

Desiderius Erasmus. *Erasmii Opera Omnia IV–4: Apophthegmatum libri I–IV*. Ed. Tineke L. ter Meer. *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi*. Leiden: Brill, 2010. ix + 398 pp. \$138. ISBN: 978–90–04–18173–1.

Recovering from a long illness suffered during the summer of 1530, Erasmus began to resume work toward the end of the year on a collection of apophthegms, which may be defined as terse, pithy sayings. Unlike proverbs and adages, they are usually associated with certain persons. The volume was intended to supplement the education of the thirteen-year-old William, Duke of Cleves, and was dedicated to him. The principal source of these sayings is Plutarch, although Erasmus also extracts stories from Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers* and in successive editions from various other collections. There were three editions in all, 1531, 1532, and 1535, with substantial additions each time. Ter Meer publishes here the first four books of eight, basing the text on the last Froben edition published during Erasmus's lifetime, which represents the collection in its most expanded form.

As Erasmus explains in his letter of dedication to the duke, he has put his own mark on the work, elucidating the Greek text more clearly, interjecting at times what he found in other authors, interpreting the meaning and application of the apophthegms, especially those that required some clarification, but never departing from the true nature of the genre. Books 1 and 2 are largely based on Plutarch's Spartan sayings and many sections of book 4 are taken from his apophthegms of kings and emperors. Book 3 is based mostly on Diogenes Laertius. One of the outstanding features of ter Meer's edition is her exhaustive description and analysis of all the editions and translations of Plutarch that Erasmus had at his disposal. The editio princeps of Plutarch's *Moralia*, in which the apophthegms are contained, was published by Aldus Manutius in March 1509. Erasmus expressed his dissatisfaction with this edition, saying that it was printed from a copy that was corrupt in many places. It is interesting to learn that his own copy of the Aldine text with notes and corrections is extant in the former Provincial Library of Friesland in Leeuwarden. Also available to him was a Latin translation of these collections of Plutarch done by Francesco Filelfo, published in 1471, and one by Raffaele Regio, first printed in Venice in 1508, the year in which Erasmus met Regio in Padua. As ter Meer demonstrates amply in the notes to the text, Erasmus's version is heavily indebted to

those of Filelfo and Regio, both in the matter of translation and in the references to readings in other manuscripts. In book 3, based largely on Diogenes Laertius, Erasmus could not profit from a printed text, which did not yet exist, but did utilize to a large extent the Italian translation of Ambrogio Traversari. In his first edition Erasmus most likely, as ter Meer suggests, did not have any access to the Greek text, but merely relied on Traversari's translation. In 1532 he obviously did have access to a Greek text and corrected many errors in the first edition. It is interesting that in a few cases, at least, in citing Greek phrases Erasmus may have reconstructed the Greek from Traversari's Italian, which recalls the famous incident when he supplied the last six lines to chapter 22 of the Apocalypse that were missing in the Codex Reuchlin that he was using, by retranslating from the Vulgate.

Erasmus's purpose in his paraphrase of Plutarch is in the main didactic and moralistic. He considers this condensed form of learning to be very appropriate for princes, who because of the affairs of state do not have a great amount of time to devote to books. The brief clever expressions are learned with pleasure and easily fix themselves in the mind. They also serve to cheer and enliven the spirit of the young and to contribute to the cultivation of polite manners and urbanity of speech. In Erasmus's view the mind formed by studies that give enjoyment is made more vigorous in dealing with the multiple problems that beset a ruler. The collection was a publishing success. The third edition (1535) was reprinted forty-seven times before the end of the century.

In her notes to the text ter Meer makes frequent references to other works of Erasmus and also cites numerous passages from various Greek and Roman writers. The historical notes are succinct and to the point, enough to aid the reader to understand the particular apophthegm. This edition of Erasmus is a splendid example of the care, thoroughness, and exactitude constantly exhibited in the *Erasmii Opera Omnia* published under the supervision of the Huygens Instituut in The Hague.

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