

Helius Eobanus Hesus. *The Poetic Works of Helius Eobanus Hesus: Volume 3, King of Poets, 1514–1517.*

Ed. and trans. Harry Vredeveld. The Renaissance Society of America Texts and Studies Series 1. Leiden: Brill, 2012. xxiii + 786 pp. \$199. ISBN: 978–90–04–22893–1.

This third volume of the poetic works of Eobanus Hesus continues the high standards of its predecessors. Each section has an extensive introductory essay; the Latin text of each work, with facing English translation; and ample support in a rich series of annotations. The works included begin in the summer of 1514, when Eobanus, still unable to secure stable employment in a German university despite the growing success of his *Letters of Christian Heroines*, returned to the University of

Erfurt in hopes that his recent success would secure for him the kind of appointment he longed for. He had no difficulty in securing permission to lecture, but such courses had no salary, and the teacher received only the small fee paid by each student.

The Erfurt humanists had won considerable standing in their university, largely by marginalizing outspoken and radical colleagues and taking care not to give avoidable offense to conservative older professors. While Eobanus could participate in German humanists' defense of Johann Reuchlin, he could not afford to be an outspoken leader. Instead, he selected a safe theme for the approaching feast of Easter. His *Hymnus Paschalis* was published in April 1515, and though it includes one epigram showing favor for Reuchlin, in no sense was it dominated by the controversy. Its glorification of Christ and of the Easter feast was more likely to win him supporters at Erfurt.

A second move in Eobanus's campaign for recognition was his *Oration*, or inaugural lecture, for a course on a highly suitable humanistic topic, Cicero's *Duties* (*De officiis*), delivered at Erfurt on 23 May 1515. It confidently predicts that despite the calamities caused by civil unrest in 1509–10, the university would recover. This lecture and the ensuing course on Cicero's moral philosophy attracted attention to Eobanus's growing reputation as a poet. The author criticizes those who neglect "the divine tenets of most holy philosophy" and focus attention on obscene and worldly poets. His goal is to praise the excellence of Cicero, especially his *De officiis*; to exalt the excellence of moral philosophy, which is the subject of Cicero's book; and in general to exhort students to pursue the fittest subjects of study. Eobanus describes each of the traditional seven liberal arts and shows how each helps students attain understanding of philosophy. This oration is a revealing example of how humanistic studies cautiously insinuated themselves into the University of Erfurt.

Eobanus's *Elegy on True Nobility* was an example of his courses on moral philosophy, part of his deliberate strategy of seeking a secure academic position. His rather obvious theme, which has ancient roots, is that true nobility depends not on noble ancestry or great wealth, but on moral qualities.

Far more successful was a pair of poems on drunkenness, published together in 1515. In German universities, the annual quodlibetical lectures were a major academic event, but a tradition had grown up of including occasional facetious and humorous orations for comic relief. A few of the humorous lectures have survived. The most striking of these, as Vredeveld shows, *De generibus ebriosorum* (*On the Species of Drunkards*), although anonymous, not only was loaded with clues that it was a satire and was never presented at a quodlibetical debate, but also suggests that this coy author must have been Eobanus.

The hopes aroused among German humanists by the military actions of Emperor Maximilian I are reflected in a Latin elegy by Eobanus's friend Ulrich von Hutten. Hutten urged other German poets to respond by writing poems in the name of the emperor. Eobanus promptly wrote his own poem in the name of Maximilian and published it, accompanied by Hutten's poem, in November 1516.

The final text in this volume, *Christ's Victory over the Underworld*, was completed in 1513 but not published until 1517. Many years later, about 1539, Eobanus discovered it and several related poems in his old papers and arranged to publish them, including *Victoria Christi*. The printer's other obligations and the death of Eobanus in 1540 almost caused the work to be lost, but it eventually appeared in 1542.

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