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Jeroen de Keyser, ed. *Francesco Filelfo: Collected Letters. Epistolarum Libri XLVIII*, 4 vols, Alessandria, 2015.

Students of the intellectual culture of early modern Europe have a happy problem. Despite the labours of generations of editors, the libraries of Europe still hold very large quantities of unpublished Latin letters from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, many of which were written by clever and committed scholars working at the forefront of their disciplines. This abundance of rich and largely unstudied sources provides modern scholars of the period with a challenge: how do we identify meaningful and manageable editorial projects among the material which remains?

The most usual strategy is to publish the correspondence which has gathered around a single author. In the first decades of the twentieth century, the monumental edition of the letters of Erasmus (d. 1536) begun by P. S. Allen established a model for such publications which has been influential ever since. However, projects on such an ambitious scale bring their own difficulties: it was published over many years, and passed through the hands of several editors on its way to publication. Some collections are so large that they will inevitably be divided among a number of editors. The correspondence of Justus Lipsius (1547- 1607), for example, at well over 4000 letters is just such a task. Yet distributing the labour over many years, and many editors, has led to uneven progress and made it more difficult to achieve editorial consistency across the corpus. To alleviate such problems, we may instead aim for the simultaneous publication of a large body of letters prepared by a small team over a short period. This was the approach adopted for the recent edition of the letters of Joseph Scaliger (1540-1609), some 1700 letters published together in eight volumes in 2012. However, the concentration of intellectual and institutional resources required to bring such projects to completion is expensive, and consequently rare.

An alternative approach is to do what Jeroen de Keyser has now done for Francesco Filelfo (1398-1481): to edit unaided a very large body of letters over a relatively short period of time, and to publish them all in a single four-volume edition. This approach favours consistency, and facilitates simultaneous publication, but it imposes great burdens on the solitary editor. Before we go further, we should pause to consider what De Keyser has achieved. He has published 2124 letters, largely in Latin, but with substantial Greek elements, in an edition running to some 2200 pages. As an example of editorial stamina, the achievement bears comparison with the heroic days of Allen. This enormous scholarly labour has been completed according to the highest critical standards. It is a credit to the editor's scholarship, and a vindication of his ambition.

The boundaries of this project are clear, and were established by Filelfo himself. He had been gathering his own letters for publication since at least the 1450s. The earliest letters in this collection go back to 1427, when he had not long returned from an extended stay in Constantinople. Most of the letters were sent from Milan, which Filelfo made his home from 1439. The corpus grew steadily with every passing year, and in 1477, towards the end of his life, he compiled the text which has now been published by De Keyser. We are fortunate to have the result of Filelfo's own lengthy editorial activity, a manuscript which is today in the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan. De Keyser's decision to publish a text based on the Trivulziana manuscript must be the right one. The decision is explained by the editor in his preface, and his survey of manuscripts and numerous printed editions of the collected letters

confirms the judgement. The Trivulziana manuscript is the most complete text, it is the latest extant version of the text, and it is a text sanctioned by Filelfo himself.

Of course, the text transmitted by the Trivulziana manuscript is also a partial, one-sided and carefully controlled account of Filelfo's relationship with his world. The corpus has been filtered and manipulated by Filelfo to an unknown degree. There is nothing unguarded about any of these letters, and the voices of Filelfo's correspondents are systematically excluded. As such, the Trivulziana manuscript is as much a literary object as it is a record of a correspondence. Although the textual apparatus supplied in De Keyser's edition does make some attempt to document earlier stages in the editorial evolution of Filelfo's collection, and hints at versions which were superseded by the Trivulziana manuscript, any attempt to see behind Filelfo's self-presentation is beyond the scope of this new edition. This does feel like a missed opportunity, and the few hints in this direction in the preface are tantalising (p. 20). The preface would have been a natural place for some discussion of how Filelfo edited his correspondence for publication; but such a discussion may belong equally naturally in the preface to a future edition of the remaining letters to and from Filelfo. The present edition is undoubtedly a necessary preliminary to an examination of the letters which Filelfo actually sent. Subsequent editions of Filelfo's other letters, of different versions of his published letters, or of letters from other people to Filelfo, can now refer to a reliable edition of Filelfo's immense project. By stabilising this shifting ground, De Keyser has provided a firm foundation on which future editors can build.

The edited letters themselves are a joy to read. The editorial principles are sensible, and many decisions about spelling and orthography are made easier by the authorial sanction which the Trivulziana manuscript enjoys. The punctuation has been modernised, minor but distracting inconsistencies have been eliminated, all abbreviations have been expanded, and the text has been properly and helpfully paragraphed. The Greek components of the text are handled with the same sure touch as the Latin. The apparatus is connected to the marginal line numbers, a practice which ensures that all critical furniture is kept out of the text: the reader will not stumble upon it, and will only find it if they go looking for it. Filelfo often discusses complicated material, and in such circumstances his readers are best served by an editor who sits quietly in the margins. The resulting text is as readable as any fifteenth-century Latin text can be. The exegetical notes are briefer than most readers would prefer, usually limited to the identification of ancient sources, but I understand the constraints which shaped this decision, and I have made similar choices myself in similar circumstances.

The valuable services provided by this edition are numerous. We now have here the first English translation of all of Filelfo's 110 Greek letters (French and Italian versions have been available for some time). We have very brief English synopses of the Latin letters. Practical considerations have precluded a fuller treatment in English, but the indices do something to supplement the synopses. Several analytical tools are supplied in the preface. The first details the distribution of addressees across the corpus, and provides references to the letters received by each correspondent. Next Filelfo's correspondents are indexed and assigned a reference number. We then have a list of 'prominent addressees', that is, a list of the correspondents who appear most regularly in the corpus. We also have a list of 'prominent letters', that is, of particularly lengthy letters. These longer letter are Filelfo's display-pieces, and are often used to open books of letters (seventeen of the forty-eight books begin with such a letter). The forty letters listed in this category constitute one quarter of the length of the published corpus, a surprising discovery. Taken together, these components of the edition allow the structural principles of the corpus to be studied for the first time.

The analytical tools in the preface are supplemented by an unusually full set of indices, occupying some 270 pages. In addition to the usual indices of sources, *incipits*, names and places, a long appendix reprints the English synopses of the entire collection in the

sequence in which they occur. This ‘master synopsis’ thus supplies the reader with a summary account of the entire collection in a small space, and it enables the scope and preoccupations of each of the 48 books to be seen at a glance. We are also given a ‘lexical index’ of all the Latin and Greek words discussed by Filelfo, a ‘frequency index’ of all the Latin words which occur more than ten times, and an index of Latin words which appear only once. These additional indices are particularly valuable for an author like Filelfo, whose broad linguistic interests and numerous printed editions ensured that he was regularly cited by later Latinists. The editor’s careful focus on language is, I believe, rare in an edition of letters, but it is justified in this context because the letters are all the work of a single author, because the author may be supposed to have endowed the corpus with a stylistic unity, and because the entire collection has been coordinated by its author to literary ends.

An edition along these lines has been much needed for a very long time. Many scholars, including this one, have been obliged to read a facsimile of the Trivulziana manuscript, often collating it laboriously against one of the early editions before its evidence could be cited. It is an enormous relief to be able to lean on the solid scholarship of these volumes. De Keyser’s excellent edition is now the essential reference work for a central document by one of the most wide-ranging writers of the Quattrocento.

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