

Bibliographical Exercise - INC 62

The book titled *De potestate et sapiential Dei* was written by Renaissance humanist and Platonic philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). It was printed at Treviso, Italy, by Gerardus de Lisa, de Flandria, on December 18th, 1471. There is no title page for this book. The colophon was transcribed as |. FINITVM. |. M.CCCC.LXXI.DIE.XVIII. |. DEVEMB. |. The format, with uncertainty, goes as octavo, duodecimo, octavo, octavo, duodecimo, and octavo. There is no signature and the pagination is 1-108, also it is believed that two leaves are missing from the copy.

The author, Marsilio Ficino, was a founder of the neo-Platonic movement and worked as a translator for Plato's and Hermetical works, he had also written commentaries and a philosophical treatises on Plato and his ideas.¹ He influenced many western European thinkers on Platonic ideas and grew these philosophic ways of thinking for many centuries. He also introduced the concept of 'perennial philosophy' which is the thought that "there is an underlying basic shared human metaphysical reality,"² which is what all religions point to. Now while this thought was a very controversial one at the time and faced a lot of backlash, it had become an idea that would be studied along with Platonism. Eventually, his popularity began to diminish as future generations began to be "concerned more with styles of life and less with systematic theories,"³ which was what Marsilio was most known for.

Another one of the authors credited for this book is Mercurius Trismegistus. A translation of this name gives the meaning of *thrice-greatest Hermes* which is the Greek name for the Egyptian god Thoth. Thoth was the scribe of the gods and the purported author of the Corpus Hermeticum, which are a series of sacred texts that are the basis of Hermeticism.⁴ He is credited as the author of many writings that were once thought to be of immense antiquity, but that has been disproven.⁵ These sacred texts were translated by Marsilio and Ludovico Lazarrelli, but were believed to not be in the original order when they were received by him since they had previously been translated by an 11th century Byzantine scholar by the name of Michael Psellus. It is believed to have been purged of all things paganistic and occult-like to be more compatible with his Christian beliefs.⁶ These translations are what allowed Latin speaking scholars and thinkers to learn about the Corpus Hermeticum.

The final owner of the book was Thomas Phillips. According to the *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* He was born in 1760 and died in 1851, donating all of his books to several institutions and Welsh towns. He was a surgeon and a member of the Royal College of Surgeons before heading to the Navy. He had been a chief benefactor of Welsh education and had established scholarships at the Lampeter campus of Saint David's College. He had also founded the Welsh Collegiate Institution, which is now known as the Llandoverly College and demanded that the Welsh language be used in the classroom.⁷ He was a prominent

¹ The National Gallery, London. "Glossary." *Marsilio Ficino | Glossary | National Gallery, London*

² Sorensen, Kenneth. "Perennial Philosophy — Kenneth Sørensen." *Kenneth Sorensen*, 14 Sept. 2020

³ "De Lisa, Gerardo- Encyclopedia." *Treccani*

⁴ "Hermes, Trismegistus." *Hermes, Trismegistus | ArchivesSpace Public Interface*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Eternalised. "Hermeticism: The Ancient Wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus." *Eternalised*, 7 Feb. 2023

⁷ Williams, Gwilym Owen. "Phillips, Thomas (1760 - 1851), Surgeon and Benefactor of Education." *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, 1959

factor in the education of humanities in Wales and allowed for ancient texts to be studied in the future generations.

The publisher for this book in 1471 was Gerardus de Lisa, originally named Geraert van der Leye which was latinised when he moved to Treviso. According to Trecanni the earliest activity known of his before becoming a printer was a witness in a notarial deed. He first began his works by printing an edition of Rolandelli's *Examinationes grammaticales* which did not include his name or the date and only included the place it was printed. His first signed edition was not printed until 1471 titled *Manuale de salute animae*. He had been the only printer in Treviso for a couple years and alongside that also worked as a bookseller. He began to notice a decrease in popularity and he had decided to put a hold on his works. He had tried his luck in Venice as a printer, but he found it just as troubling. Returning to Treviso proved to not improve business again so he had decided to attempt to begin printing in Udine working as a tax collector and bookseller. Eventually, once the printing business halted in Treviso, he had moved back there doing less work than he previously had.

There was a second printing of this book done in 1481 by a printer by the name of Lucas Dominici. He was a printer in Venice and most of his work was done between the years of 1480 to 1484. Compared to Gerardus "we know nothing of this Luca, son of Domenico from Venice,"⁸ but that 21 of his titles have survived since their initial printing. His printing had a specific style, looking sharp and compressed on the page compared to other printers of this time.

Manuscript illumination was around in Germany many years before it had made its descent into Italy, with the first press being set up in Venice around 1469. Italy was known for very decorated and elaborate illustrations included in their books and manuscripts, which was very time consuming. Compared to the average of four years to complete one bible, the printer allowed for 180 Bibles to be printed in the span of 4-6 year.⁹ This book was published as a printed book, but had spaces at the beginning of each chapter to allow an illuminated initial. While this edition does not include the illuminated initial, other editions such as the one donated to the Biblioteca Nazionale Central di Firenze shows these initials though much less artistic versions. Another edition of this book at the University of Glasgow does have a lot more illuminated manuscripts. This shows the beginning of the transition from illuminated manuscripts to printing as it was printed during the beginning stages of printing in Italy. As more and more editions of this book were printed, they began to be less and less detailed and focused more heavily on the printing of the book.

⁸ Olocco, Riccardo. "The Outstanding Spread of the Scotus Roman in Italy and Elsewhere." *La Bibliofilia*, Vol. 122, No. 1, *Miscellanea de libris saeculo XV in Italia impressis* (2020), pp. 131-148. *JSTOR*.

⁹ Mitchell, Peter. "Humanism and the Development of Printing." *The Book, the Body, and the World: Renaissance Humanism, Medicine, and Exploration*.

Sources

Primary Sources

Hermes, Ficino, M., & Phillips Thomas. (1471). *De potestate et sapientia Dei*. Gerardus de Lisa, de Flandria.

Secondary Sources

"De Lisa, Gerardo - Enciclopedia." *Treccani*,
[www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gerardo-de-lisa_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gerardo-de-lisa_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

Eternalised. "Hermeticism: The Ancient Wisdom of Hermes Trismegistus." *Eternalised*, 7 Feb. 2023, eternalisedofficial.com/2023/02/07/hermeticism/.

"Hermes, Trismegistus." *Hermes, Trismegistus | ArchivesSpace Public Interface*,
archives.collections.ed.ac.uk/agents/people/15647.

Mitchell, Peter. "Humanism and the Development of Printing." *The Book, the Body, and the World: Renaissance Humanism, Medicine, and Exploration*.

Olocco, Riccardo. "The Outstanding Spread of the Scotus Roman in Italy and Elsewhere." *La Bibliofilia*, Vol. 122, No. 1, *Miscellanea de libris saeculo XV in Italia impressis* (2020), pp. 131-148. *JSTOR*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27099828?seq=1>

The National Gallery, London. "Glossary." *Marsilio Ficino | Glossary | National Gallery, London*, www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/glossary/marsilio-ficino.

Sorensen, Kenneth. "Perennial Philosophy — Kenneth Sørensen." *Kenneth Sorensen*, 14 Sept. 2020, kennethsorensen.dk/en/glossary/perennial-philosophy/.

Williams, Gwilym Owen. "Phillips, Thomas (1760 - 1851), Surgeon and Benefactor of Education." *Dictionary of Welsh Bibliography*, 1959,
biography.wales/article/s-PHIL-THO-1760.