

REVIEWS

Plutarchi Chaeronensis “De tranquillitate et securitate animi” Guilielmo Budaeo Interprete. Stefano Martinelli Tempesta, ed.

Il ritorno dei Classici nell’Umanesimo 3. Florence: SISMEL Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2019. xii + 184 pp. €42.

This book offers a critical edition of the French humanist Guillaume Budé’s translation of Plutarch’s *De tranquillitate et securitate animi* from 1505. Stefano Tempesta’s edition is part of the Il ritorno dei Classici nell’Umanesimo project in Italy, which aims, in part, to make influential earlier translations of classical texts more accessible. In this case, Budé was the first person to translate this short work by Plutarch into Latin. Budé’s translation enjoyed great success and influence. In its Latin form the translation was published around twenty times before it was eclipsed by a new version in 1572. Beyond that direct impact, the work was the basis of vernacular translations into both English and Italian during the sixteenth century. This is the first critical edition of Budé’s work, and it will provide an important resource for specialists.

The book is broken up into a focused introduction, a discussion of the manuscript and print tradition, and the text itself. Budé translated this work in early May 1505. He dedicated it to Pope Julius II, to whom Budé was then serving as a French diplomat. Tempesta is able to use the manuscript tradition and marginalia to confirm Budé’s own claim that the translation occurred in less than ideal circumstances—specifically, while he was traveling. Consequently, the translation was based on only two copies of the text (one of which was a copy of the other). The introduction then turns to the practice and theory underlying Budé’s approach to translation, as well as the work’s reception and impact. Like many other contemporaries Budé gave a liberal interpretation to the idea of translating the sense of his text: he strove to make the text available to a Latin audience while also seeking to create a “nuovo prodotto letterario” (25). The result was a text that at times loosely followed the original Greek. This approach to translation helps explain the work’s reception: during the sixteenth century it was popular; vernacular translators relied upon it; at times Budé’s Latin was copied into more general translations of Plutarch’s works. However, as the sixteenth century progressed and translation standards changed, Budé’s translation came to be judged more critically and was seen as drifting too far from the original text. The work remained influential, even in these later early modern translations, but lost prominence by the turn of the seventeenth century.

Plutarch’s text itself traditionally fits into his broader *Moralia* writings, a large collection of essays on a range of topics. The *De tranquillitate et securitate animi* offers guidance for readers, particularly philosophers, seeking contentment in life. The text begins by dismissing general arguments that feign to apply to all people. Rather, people must

make the best of circumstances thrust upon them, meeting adversity with a point of view that encourages a positive “ne sic quidem male!” People should not concern themselves with the bad behaviors of others, nor lament what is lost while forgetting what remains, but rather appreciate what they have and focus on their own talents. After all, some pursuits are contradictory, and thus individuals must choose those paths that are most suitable, and rejoice in their accomplishments. They should live in the moment while recalling the pleasant parts of their past, and blend the bad with the good to create an individual, idiosyncratic harmony. The future ought to be met with the aid of reason and the knowledge that fortune can only afflict external, not internal, things. Death, an external thing, once faced, can remove the fear of it. Once that is accomplished, little can disturb a person. Let people, the text concludes, meet the past and present with joy and acceptance, and the future without fear.

This is a careful and thorough philological study of Budé’s influential translation of this short and fun text. The introduction raises many interesting historical questions about the broader contexts into which the original translation fits, and it hints at the broader stories of this text’s influence across its nearly seventy years of popularity. Those questions fall outside of this book’s scope, but future scholars now have ready access to this important text to see where those historical threads might lead. For all readers, this edition draws new attention to a relatively forgotten classical text whose message continues to reverberate nearly two thousand years after its composition.

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Het leven en de fabels van Esopus. Hans Rijns and Willem van Bentum, eds. Middel nederlandse Tekstedities 15. Hilversum: Verloren, 2016. 472 pp. €49.

According to a fifteenth-century biography, the legendary fable teller Aesop was often considered ignorant and dumb because of his physical deformities. He was, however, not shy about voicing truth to power. Because there was truth in his brutal criticism, his master Xanctus did not punish him for it. But when he castigated the priests of the Delphian oracle of Apollo, it led to the end of his intriguing life story—he was thrown off a cliff.

Aesop’s biography and fables were widely read throughout Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, through printed editions in German, French, English, and Czech—Portuguese Jesuits even distributed a translation in Japanese. Hans Rijns and Willem van Bentum are the editors of this high-quality critical edition and translation of an early Dutch version, *Dye hystorien ende fabulen van Esopus*, printed by Gheraert Leeu in 1485. It was based on a Latin-German translation of Aesop’s life and fables by Heinrich Steinhöwel, printed with 208 high-quality woodcuts by Johann Zainer in