

Basel 1516: Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament. Martin Wallraff, Silvana Seidel Menchi, and Kaspar von Greyerz, eds.

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A collection of fifteen essays, *Basel 1516* observed last year the 500th anniversary of the printing by Johann Froben in Basel of the New Testament, Erasmus's edition of the New Testament. The book offered the first published edition of the Greek New Testament in print—not the first printed edition because the Complutensian New Testament was printed in 1514 but did not circulate until 1522 with the entire Polyglot Bible. Yet following the argument that Henk de Jonge made in an important essay published in 1984, several contributors, including Mark Vessey, repeat that Erasmus's principal interest was his revised Latin translation, not the Greek text, of the New Testament. Vessey underlines the "single, decisive event or 'turn' in Erasmus' life." Before his arrival in Basel in 1514, Erasmus realized that a revised Latin text of the New Testament "would provide both a compelling focus and the ultimate critical test for the theory of text-centred Christian sociality" that had suffused his writings since 1503 with the publication of his *Enchiridion* (21). Modern New Testament scholars, unaware of or uninterested in Erasmus's purpose, have criticized his dependence on late Byzantine manuscripts. Andrew Brown confronts this criticism. Earlier manuscripts, he maintains, are not necessarily superior manuscripts. Later manuscripts "can in principle preserve genuine readings," and thus we should not be persuaded by "the conclusion that the Byzantine readings are individually or collectively false" (139).

Vessey and Brown are among the regular suspects in Erasmus studies who make *Basel 1516* the *vade mecum* to enrich and encourage research on Erasmus's New Testament scholarship. Other established scholars have joined them: Erika Rummel, Silvana Seidel Menchi, and Christine Christ-von Wedel. Miëkske van Poll-van de Lisdonk, who edited the last three of the six volumes of Erasmus's *Annotations on the New Testament* for the Amsterdam critical edition of his works, rightly sets a new research agenda when she asks us to consider the relationship between the *Annotations* and Erasmus's *Paraphrases on the New Testament*. The volume includes contributions by scholars who have made their mark on Erasmus more recently (Jan Krans, Greta Kroeker, Marie Barral-Baron) and who enlarge the volume's focus from allied historical and literary disciplines (Patrick Andrist, Igancio García Pinilla, Sundar Henny, August den Hollander, Martin Wallraff).

Valentina Sebastiani, a relatively new and promising Erasmus scholar, reminds us of the "market considerations" (227) of book publishing. The value of the *Novum Instrumentum* was not simply inherent; it depended also on the commercial promotion undertaken by Froben and Erasmus's cultural promotion. When initial sales did not register a solid success, printer and editor took steps to enhance the value of their product in subsequent editions (entitled *Novum Testamentum*) so that Erasmus's New

Testament proved to be “one of the best-selling books of its time” (230). Seidel Menchi adds that Froben and other printers competed and cooperated by producing “low-profile editions” (217) of the New Testament, for which Erasmus wrote prefaces that expanded his audience beyond theological specialists.

Few if any collections of essays develop “into an organic whole” (xi), as editors may wish. The link between den Hollander’s study of “Late Medieval Vernacular Bible Production in the Low Countries” and the *Novum Instrumentum* is tenuous at best. The same can be said of Kroecker’s discussion of Erasmus’s theological impact on Jacopo Sadoleto and Gasparo Contarini. By contrast, the fresh and compelling research of Henny and Christ-von Wedel illuminate the ironies and consistencies in the Protestant reception of Erasmus’s New Testament scholarship.

The great value of *Basel 1516* is that it raises questions that complicate our understanding of Erasmus’s New Testament. What was its relationship to the Complutensian New Testament? What more can one say about the manuscripts that Erasmus used? Did he undermine the exegetical tradition if, according to Barral-Baron, tradition, in light of the *Annotations*, “appears to be nothing more than an unbroken chain of errors” (250)? Or did his biblical humanism underpin an exegetical method that required recourse to “consensus and tradition” (33), as Rummel believes? How do paratexts—those imported from the manuscript tradition and those deliberately inserted by Erasmus—shape his New Testament in its various changing editions? They make it, Wallraff points out, more Byzantine than we previously knew, and they consolidate, Krans argues, “Erasmus’ deconstruction of the Vulgate” (205). Scholars should take notice of and inspiration from *Basel 1516* to continue to reveal the fascinating complexity of the *Novum Instrumentum*, its successors, and their afterlife in biblical interpretation.

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Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma and Trinitarian Debate. Grantley McDonald.

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No account of the first edition of Erasmus’s famous edition of the New Testament (1516) is complete without mentioning his treatment of the notorious Comma Johanneum: two half verses in 1 John 5:7–8 that speak of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost as three witnesses in heaven who are one, and who are contrasted with the witnesses on earth. These are, as the remainder of verse 8 tells us, the Spirit, the Water, and the Blood, which agree in one. Anyone even only vaguely familiar with Christian theology will recognize that in the first half the Holy Trinity is mentioned, with the Word denoting Jesus, the Word incarnate. For centuries, these two half verses