Francesco Filelfo, Man of Letters

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Introduction: a Century of Filelfo Studies

Jeroen De Keyser

Developments in the Filelfo research field have been influenced, over the last century, by a number of landmark studies, each of which has had a long-lasting impact on the efforts of all other scholars. Unfortunately, quite a few among those studies were created independently of each other, in a way that easily escapes notice when merely taking at face value their respective publication dates.

A first series of major contributions was published in the 1920s by Aristide Calderini, in particular a book-length article on the reconstruction of Filelfo's physical and virtual Greek library (Calderini 1913) and a follow-up inventory of the Milanese manuscripts transmitted in his writings (Calderini 1915). Later scholarship on the Greek manuscripts owned, annotated and translated by Filelfo, as well as on the "reading list" of Greek authors apparent in Filelfo's own writings, can, for the most part, be characterized as "footnotes to Calderini". This applies to *e.g.* Eleuteri 1983 and more recently to the important additions and corrections in articles published by Massimo Zaggia, David Speranzi and Scott Blanchard.

Calderini's publications were based on a thorough mining of Filelfo's *epistolarium* and on the first systematic study of the numerous manuscripts related to him that were available in Milan. The same can be said, to a large extent, about the three-volume comprehensive biography of Filelfo that was published by Carlo de' Rosmini in 1808 and which to date remains without a real successor, despite Rudolf G. Adam's impressive 1974 Oxford DPhil dissertation, *Francesco Filelfo at the Court of Milan (1439–1481). A Contribution to the Study of Humanism in Northern Italy*. Adam's unsurpassed archival efforts resulted in a much more comprehensive set of fundamental data than is indicated by the title of his dissertation, which suggests that it is limited to Filelfo's years at the Milanese courts of Filippo Maria Visconti and then Francesco Sforza and his heirs. Adam's two volumes are a first port of call for anyone studying Filelfo's biography, his writings or, especially, his networks all over Italy. Diana Robin's 1991 monograph, *Filelfo in Milan. Writings 1451–1477*, is devoted almost exclusively to the time-frame also mainly examined by Adam. While she was clearly building on Adam's achievement, her book displays a totally different, quite innovative methodological approach and a deliberate attempt at revisionism in assessing Filelfo's standing and character. As a comprehensive study of Filelfo's whole oeuvre, Robin's book has not encountered any

real competition. It therefore continues to be regarded as the standard reference work on Filelfo, in particular in wider Anglo-Saxon scholarship on Italian humanism, although more philologically-oriented scholars have at times been somewhat less enthusiastic in accepting the interpretations advocated by Robin and her followers.

In 1986 a very important collection of articles was published in *Francesco Filelfo nel quinto centenario della morte* by a group of almost exclusively Italian scholars – with the notable exception of Jozef IJsewijn – as the outcome of a conference organized five years earlier in Tolentino, on the occasion of the fifth centennial of Filelfo's death in 1481. One can only admire both the wide scope and the outstanding quality of most of the contributions to this volume, produced not only before the advent of the internet revolutionized the discipline, making freely available early printed editions and manuscripts that in those days were much harder to consult, but also without the aid of any modern critical editions of Filelfo's writings. The authors of these studies therefore had no option other than to repeat the work which had previously been done by Rosmini and Calderini, that is, going through the same set of manuscript witnesses and incunabula editions of Filelfo's writings. Above all, his massive letter collection, which is by far the most important source for Filelfo's biography and the development of his networks and offers unique information on his attitude towards his peers and his literary and scholarly interests, had to be consulted by combing through the famous manuscript 873 of the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan and the incomplete printed edition of 1502.

Beyond the inevitable practical constraints faced by these scholars in the 1980s, a second impediment has had long-lasting consequences for the development of Filelfo studies. Adam's groundbreaking doctoral dissertation was never published – although it is now freely available in the online depositary of Oxford University theses – and none of the scholars preparing their contributions for the 1981 *quinto centenario* conference apparently had access to it. At the end of the proceedings, published in 1986, Adam's dissertation was presented in a short paper as a recent scoop and was briefly summarized, awaiting its imminent publication (which then, as said, never happened). Adam's work was given due credit, although it was repeatedly underscored that it was the effort of a novice whose approach was more that of a historian than a philologist. Diana Robin's 1991 monograph mentions the 1986 collection of Italian articles, but it is obvious, both from the preface and from the text, that the bulk of her book had already been drafted and was not significantly reconsidered in light of the major philological contributions that emerged from the 1981 conference.

The genesis of parallel, mostly independent, endeavors, producing publications without profiting from the results achieved by their immediate predecessors, has been the bane of Filelfo studies. With the precedent of the almost parallel publication of Theodor Klette's *Die griechischen Briefe des Franciskus Philelphus* in 1890 and Émile Legrand, *Cent-dix lettres grecques de François Filelfe* in 1892 – both defective and unsatisfactory by current scholarly standards – the first real critical editions of Filelfo's writings suffered a similar fate.

The first of Filelfo's works to appear in a modern scholarly edition was *De psychagogia*, edited by Guido Cortassa and Enrico V. Maltese. Published in 1997, this collection of Filelfo's Greek poems, while offering a fundamental analysis of his Greek language and style, is inevitably limited in scope as a critical edition, given that it is based on an autograph *codex unicus*.

The year 2005 saw the publication both of Silvia Fiaschi's critical edition of the first half of Filelfo's one hundred *Satyrae* and of Daniela Gionta's prolegomena to an edition of the *Convivia Mediolanensia*. Both studies came to similar conclusions about Filelfo's *modus operandi*, entailing the production of manuscript copies of his writings, which he constantly revisited and revised. Building on the seminal studies of Fiaschi and Gionta, I have been able to document these same practices in the genesis and transmission of most of Filelfo's other works, as I have shown in several articles and in my critical editions of Filelfo's Xenophon and early Plutarch translations (2012), the *Commentationes Florentinae de exilio* (2013), the *Sphortias* and *Oratio parentalis* (2015) and, finally, the *Epistolarium* (2016). Ide François has also recognized the same principles at work in the preparatory study of her forthcoming critical edition of Filelfo's *Consolatio ad Iacobum Antonium Marcellum de obitu Valerii filii*.

Gionta's 2005 book was a slightly revised version of her 1991 doctoral thesis, which seems to have been unavailable to other scholars during the intervening fourteen years. When it was finally published, she made no use of the monograph published by Robin in 1991 and only briefly mentioned Fiaschi's first preparatory article about the transmission of the *Satyrae*, issued in 2002, while Fiaschi, in her 2005 edition, displayed no awareness of Gionta's research. It is even more regrettable that, after this infelicitous timing, both Gionta's edition of the *Convivia* and the second half of the *Satyrae* still remain unpublished.

There is perhaps a silver lining in that both Gionta and Fiaschi came to the conclusion that for their respective texts the *editio princeps* reflects Filelfo's final redaction. Scholars may therefore find some philological consolation in knowing that these first editions (1476 for the *Satyrae*, 1483 for the *Convivia*)

are – for the time being – the most reliable source texts, while awaiting the completed critical editions of both works.

It is also to be hoped that someone will take on the task of editing the parts of Filelfo's oeuvre which are not yet available in reliable modern editions: apart from various minor writings and scattered letters, major desiderata are the complete collection of *Orationes*, the remaining translations from Plutarch (*Apophthegmata Laconica*, *Apophthegmata ad Traianum*, and the *vitae* of Galba and Otho) who exerted an important influence on Filelfo, and the epigram collection *De iocis et seriis*, which, alongside the satires, odes and epistles, is a key source for anyone studying Filelfo's relations with friends and foes.

The bane of missed occasions is persistent. In Arthur Field's 2017 monograph, *The Intellectual Struggle for Florence: Humanists and the Beginnings of the Medici Regime, 1420–1440*, an entire chapter is dedicated to “Francesco Filelfo, Oligarchic Virtue, and Medicean Vice”, which, as explained in the book's preface, is the continuation of three conference papers presented between 2002 and 2004. Unfortunately, the published version passes over the subsequent Filelfo bibliography. Apart from quoting some Latin citations from the 2013 *De exilio* edition, Field mainly processes the acquis of Filelfo scholarship as it is to be perceived from Fiaschi's 2005 *Satyrae* edition and disregards both Gionta's *Convivia* monograph and any Filelfo related scholarship published afterwards.

When in 2009 I had the chance to embark on a KU Leuven research project, funded thanks to the joint efforts of Jan Papy and Dirk Sacré, I began to prepare a critical edition of Filelfo's *Collected Letters*. The unfortunate fate of Filelfo studies, which had so often suffered because scholars remained unaware of each other's parallel efforts, inspired me to take an initiative which has led to the present volume. In 2011 I contacted all the scholars who to my knowledge were or had recently been working on Filelfo to tell them that I was planning to organize, at the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in San Diego, 4–6 April 2013, a series of four panels about Filelfo, centering on his Greek and Latin *epistolarium*, but without excluding his other writings as topics for individual papers. My intention was that the papers would subsequently evolve into a collection of articles under the title *Filelfo, Man of Letters* – echoing Lisa Jardine's well-known monograph, *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (1993), dedicated to another self-promoting humanist giant who produced thousands of letters, and so much more – as a follow-up and complement to the 1986 *quinto centenario* volume. I provided everyone who intended to contribute to the RSA conference panels and/or the article collection with my transcription of Filelfo's entire *epistolarium* – a corpus comprising over half a million

words – along with the bibliography which I had been compiling. Inevitably, a few of the speakers in the end decided they could not contribute to the present volume, while on the other hand Han Lamers and Gary Ianziti, who were not able to make it to the San Diego conference, nevertheless sent me their contributions. I was also glad to include an important study of Filelfo's metrical practices by Jean-Louis Charlet.

It was a pleasure and an honor for me to see that the corpus of Filelfo's texts of which I had been (and at the time still was) preparing critical editions proved useful for fellow scholars. I have always believed in inclusive international collaboration, without vain competition or *campanilismo*, and I am delighted that ten scholars from different backgrounds have been willing to pursue serious research on Filelfo, using the textual corpus I made available to them. I have ordered their essays in five thematic sections.

The first section is dedicated to Filelfo's self-fashioning as a *Graecus*. It is well known that he regarded his superlative knowledge of Greek as his scholarly forte, having acquired an unsurpassed familiarity with both the literary and spoken language during his seven-year stay in Constantinople. Filelfo's relationship with the networks of Greek intellectuals of the day, both those in Italy and in Greece, is at the center of the essay by John Monfasani, in which he shows Filelfo both cultivating promising contacts and excluding others who threatened his preeminence as an authority on Greek.

In the second essay Han Lamers examines Filelfo's reaction to the criticism leveled at him by some of his fellow humanists for his allegedly un-Latin, 'Greekish' affectation – a claim that was front and center in the dispute between Filelfo and Galeotto Marzio, who dared to point out the metrical and literary flaws in the *Sphortias*, which Filelfo considered an important calling card to secure him other patronage opportunities. The entire polemical exchange, which I published in 2015 along with the *Sphortias*, shows Filelfo on the top of his game when defending himself against accusations of exaggerated Hellenism, putting forward, as Lamers demonstrates, a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between Latins and Greeks. It is also interesting to see how he combines an appreciation of the Latins' need for cultural autonomy with his own fascination for contemporary Greek culture.

The second section addresses a specific aspect of Greek culture: the legacy of ancient Greek philosophy. Guy Claessens challenges the *communis opinio* of Filelfo as an Aristotelian who only late in life came to sympathize with Platonism. Contrary to what has been claimed, Filelfo's Platonism did not rise to new heights in his *De morali disciplina* of the 1470s, since this late philosophical treatise contains some substantial recycling from the *Commentationes*

Florentinae de exilio, written three decades earlier. Filelfo's Plato was indeed "always already there," though often in a mediated way, that is, through his reading of the writings of (pseudo-)Plutarch as well as of Augustine and the Augustinian tradition. Claessens also effectively demonstrates how Filelfo's originality lies in the way he managed to assemble and interweave the historical transformations of Plato into his own oeuvre.

Another long overdue revision is Jan Papy's reconsideration of a particular feature of Filelfo the "eclectic scholar," rather than "philosophical thinker": his stance on the (Epicurean) concept of *voluptas*, which played such an important role in Lorenzo Valla's writings on the subject. Papy explores the extent to which "Filelfo's Epicurus" was a *novum* in the Quattrocento environment and how, especially in his *epistolarium*, Stoicism and Epicureanism coexist with his study of Aristotelianism and Platonism, which have received much more scholarly attention.

In the third section, devoted to historiography, James Hankins examines Filelfo's interest in ancient Sparta as documented in his translation projects, correspondence and other writings. The recovery of the main sources for Spartan history was a major achievement of humanism, and Filelfo was the most important early conduit for the transmission of texts dealing with Sparta and its myth, about which he spoke admiringly in the prefaces to his translations of Xenophon and Plutarch – two of his favorite authors – as well as in his correspondence. The source texts about Sparta provided material for debates about constitutions among humanists and fueled their interest in the Spartans' uniquely social and civic form of virtue, where personal excellence was subordinated to the needs of the state.

In his essay Gary Ianziti discusses Filelfo's historiographical projects and shows that the *Sphortias* reveals a remarkable level of engagement with historical documentation. He investigates Filelfo's ideas about the aims and processes of history writing and assesses the recognition he achieved both among his peers and his (prospective) patrons. Ianziti illustrates how Filelfo acted as a "midwife to Sforza historiography," studying his impact on the evolving practice of an important strand of early modern historiography.

The need to navigate the troubled waters of humanist patronage is on display in the clearest way in Filelfo's numerous dedication letters to his translations. Noreen Humble examines how he combined the various standard features of such letters, including flattery of the patron, assertion of his own status as a person of learning, and his need for patronage as a translator. She also demonstrates that Filelfo's dedication letters to works of Greek to Latin translations are as significant as the rest of his correspondence for what they divulge about

his scholarly learning, friendships and feuds, often revealing his knowledge of ancient Greek works prior to anywhere else in his time. In many of these letters we see Filelfo also consciously and carefully tailoring his erudition.

While in the prefaces to his translations Filelfo's polemics against his antagonists are often veiled, or disguised as apparently sincere scholarly concerns regarding the quality of his peers' renderings of Greek texts, elsewhere he pulls no punches when it comes to attacking contemporary figures. Oddly, given his repeatedly voiced intention to be active in as many genres as possible, he wrote nothing that is explicitly titled an invective; nevertheless, his vast output contains a remarkable quantity of *ad hominem* attacks. David Marsh provides a synthesis of the invective strands that are to be found in the many genres in which Filelfo wrote and situates them in the context of Quattrocento humanist polemical literature.

The last section consists of two innovative contributions studying aspects that have not previously been addressed by scholars, largely because they could not be properly explored without the large textual corpus that has only recently become available. While many pages have been devoted to Filelfo's idiosyncratic opinions concerning metrical and prosodical issues, especially in his polemical exchange with Galeotto Marzio, his actual practices have never been studied. Jean-Louis Charlet investigates Filelfo's use of metrical schemes in his Latin poetry, examining relevant samples from his satirical, lyrical and epic production. It was Filelfo's ambition to produce verse in every single Horatian meter, and he also indulged in using existing meters in unseen combinations. Charlet finds Filelfo to be classical in his dactylic epic poetry, more varying in his satires and rich in contrasts in his elegiac distichs. It comes as no surprise that even in metrics Filelfo aimed to be exhaustive, both demonstrating and boasting about a perfect familiarity with each and every classical Greek and Latin meter.

In the final essay of this collection Tom Deneire shows how Filelfo's prose style was critically assessed by Erasmus and other humanists in the century of Ciceronianism. Filelfo considered Cicero an important stylistic model, yet posterity appears to have judged that he did not live up to his ideal. In order to offer a more objective assessment, Deneire uses "computational stylistics," in particular the *R* software environment for statistical computing. This script produces a most-frequent-word (MFW) list for a given corpus of texts and then compares the results for different texts, visualizing the stylistic distances between them. Using cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling to determine how close Filelfo's prose style is to that of various other Latin authors, Deneire demonstrates that his orations

are further removed from the classical Ciceronian style than his letters – which confirms the allegation in Erasmus' *Ciceronianus* that, while Filelfo succeeded in emulating the Ciceronian model in his letters, he failed to do so in his orations.

Taken together, these ten papers, each investigating aspects of Filelfo's writings and intellectual profile, offer, I believe, a significant addition to Filelfo scholarship. They draw attention to long-neglected aspects or present a much more comprehensive and penetrating analysis of their respective topics than had been possible to produce before the availability of the entire *Epistolarium* corpus. In the meantime the *Collected Letters* have been published in print; moreover, a few months ago, they were also incorporated – along with most of my other Filelfo editions – into Brepols' online *Library of Latin Texts*, allowing users to search them electronically. It is therefore my firm wish that the example of these ten authors will be followed by other scholars seizing the opportunity to reassess Filelfo's oeuvre and legacy, building on both the recent modern critical editions and the present collection of articles.

This book has been long in the making. My naïve plan to have it in print within a year or two of the San Diego conference collided with sobering realities, such as first a gap year in my own academic career, and the need to complete the *Collected Letters* edition – from which is quoted so much on these pages – before finishing the current volume, as well as the overlap of the present effort with some of the contributors' and my own semi-permanent “*alia premunt*” situations. I am glad that Arjan van Dijk and Ivo Romein at Brill showed such an admirable ability in combining patience with persistence: the completion of this volume owes much to their gift for dogged diplomacy, and I am grateful for it. I am equally obliged to Brill's anonymous referee, from whose careful, thoughtful and thorough vetting all contributors benefited greatly, and to Gianmario Cattaneo and Ide François for assisting me in finishing the editing process.

Gratitude is also due to Jan Papy and Dirk Sacré. Without their endorsement of my plan, first voiced almost a decade ago, to publish Filelfo's entire *Epistolarium*, there would be no such edition today, nor would I have been able to organize the San Diego RSA panels that stand at the basis of this collection. I am grateful to the chairs of those panels – Christopher Celenza, Lodi Nauta, Marc Laureys and Craig Kallendorf – and all the more so to all contributors for their enthusiastic cooperation and for their patience. I very much appreciated the efforts and the company of Tom Deneire, Guy Claessens, Dirk Sacré, Jan Papy, James Hankins, John Monfasani, David Marsh, Noreen

Humble, Keith Sidwell, Scott Blanchard and Andrea Robiglio, who for the sake of Filelfian studies were willing to go quite a long way and to endure such predicaments as nicotine deprivation on transatlantic flights, bibulous Belgians and charges by burly pseudo-fellows – not to mention stormy ordeals in the Californian desert. It has been a long journey, here and now finally reaching a destination, and I cherish the memory of great times with these dear *collegae proximi*. Their much-appreciated commitment is reflected in this book and as a token of friendship I gladly dedicate it to them all.