‘COSE DI PLATONE FATTE TOSCANE’:
LANGUAGE AND IDEOLOGY IN TWO
VERNACULAR TRANSLATIONS OF PLATO
PRINTED BY FRANCESCO PRISCIANESE

Introduction

In 1544 two vernacular versions of Plato’s works appeared in Rome from the press of the Florentine humanist Francesco Priscianese: the first was a translation of Plato’s Symposium made by Ercole Barbarasa da Terni; the second, a version of Plato’s Phaedrus by the Sienese man of letters Felice Figliucci. Each Platonic dialogue was accompanied by Marsilio Ficino’s interpretations. Modern scholars have so far focused on Priscianese’s activity as a grammarian and promoter of the vernacular, and on the role he played in the debate on language. However, the reasons that led him to print these two important Platonic texts have attracted little attention. Similarly, although Michel Plaisance, Brian Richardson, and others have magisterially demonstrated the importance of print in the history of vernacular culture, many aspects of this history, especially outside Florence, still remain to be studied. In particular, there is a need to reassess the way in which the political exiles in Rome, many of whom were prominent artists and scholars, produced and transmitted their works during the first years of the Medici principato, at a time when Duke Cosimo I was launching a vast enterprise of vernacularization that would serve the political ideology of his regime. The purpose of this article is to fill this gap by examining the circumstances surrounding the publication of Plato’s works by one such exile: Francesco Priscianese. It will show that Priscianese’s press

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played an important role in the fuoriusciti’s attempt to promote vernacular culture independently of Medici Florence. To be sure, the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* were immensely popular, especially following Marsilio Ficino’s fifteenth-century Latin translation and interpretation of the entire Platonic corpus. But the reason underlining Priscianese’s reproduction of texts that had long been assimilated into Italian culture was also political. Since the writings of Leonardo Bruni, Marsilio Ficino, Cristoforo Landino, and others, Plato had become closely associated with the cultural politics of the Medici, which the newly appointed Duke of Florence, Cosimo I, was now invoking to justify his own political agenda. Thus by printing Plato in Rome, Priscianese and his associates were appropriating an important symbol of Medici Florence—Plato and, to some extent, Ficino—independently of the cultural model promoted by Cosimo I de’ Medici and the Accademia Fiorentina. As we shall see, this prompted the Academicians to react by printing Ficino’s own vernacular commentary on Plato’s *Symposium*. This is one of the first instances in which the Florentine Academy tried to establish and maintain its cultural monopoly on vernacular culture: a few decades later, under the pressure of the Academy, Cosimo and Francesco de’ Medici would prevent Paolo Manuzio from publishing the censured version of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* in Venice and obtain permission from the Vatican for the text to be published in Florence.²

**Context**

Priscianese ran his printing press at a time of intense political crisis. The fall of the Republican regime in Florence, the return of the Medici in 1530, the assassination of Alessandro de’ Medici, and the accession of Cosimo I led many intellectuals to flee Florence for Venice and Rome. As noted by Richardson, the flight of intellectuals caused a sharp decline in the Florentine printing industry in favour of Venice and to some extent Rome.³ The Florentine exiles often sought the protection of wealthy patrons who, despite their Medici roots, supported the Florentine Republican and anti-Medicean faction. One of these patrons was Cardinal Niccolò Ridolfi, who contributed to the development of one of the foremost centres of Renaissance culture in Rome, in direct opposi-


tion to the Medici.⁴ Ridolfi was appointed the Master of the Sacred Palace, a Vatican office that allowed him to control the printing of every book in Rome; he also owned one of the richest libraries in Europe, which was acquired in 1588 by Catherine de’ Medici and now forms one of the chief collections of the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. To strengthen his power, Ridolfi gathered prominent intellectuals, politicians, and artists in his court. Among these intellectuals was Francesco Priscianese, a humanist born in 1494 in Pieve a Presciano. Priscianese taught grammar in Arezzo and Figline, near Florence, before fleeing Tuscany in 1530 for having openly supported the Republican regime against the Medici. In 1540 he was in Venice, where he published two important vernacular works dedicated to Francis I: a Latin grammar entitled *Della lingua romana* and a treatise entitled *De’ primi principii della lingua romana*.⁵ Between 1542 and 1544 Francesco Priscianese was in Rome, where he ran his own printing press, which was initially financed by Cardinal Marcello Cervini (the future Pope Marcellus II), who was a keen book collector and the chief librarian of the Vatican Library.⁶ Under Cervini’s aegis Priscianese printed a number of Latin sacred texts devoted to the defence of Christianity against the pagans (Arnobius’ *Adversus gentes*), the Turks (Bessarion’s *Oration*), and Luther (Henry VIII’s anti-Lutheran *Defence of the Seven Sacraments*).⁷ He also published Cola da Benevento’s treatise entitled *Del governo della corte d’un signore in Roma*, which describes the structure and working of an ideal court, probably with reference to Ridolfi’s court.⁸

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⁷ On these editions see Mouren, pp. 449–50.

⁸ Modern scholars and library catalogues wrongly identify the author as Priscianese, on the
Very quickly, however, Priscianese’s printing press was undermined by serious financial difficulties, aggravated by Cervini’s progressive loss of interest in the enterprise.  

This is the moment Priscianese decided to publish at his own expense three non-religious texts in the vernacular, all printed in 1544: Boccaccio’s *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, referred to as the *Vita di Dante*, and the Tuscan translations of Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, together with Marsilio Ficino’s interpretations of both dialogues. In a letter dated 5 July 1544 to his friend Pietro Vettori, who was then professor at the Studio in Florence, having also spent a few years in exile, Priscianese wrote as follows:

Io attendo a stampare alcune cose per me, come dire cose di Platone fatte Toscane, come è il Convito e ‘l Fedro et ultimamente la vita di Dante composta per il Boccaccio, la quale, perché mi pare bellissima, io vi manderei volentieri, se io pensassi che voi non l’havessi letta.

Owing to illness and lack of financial support, Priscianese was soon forced to close down and sell his press. It was purchased some time between 1546 and 1547 by Lorenzo Torrentino, Cosimo’s future stampatore ducale, who probably used it to set up his own printing press in Florence. Priscianese still managed to finance the publication of Paolo del Rosso’s vernacular translation of Suetionius’s *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, printed in 1544 in Rome by Antonio Blado, and dedicated to Averardo Serristori, Cosimo I’s ambassador to Pope Paul III in Rome. Priscianese’s last work, which dates from 1549, is a
Latin classification of Cicero’s *Letters*, published in Venice by Aldo Manuzio’s sons.\(^{15}\)

Like many Florentine exiles, Priscianese soon realized that having a successful career outside Florence would prove difficult, and he tried to win the grace of the Duke in the hope of being invited to return to Florence. In 1543 one of Cosimo’s closest associates, Lelio Torelli, was looking for someone to print the Pandects, i.e. the Digest, part of Justinian’s *Corpus iuris civilis*, the first code of Roman law. This was a monumental and highly symbolic project, intended to link the Medici regime with Rome’s ancient past. Priscianese seized the opportunity: in May 1543 he sent a letter to Vettori, stating that he was ready to return to Florence if the Duke agreed to finance the publication of the Pandects.\(^{16}\) Priscianese never had the opportunity to achieve this project—after a vain attempt to gain Cosimo’s approval, Lelio Torelli gave the commission for the publication of the text to the *stampatore ducale* Lorenzo Torrentino, the very printer who acquired Priscianese’s equipment after the closing down of the Roman press.\(^{17}\) Priscianese was well aware of

\(^{15}\) *Francisci Priscianensis argumentorum observationes in omneis Ciceronis epistolas* (Venetiis: apud Aldi filios, 1549 mense Septembri). The edition is preceded by two prefaces: the first is dedicated to Niccolò Ridolfi (fols a ii\(^r\)-a iii\(^r\)); the second to Romolo Amaseo (fols [a v]\(^r\)-[a vii]\(^r\)). Amaseo was an ardent defender of the Latin language, who published a Latin translation of Xenophon’s *Anabasis* (Bologna: Io. Baptista Phellus Bononienis, formulis suis impressos, ex officina sua edendos curavit, 1533) and of Pausanias’ *Graeciae descriptio* (Florentiae: L. Torrentinus ducalis typographus excudebat, 1551). In the preface to Amaseo, Priscianese justifies his decision to introduce a Latin work with prefaces written in Tuscan by stating that all languages were once vernacular (fol. [a v]\(^r\): ‘dico che io sono stato sempre di questo parere, ne mi credo inganare, che tutte le lingue del mondo siano, ò siano state uolgarì, et che tutti gli scrittori (fuor che pochissimi) habbiano sempre scritto in uolgarì loro, ma che sempre sia stato lecito ad ogniuno, ne mai sene sia fatto decreto contrario, di potere scriuere in quella lingua che piu piace, et pura, et mescolata, et in uerso, e ’n prosa’); cf. fol. [a vi]\(^r\): ‘mescolare il uolgarì col latino non è altro che mescolare un uolgarì con un’altro uolgarì’.

\(^{16}\) See Redig de Campos, p. 177: ‘Di qui nacque adunque che io dissi a M. Cosimo, et così replica ancora a voi, che io verrei a Fiorenza quando il Duca facesse stampare le Pandette, come qua si sagiong, et io fossi sopra ciò eletto, intendoendo però che egli le facesse stampare di suo, com’io penso voglia fare, et me pagasse del mio lavoro et manifesta quello che fummo d’accordo, come fanno questi ministri papali, perciò che altrimenti non potrei né adirei metter le mani in così fatta impresa, chè, avvenga che il libro sia bellissimo, come egli è, et famosissimo, et fosse più che ogni altro disiderato, et per questo da poterne sperare utilità grande et honore a chi sen’impaccerà, pure ella è impresa più tosto da un Principe che da un Priscianese.’ We know that Vettori transmitted Priscianese’s letter to Francesco Campana, first secretary of the Duke, as shown by Lelio Torelli’s letter to Piero Vettori of 15 August 1543, in BL MS Add. 10278, fol. 121\(^r\), mentioned by Mouren, p. 449, n. 82.

this: in a letter dated 30 August 1545 and addressed to Benedetto Varchi, another Republican who returned to Florence after spending several years in exile, Priscianese enquired whether Lorenzo Torrentino would accomplish his project of printing the Pandects.¹⁸ In this context Priscianese’s decision to dedicate, in 1544, the publication of Paolo del Rosso’s translation of Suetonius’s Lives of the Twelve Caesars to Cosimo I’s ambassador in Rome might be seen as a last and vain attempt to obtain the favour of the Duke—despite the fact that del Rosso was at that time one of the most virulent opponents of the Medici regime.¹⁹

Priscianese and Claudio Tolomei

Before turning to the translations themselves, it is necessary to determine the context in which Priscianese became involved in the publication of works in the vernacular. As Luigi Vignali has shown, Priscianese was initially inclined to promote the superiority of the Latin language over the vernacular; he later modified this position and started to defend the vernacular as a language capable of transmitting intellectual knowledge. This change of heart occurred during his exile in Rome, when he established close contact with Claudio Tolomei.²⁰ Tolomei was a philologist from Siena who had been banished from his native city in 1518 for having supported Clement VII against the pro-Florentine Sienese party, and had fled to Rome at the service of Ippolito de’ Medici.²¹ Tolomei was instrumental in developing the notion, defended by the majority of Cinquecento vernacular philologists, that Italian was not a corrupt form of Latin, but a newly generated language which ultimately derived from Latin. Tolomei fully developed his theory in Il Cesano (written

²⁰ See Vignali, ‘Un grammatico latino del Cinquecento e il volgare: studi su Francesco Priscianese (I)’, pp. 22–23. On Claudio Tolomei see Luigi Sbaragli, Claudio Tolomei, umanista senese del Cinquecento: la vita e le opere (Siena: Accademia per le Arti e per le Lettere, 1939).
in 1525, published in 1555). Similarly, in another work entitled *Il Polito* (written in 1528) he propounded a new orthography better adapted to the needs of the vernacular, in response to Giovanni Giorgio Trissino’s orthographical reform developed in the *Epistola de le lettere nuovamente aggiunte*. During his exile in Rome Claudio Tolomei oversaw the foundation of one of the most influential academies of the time, the Accademia della Virtù, initially supported by Ippolito de’ Medici. The first purpose of this Academy was to study poetry, and more specifically to adapt classical metre and verse to vernacular poetry, in accordance with the theories elaborated by Tolomei in his *Versi et regole de la nuova poesia toscana*. The second purpose of the Academy was to investigate Vitruvius’s architectural treatise and provide an annotated edition of the text, together with a translation ‘in bella lingua Toscana’. We do not know whether Priscianese was actually a member of the Accademia della Virtù, but it is clear that Tolomei and Priscianese knew each other well. Modern scholars have, for instance, identified a poem that Claudio Tolomei addresses to Priscianese; in addition, Priscianese said of Tolomei: ‘non desidero meno di fare cosa che gli sia grata che (sono stato per dire) di vivere’. Priscianese’s patron, Marcello Cervini, was himself a close friend of Tolomei: he was a member of the Accademia della Virtù and possessed his own autograph copy of Tolomei’s *Il Cesano*, which is now preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence.

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26 Letter to Pier Vettori, 11 November 1543, in *Redig de Campos*, p. 179.

A number of documents suggest that Tolomei also helped Priscianese find patrons to finance the printing of Plato’s translations. The translator of Plato’s *Symposium*, Ercole Barbarasa, dedicated his work to a close associate of Tolomei, the Genoese book collector Giovanni Battista Grimaldi. From a series of letters between Tolomei and Grimaldi, dating from 1543 to 1547, we know that Grimaldi came to Rome some time in 1543 and asked Tolomei to select books for his private library, which was to comprise works in both Latin and Tuscan. In a letter dated 15 December 1544, Tolomei states:

ne’ libri usarò ogni diligenza che sian buoni, e delle migliori stampe, e li pigliaro parte Latini, e parte Toscani, co quali potrete adornare l’animo di belle e nuove ricchezze, oltre quelle che insino ad hora per natura, o per istudio rilucono in voi.\(^{30}\)

A few months earlier (19 April 1544) Tolomei had sent him a letter referring to the publication of Ercole Barbarasa’s translation of Plato’s *Symposium*:

vi sarà forse presentato costi il *Convivio* di Platone tradotto in lingua Toscana, e intitolato a voi. Non vi sia grave leggerne qualche parte, perciocché l’opera è bellissima, venendo da così nobil fonte, come fu quel di Platone, e piacendovi infiammerete con bei modi questi ingegni, che s’affatichino in così belle imprese.\(^{31}\)

It is clear, therefore, that Grimaldi commissioned the vernacular *Symposium*, which in turn Tolomei asked Priscianese to print.

It is more difficult to establish whether Tolomei played a direct role in the publication of the vernacular version of the *Phaedrus* by Felice Figliucci.\(^{32}\)

However, there are some clear connections between the two Sienese scholars.

\(^{28}\) Barbarasa dedicated to the same Grimaldi his translation of Bartolomeo Marliani’s *Urbe Romae topographia*, entitled *L’antichità di Roma* (Roma: per Antonio Blado, 1548), probably in the context of the Accademia della Virtù’s promotion of Vitruvius.

\(^{29}\) On Grimaldi see Anthony Hobson, *Apollo and Pegasus: An Enquiry into the Formation and Dispersal of a Renaissance Library* (Amsterdam: Van Heusden, 1975), pp. 49–64; all thirteen letters between Grimaldi and Tolomei (1543–47) are reproduced on pp. 197–204.

\(^{30}\) *Delle lettere di m. Claudio Tolomei libro primo*–*settimo*: con nuova aggiunta ristampate, & con somma diligenza ricorrette* (Vinegia: per Iacomo Cornetti, 1585) [hereafter *Lettere*], iv, fol. 127v. In an earlier letter (25 September 1543) addressed to Giovanfrancesco Bini (*Lettere*, iii, fol. 114°) Tolomei asks his friend to find some printed books for him in Venice: ‘poi che vi trovate in Venetia, la dove è gran copia di tutte le mercantie, e a prezzo assai ragionevole, vi prego che per amor mio vediate quel che costaranno certi libri parte Grechi, e parte Latinii; di che io vi mando la lista; e solo haverò caro intendere il prezzo de’ libri, ma de la portatura ancora; stimo saranno una cassa bien piena: li vorrei delle migliori stampe, che si trovano o di Francia, o d’Alamagna, o pur di Venetia e sopra tutto avvertite, che non sia lettera minuta infoscata, perche ella mi cava gli occhi.’

\(^{31}\) *Lettere*, iii, fols 113v–114r. The text was printed shortly after 5 July 1544; see p. 1085 above.

\(^{32}\) Figliucci is better known for his later translation of Ficino’s *Letters* dedicated to Cosimo I de’ Medici (Vinegia: per Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, 1546–48). He also published a vernacular version of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (Padua: per Giacomo Fabriano, 1548) and a vernacular commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics* (Roma: per Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1551), both dedicated to Cardinal Giovanni Maria del Monte/Julius III; a vernacular translation of Demosthenes’ *Philippics* (Roma: per Vincenzo Valgrisi, 1550), dedicated to Cardinal Innocenzo del Monte; a translation of the Catechism of the
At the time he published the *Phaedrus*, Figliucci was, like Tolomei, in Rome, where he was serving at the court of Cardinal Giovanni Maria del Monte (the future Pope Julius III). In addition, a number of documents indicate that by 1547 Figliucci and Tolomei knew each other very well. In a letter sent from Piacenza in April 1547, Tolomei starts by asking rhetorically:

credevate adunque ch’io mi scordassi di voi? [. . .] Ma forse non era mal giudicio perché io doveva ricordarmi di M. Felice cortegiano, e voi sete M. Felice scolare [. . .] che voi attendiate con diligenza le cose d’Aristotile per la via de Greci [i.e. Greek commentators] m’è sommo piacere.

This letter was sent shortly before Figliucci published his translation of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (1548), at a time when the recent transfer of the Council of Trent to Bologna, where he was accompanying del Monte, allowed him to spend some time in Padua. The tone of Tolomei’s letter implies that he had known Figliucci for some time. The second letter, probably written the same year, shows that Tolomei and Figliucci were discussing matters related to the use of Tuscan as a philosophical and literary language. Thus Tolomei advocates the need to establish a proper grammar defining the rules of Tuscan:

che m’invitate a scrivere in questa nostra lingua piu tosto le scienze, che le proprietà della gramatica, molto mi piace. Ma considerate (vi prego) come primamente io non son tale, che lo possi far, come si converrebbe, non essendo ripieno di quelle dottrine, di cui deve essere adornato colui, che si vuol porre a così grande impresa e così onorata. Dipoi le cose delle scienze sono in varie lingue disputate, discorse e da eccellentissimi maestri trattate, in tal guisa, che non han così bisogno, ch’elle ci siano di nuovo da veruno insegnate, ma la nostra lingua è ancora quasi nella sua fanciullezza, e ha bisogno di chi la regga, l’indrizzi e la governi. Onde non istimo che debbia esser senza frutto la fatica ch’io prendo di chiarirla, distinguerrla, formularla, illustrarla.

A few years later, Figliucci gives Tolomei a prominent role in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, published in 1551: the commentary is a fictionalized account of a conversation between Claudio Tolomei and his nephew in Padua, in the presence of several Venetian scholars.36

Council of Trent commissioned by Pope Pius V (Vinegia: per Giorgio Angelieri, [after 1564]); and a vernacular commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics*, dedicated to Mario Bevilacqua (Vinegia: per Giovanni Battista Somascho, 1548). Figliucci presents his translation as a revision of an earlier, anonymous version.

33 Lettere, vii, fol. 274r-v (30 April 1547).
34 Tradottione antica de la Rettorica d’Aristotile, nuovamente trovata (Padoua: per Giacomo Fabriano, 1548). Figliucci presents his translation as a revision of an earlier, anonymous version.
35 Lettere, vii, fol. 277r-v.
36 Felice Figliucci, *De la filosofia morale libri dieci: sopra li dieci libri de L’Ethica d’Aristotile*, Proemio, fol. 10*: ‘Per unire adunque hormai alla dichiaratione d’Aristotile, è necessario diruir prima in che modo, et doue furono questi ragionamenti fatti, ne’ quali tutta questa scienza morale è dichiarata. Douete adunque sapere, che ritrouandosi pochi anni passati, il degno huomo, M. Claudio Tolomei in Padoua, città nobile, et magnifica, quanto ogn’uno sa, et confessa, doue io parimente per dar qual che opera à gli studii di filosofia; m’era per alquanto tempo ridutto, egli
It remains to discuss the ideological context in which Plato was translated into the vernacular. Following a tradition initiated by Ficino, the Symposium and the Phaedrus were seen as complementary, the former being on Love and the latter on Beauty.\(^{37}\) Both dialogues were central, therefore, to the philosophical and literary circles of the time, particularly for the *trattati d’amore*.\(^{38}\) In addition, Priscianese, who had been in relatively close contact with Michelangelo and Titian,\(^{39}\) might well have responded to the artists’ fascination with the Platonic doctrines revived by Ficino and Diacceto.\(^{40}\) Indeed, since Marsilio Ficino’s 1484 translation of Plato’s complete works, the philosopher’s writings were always read, consciously or not, through the filter of Ficino’s Neoplatonic exegesis, a process that would continue well into the nineteenth century.\(^{41}\) It is not surprising, therefore, that Priscianese published the translations of Plato’s Phaedrus and Symposium together with Ficino’s interpretations. Figliucci appended to the Phaedrus a vernacular version of Ficino’s introduction (*argumentum*) to the dialogue, which was first published...
in his 1484 translation of Plato’s works. Similarly, Barbarasa’s translation is preceded by a vernacular version of Ficino’s commentary on the *Symposium*. Ficino himself had translated his *Symposium* commentary from Latin into Tuscan around 1469. However, a comparison between Ficino’s and Barbarasa’s texts shows that Barbarasa based his own translation on Ficino’s Latin rather than on the vernacular version. This is further confirmed by the fact that Barbarasa translates a number of astrological passages which are present only in the Latin tradition of Ficino’s text.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, such as Cristoforo Landino and Lorenzo de’ Medici, Ficino did not consider the role of the vernacular worthy of any other consideration than to make a text ‘a più persone [. . .] commune e facile’, as is made clear in the preface to the Italian version of the *De amore*. By contrast, the translations printed in the following century by Priscianese are characterized by a conscious and deliberate intention to use Tuscan as a medium for education and culture, in line with Claudio Tolomei’s defence of the vernacular. In both prefakes the translators clearly explain why they have chosen to use Tuscan as the vehicle to transmit Plato’s ideas, but they express a sort of reverence towards the texts they translate, still underlining the superiority of the Greek idiom over the vernacular. Thus in the preface dedicated to Grimaldi, Ercole Barbarasa explains that he has translated ‘with more eagerness than knowledge’ a text that many would have shied away

42 For the text see Marsilio Ficino’s Commentaries on Plato, ed. by Allen, I, 38–49 and 223.
44 See Sebastiano Gentile, ‘Per la storia del testo del “Commentarium in Convivium” di Marsilio Ficino’, *Rinascimento*, 2nd ser., 21 (1981), 3–27; Niccoli, pp. xlii–xliii. All the passages that are omitted in the vernacular tradition (II. 8. 38; III. 2. 11; V. 8. 7; V. 12. 7; VI. 6. 14; VII. 9. 4) are present in Barbarasa’s version, and were thus translated from the Latin version; by contrast, the 1544 Florentine edition of Ficino’s vernacular version (see n. 49 below) inserts only five of the missing passages (it omits v. 12. 7, as well as one sentence in the passage in v. 8. 7). Barbarasa also translates the Lucretius passage (vii. 6. 3) missing in both the vernacular manuscripts and the Florentine edition. Because of this, as well as for reasons of chronology, we can infer that the Florentine editor did not use Barbarasa’s translation.
from: ‘così mi rendo certo che à la maestà, à l’alteza de concetti, à la divinità de le parole di Platone, non si possa tanto levare che rivolgasi ò rompasi’. What is striking here is that in the preface Barbarasa refers solely to Plato, and not to Ficino, especially when he is alluding to his intention to translate Plato’s other dialogues. This can be explained by the fact that Priscianese’s publication has a profound ideological significance, which goes well beyond the confines of Tolomei’s Accademia or Grimaldi’s private library. Since 1542 Cosimo de’ Medici had launched a vast enterprise of vernacularization and used the Accademia Fiorentina to promote a cultural model that was centred upon the superiority of the Tuscan language. In this context, the purpose of the Academy was to translate all knowledge, whether literary, philosophical, or scientific, into the vernacular. So the fact that the first vernacular printing of Plato’s Symposium occurred in Rome rather than Florence can only have been perceived by the Florentines as a provocation on the part of the fuoriusciti. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the very same year the Florentines decided to publish Ficino’s own vernacular version of the Symposium commentary, which had been completed around 1469 and had had a limited circulation in manuscript. This publication, which probably follows that of Priscianese by a few months, was produced by a mysterious printer under the pseudonym ‘Neri Dortelata da Firenze’. It is preceded by a dedication to Cosimo I de’ Medici by Cosimo Bartoli, a known member of the Florentine Academy. The printer is generally identified in library catalogues as Cosimo Bartoli, but modern scholars are now inclined to identify Dortelata with Carlo Lenzoni or II comento di Marsilio Ficino sopra il Convito di Platone, et esso Convito, tradotti in lingua toscana per Hercole Barbarasa da Terni (Roma: per Francesco Priscianese, 1544). Ercole Barbarasa’s preface is reproduced in Kristeller, Supplementum Ficinianum, 1, 92–93. I follow the spelling of the 1544 edition (apart from the distinction u/v), which I have consulted in the British Library (C.142.a.38). Barbarasa’s preface is at fols [a i]v–a ii, followed by a list of capitoli (fols a ii–[a iii]), Ficino’s commentary (fols 1v–109v), and the Symposium (fols 110v–159v). The book ends with a list of errata (fol. [y iii]v), preceded by an apologetic note written by Battista Brussa (fol. [x viii]), probably one of Priscianese’s associates, who left out Chapter 4 of Discourse 1 and added it at the end of the volume (fols y i–y ii). The Florentine edition bears the date of November 1544. We do not know precisely when the Roman edition was published, but it is likely to have been printed shortly after July and thus before November, as indicated by the letter addressed to Vettori on 5 July 1544 mentioned on p. 1085 above.

46 Il comento di Marsilio Ficino sopra il Convito di Platone, et esso Convito, tradotti in lingua toscana per Hercole Barbarasa da Terni (Roma: per Francesco Priscianese, 1544). Ercole Barbarasa’s preface is reproduced in Kristeller, Supplementum Ficinianum, 1, 92–93. I follow the spelling of the 1544 edition (apart from the distinction u/v), which I have consulted in the British Library (C.142.a.38). Barbarasa’s preface is at fols [a i]v–a ii, followed by a list of capitoli (fols a ii–[a iii]), Ficino’s commentary (fols 1v–109v), and the Symposium (fols 110v–159v). The book ends with a list of errata (fol. [y iii]v), preceded by an apologetic note written by Battista Brussa (fol. [x viii]), probably one of Priscianese’s associates, who left out Chapter 4 of Discourse 1 and added it at the end of the volume (fols y i–y ii).

47 Ibid., fol. a ii: ‘io sono entrato di tradurre gl’altri libri del divin Platone sotto il vostro virtuoso et felice nome’.

48 The Florentine edition bears the date of November 1544. We do not know precisely when the Roman edition was published, but it is likely to have been printed shortly after July and thus before November, as indicated by the letter addressed to Vettori on 5 July 1544 mentioned on p. 1085 above.

49 Marsilio Ficino sopra lo amore o ver’ Convito di Platone (In Firénze: per Neri Dorteláta con privilégio di N. S., di Novembre 1544). I have consulted the copy preserved in the British Library, 232.a.29. Bartoli’s introduction (fols a ii–a iii) is followed by Neri Dortelata’s orthographical treatise (fols a iii–[b xi]), Marsilio Ficino’s preface to Bernardo del Nero and Antonio Manetti (pp. 1–3), Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s Symposium (pp. 4–251), and an index. The text of Bartoli’s introduction is reproduced in Kristeller, Supplementum Ficinianum, 1, 91–92. In all the passages quoted below I follow the spelling and accentuation of the 1544 edition rather than Kristeller’s.
Giambullari. The same Neri Dortelata appended to Ficino’s commentary an introductory essay entitled ‘Osservazioni per la pronúnzia Fiorentína’, which was dedicated ‘a gli amatori della lingua Fiorentína’, and defended the use of a new script that would better reflect the Florentine pronunciation. Ficino’s commentary is written in this new orthography, with prominent accent marks and characteristic spellings. Dortelata’s essay is one of several Cinquecento attempts to create a new alphabet that is adapted to the needs of the vernacular independently of Latin, the most famous ones being, as we have mentioned above, those by Trissino and Tolomei. Modern scholars have shown that Dortelata’s treatise is remarkably similar in content to Tolomei’s own orthographical reform, to such an extent that Tolomei himself wondered in a letter to Carlo Lenzoni if he had not been plagiarized. At the same time, however, Dortelata appears to distance himself from the reforms propounded by Tolomei and Trissino. For instance, he rejects the creation of new characters (fol. [6r]: ‘consciósa che io non ci ő messò caráteri nuóvi (cóme e’ dícono) o non conosciúti universalmente per quélla stéssá lettéra, che é’ rappreséntato in tútti gli scrittí’), which is precisely what Trissino had proposed; he attacks what he sees as Tolomei’s inconsistency regarding the doubling of the letter z, which Tolomei advocated but failed to apply in his own writings (fol. [13r]: ‘si ancórá perché úno scrittóre intra gli áltri mólto consideráto se béne l’ [sc. il raddioppamento della zeta] appruóva per útil’cósa, non però l’à égli volúto por’dóppio nelle ópere súe’). Given the ideological context in which this text was produced, we may infer that Dortelata’s treatise was seeking to compete with, or at least respond to, Tolomei’s orthographical project. As suggested by Fiorelli, Dortelata’s attack might well be what prompted Tolomei sub-

50 The other known work printed by Dortelata Neri is Giambullari’s treatise on the dimensions of Dante’s Inferno (De ‘l sito, fórma, & misúre, déllo Inférno di Dánte (Firenze: per Neri Dortelata, 1544)), which features the same orthography and accentuation. Against the identification of Dortelata as Bartoli see Judith Bryce, Cosimo Bartoli (1503–1572): The Career of a Florentine Polymath (Geneva: Droz, 1983), pp. 215–19, and Fiorelli, p. 190; Moyer, pp. 145–47, attributes the text to Lenzoni, or to a collaborative effort between Lenzoni and Giambullari.

51 The passage is at fol. [a vii]r–v: ‘díco adúnque primieraménte, che avéndo noi nella nóstra pronúnzia piu suóni, che nel alfábeto lettéra assegnáte alla espressióne di quéli: et úna infinitá di paróle in tútto símili di léttera et di suóno, ma divérse di accénti: la scrittúra nóstra ê státa necessitáta insíno ad óggi con súo difétto, et confusioné de’ lettóri, servírsi mólte vólte d’úna sóla, et medésima lettéra, et non sólo a duói notablíménte variáti suóni; ma a duói significáti móto divérsi.’

52 See Richardson, Trattati sull’ortografia del volgare, pp. xliii–xliv.

53 See Fiorelli, p. 186, n. 51, and Castellani Pollidori, pp. cii–civ. The text is in Lettere, iii, fol. 103r–v: ‘Me stata molto cara l’opera di Marsiglió [i.e. the Florentine edition of Marsilio Ficino’s Dell’amore], che m’havete mandata, ma molto più il vedere che vi ricordate di me, e mi tenete in quel grado di buono amico, ch’io vi sono. Non ho havuto tempo di leggerla ancora, perché pur hiersera la ricevi. De l’Osservazioni [sc. Dortelata’s treatise], che vi son dinanzi per una altra vi scrivèrò piú a longo. Basta ch’io non so s’egli è stato furto, o imitationi, o simiglianza di spirito. Queste sono cose state tratte disputate e risolte in una nostra Academia, e cominciate con molti. Benche il vostro scrittore, per quel ch’io vedo, non habbia così appreso bene ogni cosa.’
sequently to publish his *Letters* in his own new alphabet, in order to respond to Dortelata’s accusation that he had failed to apply his new orthography to his works.\textsuperscript{54}

Similarly, we may infer that the publication of Ficino’s vernacular translation of Plato’s *Symposium* was a response to Ercole Barbarasa’s new translation, in order to establish the Accademia Fiorentina’s monopoly over vernacular culture. In the preface dedicated to Cosimo de’ Medici, Cosimo Bartoli underlines the connection between the Duke and his predecessors, Cosimo the Elder and Lorenzo the Magnificent. Thus he explains that Ficino, ‘alliévo dégno certaménte di quel grán’ Cosimo’ (fol. \[2\]r), not only gave Plato to the Latin-speaking people, together with his own commentaries, but wished to please those who spoke Tuscan and, at the insistence of Lorenzo de’ Medici, translated his *Symposium* commentary into the vernacular:

Pói che non contento di aver dato Platône a’ Latini, illustráto et dichiaráto con múlti dotissimi scritti suó; desiderando non meno di giováre a tutti coloro che di questa nostra lingua solamente avéssero notizia, che égli s’avéssese desideráto prima di satisfáre álle onoráté, et útili persuasioni del vóstro Magnifico Lorenzo, il Coménto che égli sòpra lo Amóre di Platône avéva compóstó Latino, si degnò nella nostra Matérna lingua tradúrre. (fol. a ii\textsuperscript{r})

He notes, rightly, that Ficino’s translation was never printed:

Intenzión veramente bénigna et sánta, ma non pervenúta ancóra a quel’ségno dóve égli stéssó l’avéva diríttá, esséndo státo quésto suo Tesóro quási che ascóso insíno a’ témpi nóstri; o veramente godútó da póchi. (fol. a ii\textsuperscript{v})

This led him to print Ficino’s work on the basis of a text copied from the original version, and to dedicate it to Cosimo de’ Medici in celebration of the Medici’s heritage, and in testimony of Bartoli’s gratitude:

avéndo avuto commoditá d’un Testo copiáto da lo originále stéssó, ó volútó fárne párté a tútti gli intelligénti la nostra língua, ma sótto lo onoratiss. nóme délla Ecc. V. cóme di quella a chi io débbo non sóló réndere quello che cóme cosa Ereditária se le appartiéne, ma tutto quello ancóra che io sóno o éssere potéssi gia mài.\textsuperscript{55} (fol. a ii\textsuperscript{v})

There is no need, Bartoli adds, to read the *Symposium* in the original, since Ficino has provided the best interpretation of the dialogue, which is in strict conformity with Christian dogmas:

Et non si maravígli se innanzi a quéstó Coménto, non truóva il Testo di Platône: per ciò che io piu tósto ó volúto seguítare il giudízio di Marsílio, con quálche cárico di avére

\textsuperscript{54} See Fiorelli, pp. 185–86, and Castellani Pollidori, pp. cii–civ.

\textsuperscript{55} On the stemmatic position of the Florentine edition see Niccoli, pp. xlii–lviii. Given the presence of some of the astrological passages (see n. 44 above), we may infer that Bartoli also collated the text with the Latin version.
fuggito la fatica di tradurlo; che dàre occasione alle persone indotte, le quali sogliono appena considerare la scórza delle cose, di accendere per il suo figurato et gráve modo di dire, nelle Ménti loro, di quegli affétti che vi si tráttano; et förse più largamente, che a una comúne lingua quànto è la nóstra non si conviène. Cagióné veramente che Marsilio lo traducése et lo coméntassé a' Latíni; et a suoí non voléssse dàre alttro che il Coménto sólo, côme cósia in tútto Divína et veramente Cristiána. (fols a ii–a iii)

The contrast between this preface and that of Barbarasa is rather striking. While Barbarasa expressed a form of reverence towards the text he translated, Bartoli establishes here a clear distinction between ‘i Latini’ and ‘i suoi’; while Barbarasa transmitted Plato’s text together with Ficino’s interpretation, Bartoli underlines that there is no need to read Plato’s dialogue, since Ficino’s interpretation provides the perfect guide for a Christian audience. Bartoli’s insistence that the Florentine edition reproduces Ficino’s original version can also be seen as a criticism of Barbarasa’s decision to provide a new translation of the text.

A similar difference between Priscianese’s publications and Medici-commissioned translations can be observed with regard to the second translation. The *Phaedrus* translation is dedicated ‘alle donne veramente nobili, et virtuose’, indicating the role of the vernacular in promoting culture to women. In the preface Figliucci explains that the *Phaedrus* is a ‘Dialogo del Bello’ and can therefore teach women how to distinguish between good and bad lovers (‘dove apertissimamente palesa quali siano quelli amanti, che odiar si debbano, et quali quelli, che da ogni savia et gentil donna meritano essere honorati et tenuti cari’). This statement not only echoes a well-established Neoplatonic tradition, as we have seen above, but it is also very similar to the arguments formulated by the treatises ‘in lode delle donne’ celebrating female virtues and beauty, which flourished especially in the mid-1540s in the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena.

In this context, the translator adopts a modest attitude towards the text he translates, underlining the superiority of Greek over the vernacular, which recalls Barbarasa’s preface mentioned above. Thus he states:

Conoscendo adunque di quanta utilità dovesse esservi questa cognizione, desideroso oltra modo di giovarvi, mi son messo à tradurre in lingua Toscana questo divinissimo Dialogo, non per che io pensassi gli alti concetti di Platone nella nostra lingua mostrare

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57 See n. 37.

con quella maestà, et elegantia, che nella greca si veggono, ma solo per darvi un saggio
della divotion mia verso di voi.\textsuperscript{59}

The contrast with the tone Figliucci uses, four years later, in his preface to
the Medici-commissioned translation of Ficino’s \textit{Letters} could not be more
striking. In this preface, which was dedicated to Cosimo de’ Medici, Figliucci
states that he has translated the \textit{Letters} to transmit ‘grace and wisdom to more
people’, in a way that is not dissimilar to Ficino’s view in \textit{El libro dell’amore};
however, in contrast to Ficino, he also underlines that ‘Tuscan has little to
evny Latin for’\textsuperscript{60}.

The translators and editors thus oscillate between the promotion of the
vernacular as a philosophical language considered as worthy as Latin in the
context of the Medici’s political strategy, and a more modest attitude, where
the original, whether Greek or Latin, is seen as superior in elegance and style.
The way in which the authors are presented is also very much conditioned by
the context in which they are read. Both the Medici-printed books underline
the importance of Ficino, evidently to emphasize the link between Cosimo il
Vecchio, Ficino’s patron and enlightened ruler, and the Duke. By contrast, the
Platonic texts printed by Priscianese underline the importance of Plato, and
present Ficino as an interpreter of Plato, rather than as a symbol of Florentine
supremacy.

\textit{Ficino’s Legacy in the Vernacular}

Despite invoking Plato’s text, Barbarasa—like many vernacular translators—
based his translation on Ficino’s Latin version rather than on the Greek
original. A comparison between the original text and the translations indicates that Barbarasa follows Ficino’s omissions and translation techniques,
such as the technique of \textit{reduplicatio}, which consists of rendering one Greek

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Il Fedro, o vero il Dialogo del Bello di Platone}, tradotto in lingua toscana per F. Figliucci
(Roma: per Francesco Priscianese, 1544), fol. a ii\textsuperscript{v}. I have consulted the copy preserved in
the British Library (8460.b.7). The dedication (fol. a ii\textsuperscript{v–r}) is followed by Ficino’s \textit{argumentum}
(fols a iii\textsuperscript{r}–7\textsuperscript{v}) and Plato’s \textit{Phaedrus} (fols [8]\textsuperscript{r}–79\textsuperscript{v}); it ends with a list of \textit{errori di stampa} (fol. [80]\textsuperscript{r}).

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Tomo primo delle divine lettere del gran Marsilio Ficino}, tradotto in lingua toscana per M.
Felice Figliucci Senese (Vinegia: per Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari, 1546), fols * ii\textsuperscript{v–r}– iii\textsuperscript{r}: ‘accioche la
leggiadria e la grande scienza che in esse si ritruova potesse a piu persone diletare e giovare. E
perche ancora io non penso, che essendo in questa lingua, la quale non ha troppo da invidiare a la
latina, e che Vostra Eccellentia ha sempre difesa e favorita perdano punto di reputatione o di mae-
sta.’ I have consulted the copy preserved in the British Library (1084.f.1). The preface is followed
by a table of contents (fols * iii\textsuperscript{r–[* viii]\textsuperscript{r}}), the first five books of Ficino’s \textit{Letters} (fols r\textsuperscript{1–320}), and
an index of subjects (fols * l\textsuperscript{r–*[iii]}). On Figliucci’s translation of Ficino’s \textit{Letters} see \textit{Le divine
lettere del gran Marsilio Ficino}, tradotte in lingua toscana per M. Felice Figliucci Senese, ed. by
Sebastiano Gentile (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2011), p. xxv, where Gentile notes that
Figliucci renders Ficino’s text ‘mantenendo una grande fedeltà nei confronti dell’originale latino’. 
term by two Latin words. The same is true regarding Figliucci’s translation of the Phaedrus: it is based on Ficino’s rather than Plato’s text. However, in this process of translation, the religious content of Ficino’s interpretation is progressively lost. Ficino had revived pagan texts with a view to renewing the spirituality of his time. He had established some bold equivalence between paganism and Christianity, going so far as to compare the Neoplatonic and Christian rituals (theurgy, fasting, prayer, and abstinence) and to equate Neoplatonic demons, generally considered as evil spirits, with Christian angels. Allusions to ancient mythology or religion were highly significant, therefore, to Ficino’s revival of Platonism. The vernacular versions of the texts printed by Priscianese no longer take this important aspect of Ficino’s thought into account. In Figliucci’s translation of the Phaedrus argumentum, for instance, references to mythological figures and Neoplatonic intermediary spirits are often omitted: the Latin expression de animorum numinumque pulchritudine, which refers to the beauty of the souls and other divinities, is simply rendered by belleza de gli animi (fol. a iii); an allusion to Plato’s Apollonian nature is omitted (immo ab apollinea genitura Ficino: anzi dal suo nascimento Figliucci (fol. a iii)), while the term daemon, when referring to pagan good spirits,
is translated by the Christian terms *spirito* or *angelo*. By contrast, in his version of Ficino’s *Symposium* commentary Ercole Barbarasa consistently renders *daemon* by *demone*. In other cases, however, Barbarasa’s translation differs from the Latin (and Tuscan) original. For instance, the Neoplatonic One (Latin *ipsum unum*, or, in Ficino’s vernacular version, *uno* or *unità divina*), which is the first principle of the Universe, identified as the Christian God, is often (though not always) rendered by the terms *Iddio* or *Dio* (VII. 13: *ipsum unum/unità divina, ab ipso uno/da uno, ad ipsum unum/con quella unità* Ficino: *Dio, da esso Dio, ad esso Dio* Barbarasa (fol. 104v)). Allusions to pagan religious rituals lose their initial meaning: for instance, the Dionysiac rituals (VII. 14: *expiationibus sacrisque/per sacrifici e purificazioni*), which were central to Ficino’s revival of paganism, are rendered by the more neutral expression *cose pie et sacre* (fol. 105v). In these passages, therefore, Barbarasa’s translation obliterates the Neoplatonic or pagan undertones of Ficino’s text.

Thus the passage into the vernacular seems to attenuate, at least in some part, Ficino’s Neoplatonic heritage, and to erase the ambiguous and allusive nature of the original text. It is certainly not the case that the language itself lacks the nuances that can express sophistication of thought. Nevertheless, there seems to be a simplification of Ficino’s doctrines, owing to the translation process itself, and to the nature of the audience targeted by these translations. This process of simplification goes hand in hand with the sixteenth-century presentation of Ficino as a ‘truly Christian’ interpreter of Platonism, which will last until the nineteenth century and still determines, at least in some part, modern views of Renaissance Platonism.

**Conclusion**

Priscianese’s editions of Plato tell the story of the Florentine exiles in Rome and of their attempt to transmit vernacular culture independently of the Medici regime. These texts carry the ideology of the time, adding a new layer to several centuries of interpretation of Plato and inspiring artists, intellectuals, politicians, and women. As this article has shown, the choice of texts reflects the cultural and political aspirations of the humanists of the time; it documents the ideological significance of the multifaceted phenomenon of

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64 *daemon quidem aereus* Ficino: *uno spirito che è in noi aereo* Figliucci (fol. 4r); *ordines daemonum* Ficino: *(ordini)* deli spiriti celesti Figliucci (fol. 4r); *(casum)* daemonum Ficino: *la caduta de gli angeli* Figliucci (fol. 5r); *serpentem daemonicum* Ficino: *il serpente angelico* Figliucci (fol. 5r); *a daemone quodam* Theute Ficino: *la caduta de gli angeli* Figliucci (fol. 7r).

65 See e.g. Or. vi. 2: *amorem daemonem appellavit* Ficino: *chiamò amore demone* Barbarasa (fol. 54r).

66 See e.g. Or. vii. 14: *redire quippe ad unum animus nequit nisi ipse unum efficiatur* Ficino: *et certo l’animo non può ritornare ad uno, se l’istesso uno non diventa* Barbarasa (fol. 105v-v).
vernacularization in the sixteenth century. Thus, while Florence was keen to promote the vernacular as a way of linking the newly reinstated Medici to their ancestors, the Florentine exiles in Rome tended to erase the Medicean aspect of the process of vernacularization; while Florence celebrated Ficino, Rome heralded Plato. This process of ideological reappropriation was sufficiently significant to prompt the Florentines who remained in their home city to reaffirm the centrality of Ficino as the best and sole interpreter of Plato and the promoter of the Medici ideology, by printing his vernacular version of Plato in response to Barbarasa’s translation. The success of the Roman fuoriusciti was short-lived: as private courts failed to provide sufficient financial support to their entourage, prominent intellectuals decided to return to Florence and continue their projects in the service of the Medici regime, leading to a vast programme of cultural celebration of the volgare through the Florentine Academy and Torrentino’s press.