Poggio and Giannozzo Manetti (in all three) and Leonardo Bruni. In the first book Palla Strozzi consoles his son Onofrio, who laments the ills of banishment, while the second book offers the most revealing portrait of some of the twists of the Medici triumph and the role that Pope Eugenius IV played. Here Filelfo introduces Ridolfo Peruzzi, who re-creates Rinaldo degli Albizzi's speech attempting to persuade Eugenius that the oligarchs are not guilty of conspiring with Filippo Maria Visconti to take over the state (the excuse for their exile). Leonardo Bruni, who was a proponent of the Peripatetic appreciation of wealth, enters in the third book to lead a discussion of wealth and poverty.

The *Commentationes* offer a sizeable, though sometimes tedious, sample of humanist moral thought, and are particularly notable for drawing extensively on the apocryphal letters of Diogenes and others in the *Epistolographi Graeci*. In regard to attitudes toward wealth in book 3, they provide, as the editors suggest, a good complement to Poggio's dialogue *On Avarice* from the late 1420s. Given their contribution in book 2 to illuminating the complex political machinations of 1434, it is disconcerting that the introduction (xviii) mischaracterizes the Battle of Imola of 1434 as one pitting Eugenius against the Florentines and the Venetians, when in fact, as noted later (457n16), papal forces aided these states against Milan. Perhaps the most important feature of this text is its testimony to Filelfo's belief in the freedom to speak one's mind and not back down. As the editors note (xxii), this is a feature of the ancient tradition of *parrhēsia* (frank speech), which Filelfo rather flagrantly practices in his own barbs and illustrates via classical exempla of figures such as Diogenes and Hannibal, who spoke truth to power (50–60). Yet even in this Filelfo proved to be a wily survivor, sometimes trimming his sails and words to protect his next commission. After all, his attacks on Cosimo came well after his exile from Florence. And given his service to the Milanese despots Filippo Maria Visconti and Francesco Sforza, it certainly required a huge dose of hypocrisy for him to have his heroic Palla Strozzi declaim that “a man who knows that he is alone free would not desire to serve anyone for the sake of any monetary gain” (99). For providing a wider audience with this and other insights into the thought and character of Filelfo, we are indebted to Jeroen De Keyser and Scott Blanchard for offering this excellent edition and translation.

GEORGE MCCLURE  
University of Alabama