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URSULA TRÖGER, *Marsilio Ficinos Selbstdarstellung: Untersuchungen zu seinem Epistolarium*. Beiträge zur Altertumskunde, 352, Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2016, ix+ 519 pp., \$168.00, ISBN 978-3-11-045642-4.

Marsilio Ficino is undoubtedly one of the most important figures of the Italian Renaissance in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. He is best known as a translator of Plato's and Plotin's works and as a philosopher of the renewal of Christian Platonism. Accordingly, research concentrates on his major philosophical works in order to elevate his view of the world and man from them. His central thesis of the ontologically based special position of man at the border between matter and spirit had a lasting influence on the intellectual and cultural life of European culture.

In keeping with the conventions of his time, Ficino did not unfold his thoughts alone in his major works; he was a zealous letter writer. Only a few years before his death in 1495 he published just over 600 of his letters in a collection of 12 books. Ursula Tröger's work aims to examine the structure, intention and content of this collection of letters. Tröger points out that the collection is easily accessible in digital form ([www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/itali/autoren/ficinus\\_itali.html](http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/itali/autoren/ficinus_itali.html)). Tröger's study was completed as a dissertation project at the University of Bonn in 2013 and published in 2016.

It is obvious that the reconstruction of such an extensive collection requires a guiding perspective, which should allow the multitude of letters to come into view. Tröger makes her approach very clear. She is concerned with examining Ficino's "Strategies of Self-Portrayal" (6). Based on the background of epistolographic considerations, she is interested in Ficino's letters as "literary constructs", which he uses for "self-positioning" (6). For Tröger, the focus is not on the historical development of the contents, but on showing how Ficino communicates, i.e. how he uses editorial, rhetorical and stylistic means to present himself by publishing the letters to an educated public. This reference by the author is honest, because it makes clear what one can and cannot expect from her book.

After preliminary methodological considerations, Tröger gives a detailed overview of the letter collection (27-125). It informs about the history and structure of the collection as well as the compilation method used by Ficino. It is instructive how Ficino moderately corrects his collection by omissions and deletions. It reflects the sometimes dramatic changes in the rule of Florence during Ficino's lifetime. A systematic arrangement of the letters is difficult due to their disparate occasions, often arising from everyday questions. This may be one of the reasons why the research on Ficino has

mainly selected individual thematic aspects from the collection. Tröger's fundamental decision about the intention of her book is very clearly reflected here. It subordinates the strategies of self-representation to the systematics of content and examines them in four selected case studies: the letters to the Medici, letters in which Ficino appears as advisor to rulers, letters of royal praise and the letters to Sixtus IV.

In the letters to the Medici, the letters to Lorenzo are in the foreground. They provide interesting information about Ficino's complex relationship to his patrons. Although Ficino was de facto economically dependent on the Medici since Cosimo, his letters are by no means simply letters of homage. In the environment of the Pazzi conspiracy, the relationship seems to have cooled down considerably and only improved again later. In terms of content, Ficino appears to Lorenzo as the Socratic spiritual leader. This aspect of self-portrayal as a wise philosophical teacher runs like a common theme through the entire collection. It clearly emerges in the letters to powerful persons such as Cardinal Raffaele Riario, in which Ficino unfolds humility, moderation and the recognition of the fundamental equality of all people as principles of good rule. The homage to the kings, above all to Charles VIII, adds to the ruler's praise aspects of the common human mission and the realization of a higher peace. The letters to Sixtus contain interesting thoughts about the role of the Pope as spiritual leader, not as secular. The most important letters studied by Tröger are appended in German translation.

It is the merit of the book to have worked out important historical and biographical references of Ficino. These are sometimes neglected in the context of an intellectual approach to Ficino seeking for his main ideas. Conversely, although Tröger addresses important philosophical teachings of Ficino, this is not the focus of her work. The approach of the investigation is complementary to Ficino's philosophy, but it is not in the foreground. The investigation of the letters is philologically and rhetorically precise, but it could also have been somewhat compressed in some places. Tröger, on the other hand, carefully works out the fundamental intention of Ficino in his collection of letters. He presents himself as a philosophical teacher. In the form of a personal guide of the soul he can also help the powerful of the world to lead a felicitous life that is oriented towards the human goal of life. For Ficino, the collection of letters is an important instrument for bringing the ideals of his philosophy, such as love, friendship and the special divine purpose of man in everyday communication into the world.

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