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What is the Best Method to Study Philosophy? Sebastiano Erizzo and the ‘Revival’ of Plato in Sixteenth–Century Venice

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The article offers the first textual and contextual study of Sebastiano Erizzo’s *Trattato dell’istrumento et via inventrice degli antichi* printed in Venice by Plinio Pietrasanta in 1554. Through examination of previously unstudied paratextual material, it argues that the work is linked to discussions on method that took place at the University of Padua, and to the programmes of vernacularisation projected or developed under the aegis of the Accademia Veneziana and the Infiammati; it is the result of a close collaboration between Erizzo, Bassiano Lando, Girolamo Ruscelli and Lodovico Dolce.

**KEYWORDS** Sebastiano Erizzo, Platonic method, vernacular Plato, Girolamo Ruscelli, Bassiano Lando, Accademia Veneziana/della Fama, Accademia degli Infiammati, University of Padua

**Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to shed further light on the diffusion of Platonism in sixteenth-century Italy, in the context of debates on philosophical order and method that took place in Venice and Padua. More specifically, it will offer for the first time a textual and contextual analysis of a treatise that has escaped the attention of modern scholars: Sebastiano Erizzo’s *Trattato dell’strumento et via inventrice degli antichi* (*Treatise on the instrument and method of the ancients*) printed in Venice by Plinio Pietrasanta in 1554. Erizzo dedicates the text to his Paduan professor of medicine Bassiano Lando.

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1 Sebastiano Erizzo, *Trattato dell’strumento et via inventrice degli antichi* (Venice: per Plinio Pietrasanta, 1554). Plinio Pietrasanta was working for a press financed by Girolamo Ruscelli at the time.
(or Landi), whilst Erizzo’s mentor and literary agent Girolamo Ruscelli prefaces it to Marcello Cervini, future pope Marcello II.²

Sebastiano Erizzo (1525–85) belonged to a prominent Venetian patrician family. After receiving a humanistic education in Venice, where he learnt ancient Greek and Latin, he studied at the University of Padua with Bassiano Lando, then professor of medicine. Back in Venice he combined a political career with intense scholarly activities, setting up a private library of more than a thousand books and collecting ancient artifacts and coins. During that time he published, always in Venice and with the help of Girolamo Ruscelli (and, after Ruscelli’s death, Lodovico Dolce), the Trattato on method under discussion here (1554), vernacular translations of Plato (Timaeus, 1557; Euthyphro, Crito, Apologia, Phaedo, together with a reprint of Timaeus in 1574), a treatise of numismatics that became a best-seller (Discorso sopra le medaglie, 1559), a commentary on Petrarch (Esposizione nelle tre canzoni di Petrarcha chiamate le tre sorelle, 1561), a collection of six novelle modeled on Boccaccio (Le sei giornate, 1567) and a political treatise (Discorso dei governi civili, 1571). Erizzo also intended to publish a collection of vernacular letters in three books, to be printed by Vincenzo Valgrisi and dedicated to Vespasiano Gonzaga.³

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2 See two letters Erizzo addressed to Pier Antonio Tollenenti (dated 13 March 1567 and 20 April 1567 respectively), in Manuscript G 3 8 7 (277) (hereafter G) in the Biblioteca Bertoliana of Vicenza, at ff. 145r–147r and 147r–148v (‘Vorrei bene che si mostrasse che la opera fosse stampata in Cremona, et non altrove, et più tosto ancora sarei contento, che il libro fosse da m. Vicenzo dedicato al Signore Vespasiano Gonzaga, che ad altri […] Io faccio pensiero di compartire questo mio volume di lettere in tre libri, due di lettere famigliari a diversi amici, il terzo sarà delle lettere giovani, overo amorose[…]’). Unless otherwise stated, all transcriptions are mine. Accents, punctuation, and capital letters have been regularised to follow modern standards. Abbreviations have been expanded and u/o have been distinguished according to modern usage. Word boundaries have been kept as in the original except for agli, negli etc., and cioé.
The collection was never printed, and is now in a Vicenza manuscript, which is probably the exemplar prepared for publication.4

In this article, I will first offer a detailed study of the cultural context in which Erizzo developed his ideas on method, and then analyse a number of unpublished works and letters from the Vicenza manuscript mentioned above. The first one is a short treatise on method dedicated to Bassiano Lando (Discorso dei metodi et delle vie da gli antichi usate nel ritrovare le cose), written shortly after the publication of the Trattato, in which Erizzo compiles all the ancient sources on method he could not include in the Trattato. The second one is a Discorso sopra tutte le cose che possono cadere sotto la dottrina et del più perfetto et vero modo d’insegnare, held at ‘a Venetian academy’, probably before the publication of the Trattato.5 Two letters, addressed to Bassiano Lando and Girolamo Ruscelli, in turn clarify various points regarding the content and structure of the Trattato.6 I will finally provide a detailed analysis of the Trattato itself and of the sources used by Erizzo.

As the title of the works mentioned above indicates, Sebastiano Erizzo was particularly interested in the question of philosophical method, especially in the context of teaching and learning. These texts closely follow the production of important works on method in Latin and the vernacular, starting with Peter Ramus’s Aristotelice animadversiones (1543), which advocated, in direct opposition to the scholastic method used at La Sorbonne, a new philosophical method to teach and order human knowledge.7 Similarly, in Italy, a number of prominent intellectuals, such as Sperone Speroni, Bernardino Tomitano, Benedetto Varchi and Alessandro Piccolomini, all members of the Paduan Accademia degli Infiammati, not only defended the use of the vernacular language to treat philosophical matters, but also reflected on the appropriate method to teach philosophy and rejected the traditional instruments of logic used in university

4 G includes letters Erizzo wrote between 1543 and 1584; it is divided in three books (Books I–II are addressed to his familiari; Book III, under the heading ‘lettere giovenili’, includes anonymous love letters); followed by three treatises: the Discorso dei metodi et delle vie dagli antichi usate nel ritrovare le cose; the Discorso sopra tutte le cose che possono cadere sotto la dottrina et del più perfetto et vero modo d’insegnare; and the manuscript version of the Discorso dei governi civili. For a detailed description of the manuscript, see Silvia Zoppi, Sebastiano Erizzo. Lettera sulla poesia (Florence: Olhski, 1989), pp. 8–11, with a list of all named addressees, pp. 71–74. Of the letters, four are reprinted in Lettere di XIII uomini illustri (Venice: per Comin da Trino, 1560), XV, pp. 620–35 (letter to Bassiano Lando, 17 November 1553 in G, ff. 153r–154v); pp. 625–27 (letter to Bassiano Lando, 4 March 1552 in G, ff. 154r–155r); pp. 627–35 (letter to G. G. M., s.l., s.d. in G, ff. 155v–159r); and pp. 636–37 (letter to Giovanna Battista Camozzi, 31 December 1549 in G, ff. 159r–v). Ten other letters are reprinted in Giuseppe Melchiori, ‘Dieci lettere inedite di Sebastiano Erizzo’, Memorie romane di antichità e belle arti 1 (1824), 211–48, which are mostly dated 1569–70, and concerns Erizzo’s study of ancient coins.

5 These works are preserved in G at ff. 290r–308v and 308r–317v respectively.

6 The text is in G, at ff. 132r–142v.

teaching. As we will see, Erizzo’s ideas on method were also deeply influenced by prominent philosophers and physicians such as Niccolò Leoniceno, Giovan Battista da Monte and Bassiano Lando, who reinterpreted the traditional views on Aristotelian method, and, through a close reading of Galen and Plato, considered other methods (division and resolution) as valid ways to conduct scientific and philosophical research.

Context

We do not know in which Venetian academy Erizzo held his discourse on method mentioned above. It might have been at the informal academy at the private palazzo of the senator and poet Domenico Venier (1517–82), where Venetian and non-Venetian intellectuals gathered in the 1540s. Erizzo certainly knew Domenico Venier, who was a close friend of Erizzo’s mentor Ruscelli and one of the petitioners for granting printing privileges to Erizzo for his *Timaeus* translation. Erizzo had also important links with other members of the Venier family: he exchanged numerous letters with Domenico’s brother, Girolamo Venier, and later dedicated his *Discorso dei governi civili* to him. Many members of the Ca’ Venier salon later became part of the Accademia della Fama, also known as the Accademia Veneziana, which was founded in 1557 under the aegis of the Venetian patrician Francesco Badoer, and lasted until Badoer’s imprisonment

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10 The document is in Girolamo Ruscelli. *Lettere*, ed. by Chiara Gizzi and Paolo Procaccioli (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2010), p. ixvii. It shows that on 23 July 1557 Domenico Venier and Girolamo Ruscelli presented a ‘fede di stampa’ to the Venetian Senate for Erizzo’s translation of the *Timaeus*.

11 Erizzo exchanged seven letters with Girolamo Venier between 1543 and 1561 (see G, ff. 2r–46r), including his famous *Lettera sulla poesia*. He dedicated to him his *Discorso dei governi civili*, which was published by Francesco Sansovino as a sequel to Bartolomeo Cavalcanti’s political treatise: *Trattati overo discorsi di m. Bartolomeo Cavalcanti sopra gli ottime regamenti delle republiche antiche et moderne. Con un discorso di m. Sebastiano Erizzo gentil’huomo vintitutto dei governi civili* (Venice: appresso Iacopo Sansovino il giovane, 1571 [1570]). This publication was made at Erizzo’s request, see letter to Federico Valaresso (7 October 1571) in G, f. 175v: ‘questo è che, essendosi li mesi passati stampati da m. Francesco Sansovino certi Trattati di Republica, gli parve di aggiungere nel fine del libro un mio discorso ancora Dei governi civili, da me scritto già molti anni; prendendo a lui che, trattando questi due libri di una istessa materia, potessero bene andare uniti insieme’.
for fraud in 1561. To date, Erizzo’s direct involvement in the Accademia Veneziana cannot be proven by any document: his only work to be published during the short-lived Accademia — his Timaeus translation — was printed by Comin da Trino, and not by Paolo Manuzio, who was the Accademia’s appointed printer; nowhere in his works do we find any mention of the Academy’s founder, Federico Badoer, or the title ‘academico’, one of the conditions stipulated by the Academy’s conventions. However, Erizzo was clearly linked to some important members of the Accademia Veneziana. He figures as one of the authors in an anthology of poems written by various members of the Accademia and edited by Dionigi Atanagi. In addition, Erizzo’s preoccupation with the question of philosophical method and with the transmission of Platonism in the Italian vernacular echoes some of the Academy’s projects. As Vasoli has shown, the Accademia Veneziana was important for the diffusion of Peter Ramus’s ideas on method in Italy. One of its members was Francesco Patrizi, whose project was to develop a new philosophy, which defended Platonism in direct opposition to scholasticism. Another project of the Accademia Veneziana was to publish vernacular translations of Plato’s Timaeus and Proclus’ Platonic Theology.

Erizzo’s Trattato has also recently been linked to the Accademia degli Infiammati (1539–42). Erizzo’s professor, Bassiano Lando, was in close contact with two Infiammati, Giovan Battista da Monte and Sperone Speroni. In addition, we have evidence that by
the 1560s Erizzo had developed friendship with former members of the *Accademia*, such as Francesco Sansovino and Marco Mantova Benavides. However, one has to exclude any direct influence, since Erizzo was only fourteen or fifteen years old when the *Accademia degli Infiammati* was founded, and there is to date no evidence that he was in Padua at the time. In addition, despite some clear similarities (such as the preoccupation with the question of method, as well as an interest in non–Aristotelian sources, such as Galen and Plato), there are important differences between Erizzo’s treatise and the vernacular treatises on logic written by the *Infiammati*, one of which being Erizzo’s unparalleled knowledge of Platonic and Neoplatonic sources, which led him to defend the superiority of the method of division; another being a lesser preoccupation with the ideological promotion of the vernacular language; and a third one being an exceptional command of ancient Greek, which allowed him to develop a detailed and accurate understanding of Greek texts (Proclus, Damascius, Iamblichus) that were not easily accessible in translation.

The *Trattato* appears less idiosyncratic, however, when one links it to the years Erizzo studied at the University of Padua (1543–45), where he followed the lectures given by the Paduan professor of medicine Bassiano Lando, celebrated for his mastery of philosophical and medical texts on method. The University of Padua was historically inclined to teach Aristotle as a preparation to logic and medicine, rather than to metaphysics or theology. This means that Paduan scholars traditionally applied Aristotelian philosophy to

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19 See letter to Sansovino (14 novembre 1564) in G, ff. 55v–56r, where Erizzo expresses his friendship. Sansovino agreed to print his *Dei governi civili* in 1571 (see footnote 11 above). Erizzo wrote five letters to Marco Mantova Benavides (see G, ff. 87v–89r; 149v–150r; and 151v–152r, which concerns Erizzo’s collection of ancient coins). Benavides dedicated to him his *Zographia*, (see Erizzo’s letter at ff. 149v–150r (29 September 1566) and Marco Mantova Benavides, *Zographia siue Hieroglyphica sane pulcherrima ex uiuis cum naturae tum autorum fontibus hausta. Nunc primum in studiosorum gratiam edita* (Padua: Laurentius Pasqualius excudebat, 1566).

20 Erizzo was in Padua between 1543–45 (see footnote below). Pace Sgarbi, there is no evidence that Erizzo was in Padua before that time, or that he learnt about Platonic ideas whilst listening to Varchi’s lessons on love, which were delivered in 1539. The text cited to support this claim, Lodovico Dolce’s dedication preface to Erizzo in the *Somma*, states that Erizzo studied Greek with Giovanni Bernardo Feliciano (in Venice, not Padua), and studied Plato and Aristotle in the original Greek at Padua with Bassiano Lando: see Lodovico Dolce, *Somma di tutta la filosofia di Aristotele* (Venice: appresso Gio. Battista, Marchio Sessa et fratelli, 1565), ff. 3v–4r: ‘Perciocché, essendo V.M. sotto la cura del detto clarissimo suo padre (che fu et ottimo senatore e, malgrado della invidia e della malignità, al pari di ciascun’altro gentilhuomo benemerito di questa Repub.) allevata da fanciullo negli studi delle lettere così grece come latine, in quelle fece ancor giovanetto così buon profitto, che ne diviene egualmente intendissimo; e questo si per la vivacità del suo ingegno, e si per haver solamente apprese le lingue, ma essendo vago di saper le cose che in esse si contengono, negli studi di Padova salendo per li gradi delle dottrine alla cognitione della Filosofia, a questa applicò l’animo. Et ascoltando Platone et Aristotele nella propria natia favella, bevé il latte puro di questi due gran filosofi senza alcuna corrutione, cagionata sovente della ignoranza de’ traduttori, valendosi ciò dell’opera di M. Bassiano Lando, il quale poi col suo favore inalzò alla pubblica lezione’.

21 Erizzo was in Padua between 1543 and 1545, as suggested by four letters addressed to Girolamo Venier from Padua between 23 November 1543 and 13 October 1545 (G, ff. 2r–6v; the last letter is dated 13 October 1545, not 1544, as stated by Zoppi, *Lettera*, p. 71), and Dolce’s testimony cited above. Bassiano Lando obtained a formal appointment in the faculty of medicine at Padua in 1543 (partly with the help of Erizzo’s family): see Benzoni, ‘Sebastiano Erizzo’, p. 198 and Ferretto, *Maestri*, p. 37.
medical problems, including questions regarding the best scientific method. In addition, in the sixteenth century Padua was one of the first Italian universities to be affected by the new discussions on method developed by Ramus. Two important Paduan professors, Giovanni da Monte (or Montano) and his pupil Bassiano Lando developed innovative ideas about Aristotelianism, often in connection with questions of method and the revival of classical texts that were not part of the traditional curriculum. Through their reading of Galen they argued that both Plato and Aristotle had reflected on questions of method, and that, contrary to the scholastic and Arabic tradition, demonstration and syllogism were not the only ways to gain knowledge. Da Monte and Lando might well have played an important role in the discussions held at the Accademia degli Infiammati (and, more specifically, the diffusion of Galenic and Platonic ideas): as mentioned above da Monte was a member, and Bassiano Lando was in contact with some of the Infiammati. In the opening section of the Trattato Erizzo explains that he became aware of the importance of the method of division whilst listening to Lando’s lectures on order and method in Padua, where Lando praised the ‘beauty and utility’ of division. We know that Lando


26 It is probably that Varchi’s use of Galen in his writings on method (esp. Del metodo and Degli ordini delle doctrine) was influenced by the work of Leoncino, via da Monte and Lando. See e.g. Benedetto Varchi, Opere, ed. by Antonio Racheli, vol. 2 (Trieste: Sezione letterario–artistica del Lloyd austriaco, 1859), pp. 797–98 and 802.

27 See Trattato, pp. 9–10 [F. B] [i–iv]: ‘Havendovi io più volte, eccellente M. Bassiano mio, ragionando con esso voi famigliarmente, sentito discorrere sopra quella maraviglia, della quale mi furono visi manifestate eccellentemente. Onde avvenne che, entrato io di ciò in pensiero e la utilità di questo metodo considerando, come quegli che alcuna cosa nuova et non più udita sentisse, molte et varie cose meco intorno a ciò rivolgiendo, sono in cotal materia nella mia mente nati diversi concetti. Appresso, vago investigatore divenuto–sempre leggendo i buoni scrittori antichi di questa via, se forse alcun di loro ne accennasse o facesse menzione; ovo se scrivendo o forse qualche materia trattando la usasse–io veramente infra non poco spazio di tempo ho fatto di tutto un fascio, in cui molte cose stringo, così de’ miei pensieri et concetti intorno a questa via, come di alcuni avvertimenti notati ne’ migliori antiqui scrittori ove ei si fa menzione et si tratta, quantunque il più delle volte assai oscuramente. Ma perciocché intorno a ciò non mi pareva così d’esser risoluto, conciossa cosa che questo istumento et via (come ben vi è noto) sia una materia gravissima et difficilissima, non ancora ch’io sappia trattata da alcuno de’ nostri tempi; et ancora perché io ho reputato che mi torni a grande util et la lezionali et la utilezza di questo metodo?’. 
himself dedicated two of his works to Erizzo. As we will see shortly, evidence also indicates that Lando read and commented on the Trattato prior to its publication.

Giovan Battista da Monte and Bassiano Lando developed a new, philological approach to Aristotle’s works, questioning the traditional interpretation of Aristotelian methodology, and propounding alternative methods to teach and study philosophy and medicine. Since Antiquity, commentators had compared Aristotle’s scientific demonstration with Platonic dialectic, and tried to reconcile Aristotle’s criticism of the method of division with Plato’s use of division in Philebus, Sophist and Statesman. Neoplatonic interpreters like Proclus rejected the Aristotelian method of syllogism and stated that Plato’s method of division, which he equated with the dialectic of the Parmenides, was the best way to gain truth. Another important problem was that Aristotle’s position on method was not always consistent and clear. Averroes and the scholastics had attempted to smooth out these inconsistencies and offer a systematic reconstruction of Aristotle’s views on methodology. The return to the Greek original texts of Aristotle and Galen, as well as the appearance in print of ‘new’, humanistic versions of philosophical and medical texts and commentaries that had been unknown or ignored in the Middle Ages led to a reassessment of Aristotelian views on methodology. Most of these texts (such as John Philoponus’ commentary on the Physics, Eustratius’ commentary on Posterior Analytics, Ammonius’ commentary on Porphyry’s Isagoge, Galen’s De Hippocratis et Platonis decretis) were printed in Venice and were used as teaching tools at the University of Padua. Thanks to them sixteenth-century commentators came to reconsider Aristotle’s methodology: they recognized that the Philosopher’s views were often inconsistent and incomplete, and that nowhere had Aristotle identified a unique, universal method that would be applicable to all disciplines. In addition, thanks to Galen, who had analysed in detail the various methods used by Plato and Aristotle, they came to see division as a legitimate logical method besides demonstration and definition.

Giovan Battista da Monte was a pupil of Niccolò Leoniceno who, through close reading of Galen and the Greek commentators of Aristotle and Plato, questioned the
medieval and Arabic interpretation of Aristotle’s methodology, and the supremacy it
gave to the method of demonstration. In this context, Leoniceno had published in 1532
a treatise entitled De tribus doctrinis ordinatis secundum Galeni sententiam, where he
openly rejected the interpretation of medieval commentators of Galen and advocated a
return to the original Galen, described as the best imitator of Plato. This text, as we
will show, had a profound influence on Erizzo. Back in Padua in the 1540s Giovan Battista
da Monte and his pupil Bassiano Lando sought to describe the best possible method to
study and teach philosophy and medicine, based on a critical reading of ancient texts,
and more specifically, of Aristotle, Galen and to some extent Plato. In that context, they
both underlined the importance of division and resolution (rather than demonstration
and syllogism), making frequent parallels between the methods used by Hippocrates,
Galen, Plato and Aristotle. As we will see, Erizzo is strongly influenced by this approach,
although his scope is to defend the Platonic method of division as the best and only way
to attain knowledge.

Paratexts

Before turning to an analysis of the Trattato itself, it is worth examining a number of
unpublished texts and documents related to the question of order and method, which are
now in a manuscript at the Biblioteca Bertoliana of Vicenza. The first one is a discourse
held in ‘a Venetian academy’, which, as we have mentioned above, could have been the
academy founded by Domenico Venier. Erizzo was presumably quite young when he
delivered it, since he describes himself as a ‘student lacking expertise’. Here Erizzo
presents a classification of all the sciences and arts, already showing a predilection for
the method of division and a profound familiarity with Greek sources. His text is filled
with Greek terms and makes frequent references to Plato, Galen, and Aristotle. He also
reflects on a classification of the process of teaching knowledge, distinguishing between
‘il modo’ that is, the way in which one acquires knowledge, ‘l’strumento’, that is the
method, and ‘l’ordine essentiale’, that is the relation that governs things. He already

33 On Renaissance debates on method in the context of medical teaching (Galen), see Vasoli, Studi sulla cultura del
l’enseignement médical à Padoue et à Ferrare’, in Sciences de la Renaissance. Actes du VIIIème Congrès international
and Humanism: Renaissance Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller, ed. by Edward P. Mahoney (Leiden:
dottre ordinate di Galeno’, Annali dell’Istituto e Museo di storia della scienza di Firenze 8 (1983), 31–57; Idem,
La biblioteca di Niccolò Leoniceno. Tra Aristotele e Galeno: cultura e libri di un medico umanista (Florence:
of Arts and Sciences (Helsinki: Societas Historica Finlandiae, 1992), pp. 131–59; Massimo Rinaldi, Arte sinottica
e visualizzazione del sapere nell’anatomia del Cinquecento (Bari: Cacucci, 2008), pp. 91–104.
35 On da Monte’s defence of division and resolution as the best methods to cure diseases, see Byehyl, ‘Teaching’,
36 Discorso di M. Sebastiano Erizzo in una Academia Venetiana: Sopra tutte le cose, che possono cadere sotto la
Dottrina; et del più’ perfetto et vero modo d’insegnare, in G, ff. 508v–515r.
notes here that Plato, Aristotle and Galen have shown the utility of the method of the division, an argument that will be central in the Trattato.\(^{38}\)

Shortly before and after the publication of the Trattato, Erizzo exchanged letters with his mentors Bassiano Lando and Girolamo Ruscelli, where he clarified a number of points regarding the content and structure of the Trattato. In the first letter (17 November 1553) Erizzo provides a response to comments made by Lando. We learn that, shortly before the treatise went to press, Lando read the text and made three important suggestions. First, Lando suggested that the title of the treatise be changed into Della præstantia dell’instrumento diviso, o vero Della eccellentia del metodo divisivo.\(^{39}\) To this Erizzo responds that both Plato and Aristotle defined division as a ‘metodo’ and a ‘via inventrice’, quoting Eustratius’ commentary on Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics and Galen’s interpretation of Aristotle’s Parts of Animals.\(^{40}\) In addition, he states, using a more general title will lead the reader progressively to discover the benefits of this method.\(^{41}\) Secondly, Lando enquired about the pertinence of defining the methods of division and resolution as ‘principal modes of knowledge’ (‘principali scientie’), which Erizzo defends, quoting a passage of Proclus’ Platonic Theology, where division and resolution are called πρωτουργοῖς ἐπιστήμας.\(^{42}\) Finally, Lando suggested reducing a long passage on the creation of the world and avoiding long quotations of Platonic passages. Erizzo responds that it is key to his argument to underline that God had used order and division in His creation; and that he quotes Plato at length because it is a ‘cosa nuova e quasi resuscitata’; in that context, he argues, the use of long quotations enables him to provide strong evidence and make his analysis credible.\(^{43}\)


\(^{40}\) Lettere, pp. 620–21: ‘Et Eustratio, in conformity, dice sopra Aristotile [sic] [Posterior Analytics II 91b] queste parole: “Nam secundum convenientem ordinem divisiones facientes differentias omnes inveniuntur sicut et componuntur”. Dalle quali parole di Eustratio siamo ammaestrati che, per mezzo della divisione, noi ritroviamo quello che più nelle cose importa: che sono tutte le differentie loro essenziali, dalle quali la definizione si compone’; p. 621: ‘Et Aristotele ancora tutte le differentie de gli animali nel libro Delle parti, come si assicura Galeno ancora con queste parole: “Conatur enim in eo libro Aristotoles [sic] omnes animalium differentias enumere”. Si che non bisogna traviare da questo sentiero: che la divisione sia istruimento et via (che è quello che i Greci dicono metodo) inventrice delle cose’. Cf. Eustratius, Commentaria in secundum librum posteriorum resolutvorum Aristotelis […] Andrea Gratioso Tusciiano ex Benaco interprete (Venice: apud Hieronymum Scotum, 1542) (CAGL 7), p. 120 [118]; Galen, De metodo medendi I, 3 in Galeni omnium opera secta classis (Venice: apud Vincentium Valgrisium, 1562), p. 4 (Thomas Linacre’s translation, on which see note 45 below).

\(^{41}\) Lettere, pp. 621–22: ‘studiosamente da me si è fatto di porre un titolo così generale, senza specificare in esso quale sia questa via inventrice, per condurre a passo a passo colui che legge a scorgere particolarmente il detto metodo, et insieme col nome gli effetti suoi mirabili spiegare’.

\(^{42}\) Lettere, p. 622: ‘all’altra obiezione che Vostra Eccellenza scrive che si potria fare in quel luogo, dove ella dice ch’io chiam o la resolutiva et divisiva principali scientie, rispondendo dico che Proclo, nel primo libro della Teologia secondo Platone, in quel luogo dove egli va investigando il sentimento vero et il proposito del Parmenie di Platone, dice queste formali parole: “Ma la dialettica nostra per lo più usa le divisione et le resolutioni come prime et principali scientie”. See Proclus, Platonic Theology I, 9, p. 40,7, which is also used in the Trattato.

\(^{43}\) Lettere, pp. 623–24: ‘in cosa nuova et quasi resuscitata alla mente di Platone et de gli antichi, bisognava citare le parole formali et nulla pretermettere; dico che, per provare la mia opinione, faceva mestiere di testimoni […] altrimenti, facendo in cosa, come ella dice, nuova, non forza creduto né a me né alle ragioni ch’io produco’. 
Similarly, in a letter to Ruscelli (Padua, 15 September 1553), written shortly after the publication of the Trattato, he gives a good illustration of how the method of division can help us reach a definition. Here Erizzo responds to Ruscelli’s request to explain the opinion of the ancients on ‘the constitution of the arts’, as a complement to his Trattato. Lamenting the fact that the most complete account — Galen’s De constitutione artium — is lost (only the third book, De constitutione artis medicae has come down to us), Erizzo analyses what other sources have said on the topic. Here he uses a few passages from Plato’s Sophist, which he quotes in Ficino’s translation, Galen’s De constitutione artis medicae, which he paraphrases in Italian, and the ‘Greek commentators of Aristotle’ on Book II of Aristotle’s Physics, which he translates in Italian, leaving a few technical words in Greek. He concludes that, in order to reach a proper definition of the constitution of the arts, one needs to use the method of division. The sources he quotes are texts that have recently appeared in the new Latin translations printed shortly before in Venice by members close to his circle: Galen’s De Constitutione artis appeared in Bartolomeo Silvani’s translation in the Giunta edition of 1542 published under the aegis of Giovanni Battista da Monte; Philoponus’ commentary on Aristotle’s Physics appeared in Venice in 1548 in Giovanni Battista Rasario’s translation; and Plato’s Sophist was available in Ficino’s translation.

Another unpublished document entitled Discorso dei metodi et delle vie da gli antichi usate nel ritrovare le cose and dedicated to Bassiano Lando, confirms this. In this short treatise, Erizzo states that, at the request of Lando, he compiled all the ancient sources mentioning the method of division that he had not been able to include in the Trattato. Here Erizzo states that Plato praised the method of division in the Philebus, the Parmenides, the Statesman, the Phaedrus, the Sophist and others. Accordingly Plato frequently uses division and distinction, of which he is the inventor, ‘in order to avoid equivocations and ambiguities and discover the nature of things’. He then analyses some passages from

44 The letter is in G, ff. 132r–142v.
46 Aristotelis Physicorum libri quattuor, cum Ioannis Grammatici cognomento Philoponii commentarius, quos nuper ad Graecorum codicum fidem summa diligentia restituit Ioannes Baptista Rasarius (Venice: apud Hieronymum Scotum, 1558).
47 Ficino’s translation of Plato’s complete works was reprinted many times, the most important editions being those of 1556 (Venice: apud Ioannem Mariam Bonellum, 1556) and 1570 (Venice: apud Hieronymum Scotum, 1570).
48 G, f. 290r: ‘Dapoi che fu interrotto quel giorno il ragionamento che noi facemmo da quel nuovo accidente quando voi eravate in Vinegia, discorrendo io sopra tutte le parti del mio trattato Dell’istumento et via inventrice de gli antichi, voi mi scriveste di costi una amorevole lettera, pregandomi ch’io vi facessi parte di quelle cose che allora vi dissi di haver raccolte dagli scritti d’approvati autori intorno al metodo et le vie da quelli usate nel ritrovare le cose, le quali non erano state da me poste nel detto trattato’. G, f. 290r: ‘Dico adunque che noi sappiamo la via divisa essere dal divino Platone commendata in piu luoghi: nel Filebo, nel Parmenide, nel Civile, nel Fedro, nel Sofista, et altrove. Il qual Platone si valse molto di cotali modi del distinguere et del dividere et ne fu il primo inventore, per quanto si vede, per togliere le ambiguità et le equivocazioni, et per aprire la natura delle cose’.

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the De Hippocratis et Platonis dogmatibus, where Galen praises Plato’s method of division.\textsuperscript{50} He quotes some passages from Galen’s commentary on Hippocrates’ De natura humana, before excerpting long passages from Plato’s Sophist, Phaedrus, Statesman, Republic V, and Parmenides. Finally, he makes a detailed analysis of the method used in the Parmenides, filtered through Proclus’ exegesis. Here he follows Proclus, who had stated that Parmenidean dialectics is analogous to the method of division.

**Defence of the vernacular**

Erizzo wrote all his works in the vernacular. In the Trattato itself, Erizzo never justifies his choice of language. However, in a letter to Bassiano Lando, Erizzo expresses his disapproval towards Agostino Valier’s apparent contempt for the vernacular, which suggests that he was clearly in favour of using it.\textsuperscript{51} In addition, Erizzo must have been, at least in part, influenced by Ruscelli’s and Dolce’s strong defence of the vernacular, which echoed the ambitions of the Accademia Veneziana, as well as the programme of vernacularization of philosophy developed by the Infiammati. Both Ruscelli and Dolce were deeply involved in the printing, editing, translating and correcting of vernacular texts, which is such a mark of the Venetian press in the 1540–50s.\textsuperscript{52} In the preface to the Trattato, Ruscelli expresses himself openly in favour of the Italian vernacular, adopting some ideas developed by the Infiammati, such as the notion that vernacular translations help students avoid spending too much time learning ancient languages.\textsuperscript{53} Thus Ruscelli explains that the progress of knowledge has been impeded by two facts: first, the lack of order in teaching and learning; secondly, the difficulty and time commitment required for learning foreign (i.e. Latin and Greek) languages, suggesting that Erizzo’s work addresses these two problems.\textsuperscript{54} Similarly, in the preface to Erizzo’s Timaeus, printed three years later, Ruscelli celebrates Erizzo’s
translation as part of a larger project (which was never completed) of publishing all Plato’s dialogues in Italian to promote vernacular philosophy, echoing Alessandro Piccolomini’s ambition to vernacularize Aristotle’s complete works. Finally, in his dedication preface to the Somma, Lodovico Dolce praises Erizzo for having learnt the Italian vernacular by reading the ‘good authors’, and for producing excellent translations of Plato, which are equally praised by specialists of Greek literature and by those who know the vernacular.

Yet Erizzo himself does not seem particularly interested in celebrating the vernacular as a privileged language for the dissemination of philosophical knowledge. In his preface to his other translations of Plato, published after Ruscelli’s death, he remains silent about the reasons that led him to translate Plato in Italian. Like his master Bassiano Lando, he appears more preoccupied with developing a new, ‘philological’ reading of ancient philosophical texts, where words and concepts are defined and used in a clear, consistent way. In Erizzo’s case, the question also concerns how to translate Greek philosophical terms. As Franco Tomasi has recently shown, Erizzo was acutely aware of the difficulty of finding the correct terminology to render Greek concepts in the vernacular. This preoccupation led him to ask advice to Bassiano Lando on the meaning of one specific Greek word, and to add to his translation annotations that indicate which Greek term is being translated, or underline any departure from Ficino’s translation. A preliminary examination of the translation, which would deserve a more detailed study, shows that, in some instances, Erizzo is too quick to reject Ficino’s choice of translation; in others,
he appears to improve Ficino’s version.61 In many cases, Erizzo seems particularly preoccupied with finding the correct terminology to render key technical and medical words.62

In the Trattato itself, Erizzo shows a similar preoccupation with philological matters. For instance, he reflects carefully on how to present his sources. As one of the letters mentioned above indicates, shortly before the publication of the Trattato Erizzo asked Lando some advice on whether to quote the ancient authors in the original Greek or Latin, or in Italian translation.63 We do not know what Lando advised him to do; however, in the printed version of the Trattato Erizzo uses quotations either in the Greek original or in the new humanistic Latin translations (whenever these exist), as well as his own vernacular translation of Greek texts. In many instances Erizzo chooses to cite the original Greek when he wishes to reflect on the meaning of concepts, underline the use of an important philosophical word, or justify his own choice of terminology.

What is also striking here is that, in addition to the ‘old’ humanistic translations by Acciaiuoli and Ficino, Erizzo uses both the original Greek texts that were available in Bessarion’s Library, and the Latin translations of Aristotelian and medical texts that were produced or printed in his native Venice at the time he was writing his Trattato. For instance, he quotes Galen’s De Hippocratis et Platonis deceretis in his Greek teacher Giovanni Bernardo Feliciano’s translation, which was printed in Basle in 1535.64 Similarly, he quotes Eustratius’ commentary on Book II of Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics in Andrea Grazioli’s translation, published in Venice in 1542.65 He also uses Ammonius’

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61 See, for instance, at f. 41v [ad Tim. 92c]: ‘Iddio sensibile: θεὸς αἰθητος. Marsilio varia’. The text is εἰκόνα τοῦ νοητοῦ θεοῦ αἰθητος, which Ficino renders as ‘intelligibili des imago, sensibilis’ (Ficino, Platonis Opera omnia (Venice: per Bernardinum de Choris and Simonem de Luero, impensis Andreae Toresani, 1491), f. 262r), whilst Erizzo has the more correct ‘image dello intelligible, Iddio sensibile’; f. 37v [ad Tim. 86 c]: ‘et colui che di molto et fluviante esse intorno alla medolla abbonda, et che a guisa di uno arbore gradi di troppo [sic] frutti, più del convenevole fuor di misura sia morbido […]: Marsilio varia’. The text is τοῦ συμμετρου τουργκὸς ἢ, which Erizzo renders as ‘fuor di misura sia morbido’, whilst Ficino had ‘nimia ubertate luxuriat’ (see Ficino, Platonis opera omnia, f. 262r: ‘qui vero fluido studioque circa medullam abundat semine atque ut arbor pluribus quam conveniat fructibus gradiam nimia ubertate luxuriat’).

62 See, for instance, at f. 22v [ad Tim. 57v]: ‘Noi certamente abhiamo trattato la generatione della disaguaglianza. Qui Marsilio male tradusse, chiamando υμπλούσσα τη pianeza, significando piu tosto in questo luogo Platonе la ugualità, ove το l’agualianza de gli elementi’. The text is οὕτω δὴ στάσιν μὲν ἐν υμπλούσσῃ, κίνησιν δὲ εἰς τούτων φύσος ἀξί τιθέμεν, which Ficino renders as ‘sic itaque statum quidem in planitate, motum vero in contraria semper natura ponemus’, whilst Erizzo has ‘così adunque noi sempre ponereemo lo stato veramente nelle ugualità, et il movimento nella disuguale natura’ [underlined sections are mine].

63 Lettere, p. 624: ‘Ma a questo proposito ancora vi è alcuno che mi dice che, allegando io in molti luoghi i testi degli autori propri, doverei citargli nella lingua che li hanno scritto (o greca, o latina che ella si fosse), et non allegare le traduzioni; overo, se io pur non volessi citargli nella lor lingua propria, farli tutti uguali in ciò et trasportare quei luoghi in lingua nostra, conforme alla lingua di tutta l’opera’.


65 Eustratii Episcopi Nicaeni Commentaria in secundum librum posteriorum resolutiorum Aristotelis. Immominiti item authoris expositiones emendatae in eundem. Andrea Gratioso Tusculano interprete (Venice: apud Hieronymum Scotum, 1542). The translation is based on the Aldine edition of the original texts published in 1534. The passage Erizzo quotes is at p. 120 [118]: ‘nam secundum conveniendum ordine divisiones facientes differentias omnes inveniensem indefectuose, ex quibus definiit copomuner’.
commentary on Porphyry, whose translation by Gaurico had first appeared in print in Venice in 1504.66 Finally, he uses John Philoponus’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* in the new translation of Andreas Gratiolus revised by Philippus Theodosius and printed in Venice in 1542.67 Erizzo is critical towards these new translations. For instance, when quoting the 1542 edition of John Philoponus’ commentary mentioned above, Erizzo silently corrects their version of Aristotle’s text, which reproduces Agostino Nifo’s translation. Erizzo’s text has ‘oportet autem cum totum aliquod tractet (πραγματεύεται) aliquis, dividere genus in atoma specie’, whilst the 1542 edition has ‘oportet autem cum totum aliquod negotietur aliquis, dividere genus in atoma specie prima’. Whilst the 1542 edition follows Agostino Nifo’s translation, Erizzo’s text follows nearly word for word John Argyropoulos’ version, which has ‘oportet autem cum totum aliquod quispiam tractat [sic], genus in ea dividere quae sunt prima’.68 Whilst the 1542 edition follows Agostino Nifo’s translation, Erizzo’s text follows nearly word for word John Argyropoulos’ version, which has ‘oportet autem cum totum aliquod negocietur atoma specie prima’.69 Erizzo’s correction is deliberate, since he makes the same correction when he quotes Philoponus’ commentary on the passage.70 He probably modifies the text because Agostino Nifo follows closely Boethius’ version, i.e. the vulgate used by medieval commentators, and which circulated widely in the Cinquecento.71 To the medieval vulgate Erizzo evidently prefers Argyropoulos’ humanistic translation.

To this Erizzo adds a meticulous reading of Plato’s dialogues, which he quotes in Ficino’s translation.72 Thanks to his exceptional knowledge of ancient Greek he also reads in the original Proclus’ *Platonic Theology* and *Parmenides* commentary, as well as Damascius’ *Philebus* commentary (wrongly attributed to Olympiodorus in the


67 The text was first translated into Latin, from the 1504 Aldine edition of the Greek text, by Andreas Gratiolus (printed in 1539). It was then reprinted in 1542 with revisions by Philippus Theodosius (printed in 1542). For the text, see *Commentaria Ioannis Gramatici Alexandrei cognomento Philoponi in libros posteriorum Aristotelis. Recens cum Graeco exemplari per doctissimum Philippum Theodosium collata* (Venedig: apud Hieronymus Scotum, 1542), p. 138 (CAGL 5). On these editions, see Charles H. Lohr, ‘Renaissance Latin Translations of the Greek Commentaries on Aristotle’, in *Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Jill Kraye and Martin W. F. Stone (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 24–40 (pp. 27–30). Erizzo is clearly using the 1542 rather than the 1539 edition: Erizzo has also ‘lineam ut genus divide in rectam lineam in circularem’ instead of ‘in rotundam’ (1539 edition); ‘deinde accipere definitiones’ (instead of ‘deinde accipere definitiones in 1539 edition); ‘cuius partes extremis inte-rioriunt’ instead of ‘cuius partes extremis impediuntur’ (1539 edition). Note that, in the same passage, Erizzo’s text mistakenly has *per communia primorum* instead of *per communia prima* for διὰ τῶν κοινῶν πρῶτων, which might be a typographical error.

68 See *Trattato*, p. 125 [f. Quii], with reference to *Posterior Analytics* II, 96 b15.

69 The two versions had been printed together in the 1543 edition of Nifo’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*: see *Augustini Niphi Suessani philosophi In Aristotelis libros posteriorum analyticorum subtilissima commentaria, cum duplici textus translatione Ioannis Argyropili videlicet, & ejusdem nova ab ipso fidelissime recognitae [...]* (Venice: apud Hieronymum Scutum, 1553).

70 The text of the 1542 edition has ‘cum aliquis negocietur totum’, whereas Erizzo has ‘cum aliquis tractat vel negociatur totum’.

71 Boethius’ text has ‘congruum autem est cum totum aliquod negotietur aliquis, departiri genus in atoma specie prima’; see, among the many sixteenth-century editions of Boethius’ works which circulated in Europe, *Anitii Manlii Severini Boethi [...] opera quae extant omnia* [...]. [Basel: apud H. Petrum, 1546], p. 533.

72 See, for instance, *Trattato*, p. 64 [f. [Hiii]e], where he quotes Plato’s *Philebus* in the ‘commune traduzione del Ficino’.
manuscript tradition). These texts, which were not easily available in Latin, are directly quoted from the Greek.73 Evidence confirms that Erizzo had access to the original manuscripts of Proclus and Damascius, preserved in San Marco Library in Venice. From two sixteenth-century inventories of San Marco Library edited by Omont, we know that Erizzo borrowed a copy of the Platonic Theology on at least one occasion in June 1548.74 He borrowed Damascius’ Philebus commentary between July 1552 and February 1553;75 and Iamblichus’ De secta Pythagorica between 7 November 1553 and 10 August 1554.76 We have no evidence that he borrowed Proclus’ Parmenides commentary from San Marco; however, a letter from the end of 1549 shows that he asked another philosopher and translator of Greek texts, Giovan Battista Camozzi, to lend him a copy of that text.77

Erizzo’s approach towards language seems to reflect, therefore, the twofold nature of his audience. The presence at Padua and Venice of academic circles where programmes of vernacularization of classical philosophers were being developed, as well as Erizzo’s close contact with prominent promoters of the vernacular such as Girolamo Ruscelli

73 See letter of Erizzo to Lando (4 March 1552) in Lettere, p. 622.
75 See Omont, ‘Deux registres’, pp. 683–84: ‘N. v. ser Sebastiano Erizzo, q. ser Antonius, habuit librum, no 660, in papiro, dictum Olimpiodoros in Gorgam, et reliquii [Marcianus gr. 197], juxta mandatum D. Reformatorum, et depositu unam cathenulam auream. 1552 [ab inc., 1553] die 17 februarii, rehabuit suum pignus, cathenam supra dictam per Franciscum, suum servitorem, qui restituit librum suprascriptum’. Of this manuscript Erizzo had two copies made, each in two volumes. The first copy is Vindobonensis phil. gr. 13 (Olimpiodorus’ Alcibiades and Phaedo commentaries; Damascius’ Phaedo and Philebus commentaries and Hermias’ Irriso gentilium philosophorum) and 221 (Olympiodorus’ Gorgias commentary); the second copy is now in Cizenses 59 and 60 (same texts except the Irriso). On these manuscripts, see Gerd Van Riel et al., Dizionario bibliografico degli italiani 17 (1974), 297–98.
76 I have not been able to identify the first book, which presumably contained the first three books of Iamblichus’ De secta Pythagorica and one of Simplicius’ commentaries. The second book borrowed by Erizzo is mentioned in the 1474 inventory of Bessarian’s library, no. 53 (‘Iamblici de secta Pythagoreorum libri quatuor, et eisdem in epistola Porphyrii, et expositio Hieroclei in carmina Pythagorae aurea, in pergamento’): see Lotte Labowsky, Bessarian’s Library and the Biblioteca Marciana. Six Early Inventories (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1979), p. 219. The manuscript is now in Turin, Biblioteca nazionale, ms. gr. 146.
and Lodovico Dolce, both explain why he wished to express himself in the vernacular and provide vernacular translations of Plato. At the same time, however, the Trattato is clearly addressed to an audience of scholars, University professors and fellow students who were familiar with Latin and ancient Greek, and were keen to question scholastic philosophy and terminology through a return to Greek original texts and the use of philologically accurate Latin translations. This is reflected by Erizzo’s long quotations in Latin, citations in Greek and digressions on terminology.

**A concordist defence of Plato’s method of division**

The argument of Erizzo’s Trattato is twofold. In the first part, Erizzo demonstrates that reality is fundamentally structured according to division, and that division is therefore a legitimate method to discover, describe and explain it. In the second part, Erizzo combs the writings of the ancient philosophers for anything they might have said on ‘division’. Drawing on Aristotelian commentaries that propounded a Platonized interpretation of Aristotle, as well as on Proclus’ Neoplatonic interpretation of Parmenidean dialectics, Erizzo argues that Plato invented the method of division, that all the ancient philosophers (including Aristotle and the Aristotelians) had praised its utility and beauty, and that it was the best method to gain knowledge and memorize it. According to him, Aristotle’s apparent rejection of division in Prior Analytics had been misinterpreted and should be reconsidered in the light of the ‘faithful commentators’. As such, Erizzo’s concordist approach differs markedly from that of Ramus and Patrizi, who adopted a radically anti-Aristotelian position; he also differs from his Paduan master Lando, who was defending the utility of two methods in medicine and philosophy, those of division and resolution. For Erizzo defended division as the only method capable of leading to truth. His wide knowledge of Platonic and Neoplatonic sources leads him to identify, like Proclus, Plato’s dialectics with the method of division, and thus to consider division as the best method to study all disciplines. This concordist attitude is not new, since it was adopted by the Greek commentators of Aristotle mentioned above. However, what is striking here is that Erizzo offers a systematic reinterpretation of Aristotle’s texts on method — including those that present a clear condemnation of the Platonic method of division — and refutes the ‘calumniators’ who, ‘forse per dimostrarsi troppo Aristotelici’, undermined the value of division and accused Plato of not knowing how to use syllogisms.

Erizzo never mentions by name these anti-Platonic ‘calumniators’, so it is difficult to identify them with certainty. Plato’s ignorance of logic and syllogism is a topos that was central to the fifteenth-century Plato–Aristotle controversy between Bessarion and George of Trebizond, whose works had enjoyed renewed popularity and been reprinted in Venice at the turn of the century. Erizzo might also have had in mind some of Lando’s many
detractors at the University of Padua. We know, for instance, that Lando was repeatedly attacked for his heterodox positions, and that he had decided not to publish a treatise on method to avoid further criticism on the part of his enemies. In a letter addressed to Lando Erizzo welcomed his master’s decision, ‘lest those malign and invidious minds lacerate [his] work with their sharp teeth’.

In the opening section, Erizzo gives a long and detailed demonstration of what is ‘scienza’ and what its objects are, and shows that there is only knowledge of universals. These universals can be reduced to the ten categories of Aristotle, which are equivalent to the ten ‘capi universali’ of the Cabbalists and the ten oppositions of the Pythagoreans. Here Erizzo is alluding to the ten sephirot of the Kabbalah and the Pythagorean table of opposites, which had been associated with the ten Aristotelian categories by Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola.

The universals are not sufficient, however, Erizzo argues, to acquire knowledge: we also need to order reality. In a long digression — the one Lando suggested to remove in the letter mentioned above — Erizzo shows that philosophers and theologians alike have described the Universe and its creation by means of division. Similarly, God created the world through separation and division. This leads him to describe division as a possible method for gaining knowledge. Paraphrasing Eustratius’ commentary on Book II of Posterior Analytics, and Ps.–Ammonius’ commentary on Isagoge, he states that there are four methods or instruments, of which division is the most important, because it brings order to reality and is the method that was adopted by the best and

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80 See Ferretto, Maestri, pp. 21–24, with reference to Lando’s criticisms against his Paduan colleague Capodivacca, professor of medicine from 1543. There was a general disagreement as to whether one needed to study the philosophers (Aristotle and to some extent Plato) to gain medical expertise (da Monte–Lando) or if Galen was sufficient (as argued by Capodivacca, Paterno and Mercuriale). In his De differentiis doctrinarum sive methodis (Padua, 1562), Capodivacca openly opposed Leonceno’s interpretation of Galen and da Monte’s emphasis on practice in the medical curriculum, defending the method of demonstration to teach and practice medicine, but he does not adopt anti–Platonic positions. See Giuliano Gliozzi, ‘Girolamo Capodivacca’ in Dizionario biografico degli italiani 18 (1975), 649–53; Giulio F. Pagallo, ‘In confinio scientiae naturalis et artis medicae: medici e filosofi sul tema della subalternatio nello Studio di Padova del ’500’, in Girolamo Mercuriale. Medicina e cultura nell’Europa del Cinquecento. Atti del convegno (Forlì, 8–11 novembre 2006), ed. by Alessandro Arcangeli and Vivan Nutton (Florence: Olschki, 2008), pp. 11–27.

81 See Lando, Praefatio in Aphorismos Hippocratis, in Bassiani Lando Placentini philosophi et medici Opuscula (Padua: apud Simonem Galignanum, 1552), cited in Ferretto, Maestri, p. 67, note 64; and letter of Erizzo to Lando (4 March 1552) in Lettere, pp. 625–27: ‘Percioché, se la scriveva a coloro che non sanno, non faceva profitto alcuno; oltre che, se questi erano maligni o invidi (come molti si ritrovano a’ tempi nostri) haveriano con acuto dente d’invidia lacerate le cose sue…’.

82 Trattato, p. 22 [f. Ciiv]: ‘Da che si conchiude, col testimonio d’Aristotele, che la scienza consiste nel conoscere lo universale, il quale non cade nel senso, ma nell’intelletto nostro’.

83 On the Pythagorean table of opposites, see Ficino, In Parmenidem LXX, who is drawing on Proclus, In Parmenidem VII, 1198. On the ten sephirot, see Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Conclusiones cabalistice secundum opinionem propriam 66.

84 Trattato, p. 27 [f. Diir]: ‘…non bastano gli universali per sé al ritrovamento delle scienze, ma bisogna etiandio fuggire la confusione et procedere investigando le cose che si vogliono sapere con ordine’.

85 Trattato, p. 45 [f. Fiiur]: ‘Et perché noi fin hora habbiam parlato dell’ordine in generale, et perché specialmente ci habbiam proposto d’investigare qual fosse quella via, o (per usare il nome greco) quel metodo particolare, per lo quale caminando gli antichi più chiari filosofi, ritrovavan la natura delle cose […], diremo che la via, secondo che scrive Aristotele nel terzo della Rhetorica, è una diritta ragione di procedere nella dottrina et etiandio del giudicare’.
most illustrious ancient philosophers. Among them, Plato is the philosopher who used it principally. According to the ‘espositori più fidi di Platone’, namely, Proclus and Alcinous, the best method to reach truth is Plato’s dialectics, and of the four methods division is superior to the others, because it imitates the procession of beings from the supreme principle (whilst resolution, the second best method, imitates the conversion of beings). Paraphrasing Proclus, Erizzo shows that Plato used dialectics in the Sophist, the Parmenides and the Philebus. He concludes that the method of division is Platonic dialectics and that Plato used this instrument to treat of elevated theological matters.

Erizzo then embarks on a detailed analysis of the dialogues where Plato describes the method of division. This section is characterized by long quotations of the relevant passages in Ficino’s Latin translation, followed by a paraphrase of commentaries on the passage. Thus Erizzo adds to the Philebus passages a paraphrase of Ps–Olympiodorus’ commentary, and concludes that ‘according to Olympiodorus, Plato mentions and explains in the Philebus the method of division’. The second dialogue to describe division is, according to Erizzo, the Phaedrus. After quoting relevant sections in Ficino’s translation, he mentions a passage from Ficino’s ‘brieve argomento’, where Ficino equates dialectics with division and composition, and God’s gift is said to be to divide and compound. Finally, Erizzo analyses relevant sections of Republic VII (in Ficino’s translation), followed by Ficino’s argumentum. Erizzo then turns to the passages from the Sophist and the Statesman, where Plato is actually using the method of division; here he mixes Ficino’s Latin version and quotations in Greek, followed by Ficino’s interpretation.

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86 Trattato, pp. 49–51 [ff. G[ii]r–G[iii]r]: ‘ora, dalle cose dette assai si vede chiaro che di queste quattro vie da noi brevemente toccate, la via divisiva è la principale, la guida, et la reina della nobiltà di cui nel processo del nostro discorso più ampiamente ragioneremo. […] Appresso io dico che questa via procede per gli universalì, et non per gli particolari, et che per questa tutte le cose che investigando si vanno, per ordine et senza confusione si dispongono, separando quelle che nulla alla proposta che si vuol trattare appartengono. […] Posti adunque da noi tutti questi fondamenti, mi da l’animo di mostrare assai chiaro che questo è quello istruimento et via inventrice, per la quale gli antichi, più chiari et illustri filosiﬁ, procedendo, andavano ritrovando le cose, et venivano insieme a notitia della loro natura; et che le loro inventioni di filosofia, o di alcun’arte havevano origine da cotale istruimento’.

87 Trattato, p. 51 [f. G[iii]r]: ‘[…] il divino Platone principalmente usò questa via del distinguere et dei dividere, non solo per levare la equivocazione et i diversi signiﬁcati delle cose, ma specialmente per aprire et dichiarare la loro natura’.


90 Trattato, p. 64 [f. [Hii]ir]: ‘in diversi luoghi abbiamo letto negli espositori più fidi di Platone dove (come s’e visto) di questo metodo amato et seguitato da esso Platone si fa assai honorata menzione’.


92 Trattato, p. 70 [f. [Hii]iir]: ‘Di maniera che si vede, secondo la opinione di Olympiodoro, che in questo dialogo si fa menzione et si spiega da Platone il metodo divisivo’. Erizzo is here paraphrasing Ps. Olympiodorus (in fact Damascius), In Philebus 57 (division of dialogue in three parts); § 9 (the dialogue treats of a variety of topics, including theology, questions on intellect and soul, ethics, physics and logic), ed. Van Riel et al., p. 3; § 54 (division corresponds to procession; resolution corresponds to conversion; the intermediary ones to the very existence of reality; definition corresponds to existence per se and demonstration to existence ex alio), ed. Van Riel, p. 17; §§ 55–57 and 62–69.

In what is perhaps the most interesting section of the treatise, Erizzo offers a new analysis of all the passages where Aristotle mentions division.\(^{94}\) His use of Greek commentators, who had adopted a concordist interpretation of Plato and Aristotle, leads him to underline that Aristotle did not reject the method of division, but considered it positively and indeed used it in his writings. Erizzo’s approach consists of quoting Aristotle’s text (in Greek or in Latin) and that of a commentator, followed by a detailed analysis of that commentator’s argument. For instance, Erizzo analyses a passage from *Nicomachean Ethics* (X, 1, 1172b: ‘τὸ διορίζειν γὰρ οὐκ ἐστὶ τῶν πολλῶν, cioè il distinguere non è opera della multitudine ignorante’), followed by Donato Acciaiuoli’s commentary on the passage, to conclude that Aristotle praised division.\(^{95}\) Erizzo then interprets another Aristotelian passage where Aristotle prescribes the use of division to reach a definition of things (*Posterior Analytics* II, 96b–97a, quoted in Latin), in the light of Philoponus’ and Eustratius’ commentaries, to show that the Platonists used the method of division to define things, and that Aristotle too showed the utility of division and used it in his teaching.\(^{96}\) Erizzo then turns to the passages where Aristotle has been interpreted as rejecting the method of division. Many of his contemporaries, he deplores, drew on these texts to reject the method of division, even though they themselves used division in their reasoning.\(^{97}\) According to him, these passages need to be reinterpreted in the light of Eustratius’ commentary, which demonstrates that Aristotle does not reject division as such. In the first passage (*Posterior Analytics* II 91b), Aristotle states that it is impossible to use the method of division to establish a deduction. Drawing on Eustratius and the ‘altri buoni et fedeli espositori’, Erizzo argues that, even if division is not able to deduce, and can lead to errors when not used correctly, it is nevertheless a method that is useful

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\(^{94}\) *Trattato*, p. 124 [f. Qii]: ‘Noi ci habbiam proposto di aggiungere all’autorità di Platone quella di Aristotele ancora, et andare in diversi luoghi investigando, dove egli parla et fa menzione di questo metodo; et vedere etiandio se esso Aristotele, nell’ insegnarci la sua filosofia, nelle sue questioni tenne mai questa via’.


\(^{97}\) *Trattato*, p. 138 [f. S[i]:v]: ‘ma perché sono hoggidì alcuni i quali, come che essi molto sappiano et sieno appresso tutti in grande stima et autorità tenuti, non perciò possono sostenere che altri che essi alcuna cosa sappia che da loro intesa o conosciuta non sia, però dannano alle volte questo metodo, coloro calumniando che per mezo di questo hanno nelle scientie fatto qualche profitto; io, non trattando della proposta materia, non voglio restare con la verità di rispondere a quel tanto che essi, per dar colore et autorità alla loro opinione, s’ingegnano di provare, non già perché egli di ciò faccia mestieri alla chiarezza della materia, ma per dare maggior lume alla verità, riprovando il falso; anzi, scoprendo la ignorantia et la malitia di tali huomini. Dico adunque che coloro i quali cercano, non sapendo essi né conoscendo questo metodo di biasimarlo in altrui et abbasarlo, togliono principalmente per scudo delle loro ragioni l’autorità d’Aristotele in alcuni luoghi, dove lor pare che esso biasimi questa via et non ne faccia quella stima che di sopra mostrato habbiamo’. 
and should not be rejected. The traditional rejection of division as a ‘via ordinaria’ can only be explained by an ignorance of the sources — in particular of Plato and Galen — and a wrong interpretation of Aristotle. Quoting Averroes and Alexander of Aphrodisias, Erizzo states that, even if division cannot ‘sиллогизирать’ and cannot be used for demonstration, Aristotle and his commentators considered it as a method as valid as the others. What is striking here is that Erizzo does not quote Averroes’ text from the Giunta edition, but from Leoniceno’s translation of the same passage in the De tribus doctrinis. Erizzo’s definition of division as ‘via ordinaria’ further echoes the arguments developed by Leoniceno in his De tribus doctrinis against the medieval commentators of Galen, who excluded division from the ‘true doctrines’. Erizzo is evidently reusing

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98 Trattato, pp. 140–41 [ff. Siir–[Siii]r]: ‘nondimeno, tutto che la divisione atta non sia a sillogizare, et che molti possano essere gli errori possibili a commettersi nel dividere, afferma Eustratio che non perciò dobbiamo noi sprezzare la divisione come inutile, anzi opporci a costali errori et fuggirli, per mezzo di alcune osservazioni, con le quali potremo noi direttamente dividere. […] Adunque conclude egli, secondo la opinione d’Aristotele, che la divisione dichiara la natura et la essentia della cosa, et ci mostra la diffinitione, procedendo noi con ragione; ma dicendo la diffinitione, non viene però a dire il sìllogismo’; p. 142 [f. [Siii]v]: ‘Dal predetto testimonio d’Aristotele noi veggiamo chiaro che cotal metodo non è, come questi dicono, inutile alla cognizione, ma da questa via noi acquistiamo notitia, pigliandola nel modo debito, quantunque noi non potremmo già dire ch’ella sillogizasse […]’. Aristotele, nel precedente testo 25 non biasima perciò questa via, perché ella non sia sillogistica, né la sprezza, come vogliono questi, ma approvandola più tosto per utile la conferma, il che veggi ancora essere opinione di Eustratio a questo passo et de gli altri buoni e fedeli espositori’.

99 Trattato, p. 143 [f. [Siii]r]: ‘Ora dalle cose dette possiam trarre che di gran lunga s’ingannano coloro i quali, poco stimando, anzi sprezzando la divisione, cercano di scacciarla dal numero di quelle vie che ordinarie si chiamano, perché essa divisiva nulla sillogisticamente provi; et che perciò Aristotele non ne faccia conto, come di sopra dis- corso abbiamo. Perciò che questi non sanno, overo non attendono, che Platone prima, et poi Galeno, col predetto consentendo in molti luoghi, attribuiscono alla divisiva l’ufficio di构成 tutte le arti. Oltre che, dicendo essi che la divisione nulla provi semplicemente, et che perciò non è via ordinaria, dicono cosa diversa dalla opinione d’Aristotele, il quale, come s’est detto, nel secondo libro della Posteriore pur vuole che il metodo della divisione provi alcuna cosa, si come fa ancora la induzione, quantunque alcuna di queste sillogisticamente non provi.’

100 Trattato, pp. 143–44 [f. [Siii]r–v]: ‘Ma la via divisiva Averroë mostrà essere più certa della via della induzione nel commento del quinto libro della Fisica d’Aristotele, dove dice: “Aristoteles postquam enumeraverat illam, per qua determīnantur species motus ex inducutione, vult enumerate eadem secundum divisionem, qua via est certior”’. Dalle quai parole si vede chiaro, secondo il commentatore, che la induzione è via, overo s’ella alcuna cosa insegna, molto più la divisione o il metodo divisivo si deve dire che sia via; et per conseguente affermare, secondo i peripatetici, ch’essa ancora deve esser posta nel numero delle altre vie’.


102 See Nicolai Leoniceni Vicentimi, philosophi et medici clarissimi, opuscula, f. 73r: ‘Haec solutio illam quam antea notavi barbariæ prae se fert: quia vult per ordinarium intelligi id quod rem per propria et non extranea certificat. Excludit [sc. Plusquam Commentator] etiam doctrinam divisivam a numero doctrinarum verarum, quo nihil potest esse Galeno, qui Platonicus fuit, contrarium magis […]’ Excludit etiam topicam inductionem et exemplum quas Aristoteles in principio librorum posteriorium resolutoriorum pro veris doctrinis computat’, and ff. 82v–81r: ‘opportunit enim ipsos quom de Galeni opinione discapient, eundem Galenum non Aristotelis, a quo non raro dissentit, sed magis Platoni cuius semper summus fuit imitator, ostendere consentientem. Quamquam neque quom dicunt doctrinam divisivam nihil probare, atque ideo non esse ordinariam, omnino in hoc placent Aristotelis, qui libro secundo resolutoriorum posteriorum vult methodum divisionis probare aliquid, sicuti et inductionem, licet neutra earum syllogistique probet’. 
Aristotle does not contradict Plato, but those who misunderstand Plato’s thought. Finally, he refutes the ‘calumniators’ who, ‘perhaps to show themselves too Aristotelian’, draw on two passages from Posterior Analytics (I, 31 46a and 46b), where Aristotle rejects those who use the method of division instead of demonstration and syllogism. According to Erizzo, Aristotle does not criticize Plato, but those who use the method of division wrongly or misinterpret Plato’s philosophy. Here he rejects Philoponus’ testimony according to which the Platonists used the method of division to ‘silllogizare’ and ‘demostrare’: as argued by another commentator, Ammonius Hermiae, Aristotle does not contradict Plato, but those who misunderstand Plato’s thought. The same ‘calumniators’ argue that Plato used division to ‘demostrare’ and ‘silllogizare’ because he did not know how to use syllogisms; in fact, they say, Plato never described any dialectical rule in his writings. Drawing on the same argument Bessarion used in the In calumniatorem Platonis Erizzo underlines that the absence of clear exposition on the part of Plato is to be explained by the Pythagorean rule of silence, as well as by the fact that Plato’s writings are reporting Socrates’ teaching rather than his own. Yet Plato does practice the art of syllogism in his writings, as exemplified by the way in which he demonstrates his arguments and refutes those of his opponents.

105 Trattato, p. 145 [f. T[ii]r]: ‘Via enim haec est, ex hac vero demonstrare non licet [Prior Analytics I, 31, 46b14].

106 Trattato, pp. 145–46 [f. T[ii]r–e]: ‘Ma perciò che pur li medesimi calumniatori di questo metodo, forse per dimostrarsi troppo Aristotelici, oltre quanto habbiam detto di sopra vanno dicendo che Platone nulla seppe o intese de’ silllogismi, o del metodo demonstrativo, conciò fosse cosa che egli, volendo alcuna volta sillegelizzare o demostrare, ciò faceesse per via della divisione, parmi, dal proposito nostro non traviando, di oppormi ragionevolmente a cotali uomini, per mostrare loro quanto s’ingannino della loro opinione et quanto in ciò vadano errando dal diritto sentiero. Dico adunque che questi, per dare il pregio a sì fatta opinion loro, allegano di ciò per testimonio Aristotele nel luogo della Priore da noi di sopra rammemorato [Prior Analytics I, 31, 45a], dove egli dice parlando della divisiva: “Primum autem omnes qui ea utuntur, ipsum hoc laturit. Et suadere conabantur, quasi fieri posset, ut de substantia et de eo quod est quid, demonstratio efficercetur”. Nel qual luogo egli non è dubbio che Aristotele riprendesse quelli che, usando il metodo divisivo, stimavano con questo di demostrare la diffinitione della cosa et raccogliere la sostantia. […] Ma perché esso Aristotele riprenda cotali huomini, i quali, come egli dice, non intendano dividendo quello che faceva mestieri d’intendere, non danna però in ciò, né riprende Platone’.

107 Trattato, p. 146 [f. T[i]v]: ‘Et se i predetti calumniatori oltre di ciò allegano da capo Aristotele nel 2 libro della Posteriore dove egli dice: “At vero necque per divisionem via est sillogizare, sicut in resolutione circa figuras dictum est” [Posterior Analytics II, 5, 91b]; al qual passo questi dicono che Filopono afferma, che i Platonici cercavano per il metodo divisivo sillegelizzare et demostrare, i quali esso filosofo riprende et rifiuta, come non sillegelizanti non demonstranti [Philoponus, CAGL 7, p. 119], da che poi conchiudono che Aristotele in ciò riprendesse esso Platone. Si può loro con verità rispondere quello che Ammonio sopra i Predicamenti nel principio dice a tale proposito, che, ingegnandosi alcuni di dire che Aristotele in molte cose contradice a Platone, si deve a questi rispondere ch’esso Aristotele non contradice semplicemente a Platone, ma a coloro che non intendono le cose di Platone [Ammonius, In Aristotelis Categorias Explanatio, CAGL 9, p. 98]’.

In the final section of the *Trattato*, Erizzo shows that Aristotle used the method of division, particularly in the *Parts* and *Generations of the Animals*, the *Ethics*, *On Heavens* and the *Physics*;\(^{107}\) that Galen too praised and used division in his writings, as well as Theophrastus and Andronicus.\(^{108}\)

**Conclusion**

Erizzo’s *Trattato* is the sole vernacular treatise on method that advocates the use of the Platonic method of division to describe reality and teach philosophy. And yet it is the direct result of a series of influences, at the crossroads of academies, Universities, printing presses and civic life. It would perhaps not have existed had it not been written in Venice, where Erizzo could access Greek texts from Bessarion’s library, borrow manuscripts from other scholars, purchase freshly printed editions and translations, and benefit from the support of some prominent typographers and literary agents of the sixteenth century, such as Girolamo Ruscelli and Lodovico Dolce. Close to Venice was the University of Padua, where Giovan Battista da Monte and Bassiano Lando developed innovative ideas about method through a close reading of Galen, Aristotle, Plato, leading to a rejection of traditional modes of thought, and a new understanding of how to order, acquire, teach and retain knowledge. Thanks to an exceptional command of ancient Greek and Latin, Erizzo could thus pursue the work initiated by Marsilio Ficino and Niccolò Leoniceno: the revival of Platonic and Neoplatonic wisdom and the reassessment of the traditional interpretation of Aristotle, breaking away, at least in part, from the scholastic tradition and moving towards a concordist interpretation of Plato and Aristotle. Like Proclus and Ficino, Erizzo equates Plato’s method of division with dialectics, underlining its universality as both what structured reality and what should be used to describe and memorize it. In that way, Erizzo was accelerating a process that had already been initiated by Ficino, Diacceto, and Francesco Verino il Vecchio, adding to the progressive introduction of Platonic ideas in University teaching, the notion that the use of Platonic methodology could well be an appropriate way to acquire and retain knowledge.

Twenty years after the publication of Erizzo’s *Trattato*, Cosimo de’ Medici created the first official chair of Platonic philosophy at the University of Pisa. Its holder, Francesco Verino il Secondo, describes to his mentor Baccio Valori what would be the ideal curriculum of studies, along lines that strikingly echo what Bassiano Lando and Sebastiano Erizzo had argued in their writings. Thus Verino proposes to teach in the first year Plato in relation to Christianity; in the second year, Plato in relation to Aristotle; in the third, Plato in relation to Hippocrates, through the medium of Galen’s *De placitis Hippocratis*.

\(^{107}\) *Trattato*, pp. 155–62 [ff. Vii r–[Xi]v].

et Platonis; in year four, Plato’s ethics and political thought. Verino’s book ends with ‘a defence of Plato’s doctrine against erroneous calumnies’ (Difesa della dottrina di Platone da alcune calunnie à torto datele), as a response to one of his chief enemies at the University of Pisa, Girolamo Borri, who had advocated a return to Aristotle and Averroes and the strict use of Latin. In an essay on Aristotelian method, Borri argued that only Aristotle has provided the necessary order and method, drawing on a number of passages where Aristotle criticized Plato’s method of division. In this context, Erizzo’s treatise appears as a missing link in the long history of the Platonic tradition, and as one of the first explicit attempts in the Renaissance to introduce the study of Platonism in the University curriculum.

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109 Vere conclusioni di Platone conformi alla dottrina Christiana et a quella d’Aristotile. Raccolte da Messer Francesco de Vieri detto il Verino secondo. Divise in tre parti (Florence: appresso Georgio Marescotti, 1590), pp. 4–6: ‘Questo scrittore così grande io istimo che e’ si dovesse esporre ne’ giorni delle feste in questa maniera: che il primo anno e’ si dimostrassero et si esponessero tutte le principali verità nelle quali Platone è conforme con la fede nostra, per far frutto a’ teologi et a’ professori della christiania dottrina, la quale tra tutte tiene il prencipato per altezza di concetti, per il fine certo et vero al quale la ci invia, et per che è da Dio rivelatasi. Il secondo anno vorrei che quel medesimo scrittore si confrontasse con Aristotile in quelle conclusioni nelle quali (senza storcere i testi) e’ son d’accordo, perché così la peripatetica filosofia sarebbe più credibile e più sicura. Il terzo, il medesimo lettore della platonica filosofia io stimo che la dovessi confrontare con le opinioni del gran medico et primo Ipocrate per giovare all’intelligenza di esso et di tanti et tanti libri di Galeno De placitis Ipocratis et Platonis. Il quarto et ultimo anno mi piacerebbe che quello stesso lettore et maestro di quella scienza fusse tenuto di ridurre ad ordine sommario le più importanti leggi, le quali ci ha lasciate l’istesso Platone in tanti et tanti suoi libri, fondate su la morale et su la civile Filosofia; onde avverrebbe che ancora i dottori di legge ne caverrebbero grandissimo beneficio et ne potrebbero arricchire et aggrandire le loro legali letture’.

110 De Peripatetica docendi atque addiscendi methodo, ad Franciscum Mariam (Florence: apud Bartholomaeum Semartellium, 1584).