

Basel 1516: Erasmus' Edition of the New Testament

Edited by
MARTIN WALLRAFF,
SILVANA SEIDEL MENCHI,
KASPAR VON GREYERZ

*Spätmittelalter, Humanismus,
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91

Mohr Siebeck

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NOVVM IN

strumentū omne, diligenter ab ERASMO ROTERDAMO
recognitum & emendatum, nō solum ad græcam ueritatem, ue-
rum etiam ad multorum utriusq; linguæ codicum, conumq; ue-
terum similium & emendatorum fidem, postremo ad pro-
batissimorum autorum citationem, emendationem

& interpretationem, præcipue, Origenis, Chry-
sostomi, Cyrilli, Vulgarij, Hieronymi, Cy-
priani, Ambrosij, Hilarij, Augusti-
ni, una cū Annotationibus, qua-
lectorum doceant, quid qua-
ratione mutatum sit.

Quisquis igitur
amas ue-

ram

Theolo-

giam, lege, cogno-

scas, ac deinde iudica.

Nec statim offendere, si

quid mutatum offenderis, sed

expende, num in melius mutatum sit.

APVD INCLYTAM
GERMANIAE BASILAEAM.



CVM PRIVILEGIO
MAXIMILIANI CAESARIS AVGVSTI,
NE QVIS ALIVS IN SACRA ROMA-
NI IMPERII DITIONE, INTRA QVATV-
OR. ANNOS EXCV DAT, AVT ALIBI
EXCVSVM IMPORTET.

georgij semmarij, Venetianensis
Est Stephanij fabri ferrarij
ex Basilea. ex perma 1516

Fig. 1: Title page of the *Novum Instrumentum* 1516.

Preface

1. This book has a double purpose. Firstly, it commemorates the 1516 publication of Erasmus' New Testament in Basel by the printer Johann Froben, situating that event in the overall history of the Biblical text. Secondly, it documents the intellectual vigour of current research into the "Prince of Humanists" and contemporary humanist biblical scholarship, of which the contributions contained within are a reflection. These contributions are based on papers delivered at a conference held in Basel in mid-September 2014, which have since been reworked and revised by their authors.

"Basel 1516": does the title of this book refer to a true historical *kairos*? In that year, an "eternal peace" was established between the French crown and the Swiss confederates, which cost the former 700,000 *écus* and the latter their claims in Italy. At the end of the year 1516, François I and the Medici Pope Leo X concluded the Concordat of Bologna, in which the King of France recognized several papal prerogatives in exchange for more freedom to make ecclesiastical appointments at home. And at about the same time, in December 1516, Thomas More's *Utopia* appeared in Leuven at Erasmus' prompting. Notwithstanding the importance of More's achievement, the year 1516 was no watershed in Europe's development. If we insist that 1516 was a special year, we readily concede that it was special above all for cultural, theological and literary reasons, and for the milestone in biblical scholarship it represented.

If measured by contemporary public reaction, the publication of Erasmus' Greek New Testament in March 1516 was clearly a more distinct event than that of Martin Luther's 95 theses in October of the following year. In Germany, however, a different perspective was strengthened by the 19th-century historiography that hypostasized Luther as a national hero. This has had a long-term effect on German research into the 16th century, reflected to this day in the conferences held to commemorate Luther's initial steps towards a wholesale Reformation of the Church and society. This explains to a large extent why scholarship on Erasmus remains relatively scarce in Germany, while it is prominent in Western and Southern Europe, in the Anglo-American world (especially in Canada) and, last but not least, in Switzerland.

What about Basel? Prominent exponents of Basel's intellectual and university life in the 19th century, such as the theologians Karl Rudolf Hagenbach (1801–74) and Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780–1849), as well as the historian Ja-

cob Burckhardt (1818–97), shared little appreciation for Erasmus' historical role. This changed to some extent in the 20th century with Werner Kaegi's (1901–79) important work on 16th-century humanism and the impressive body of studies produced by his students. However, Kaegi, conscious of local tradition, committed himself by and large to a Burckhardian perspective, which was prone to constructing bold lines of intellectual continuity running from the Renaissance to the 18th-century Enlightenment, and downgrading the historical importance of humanist biblical scholarship. A larger shift occurred with Hans Rudolf Guggisberg (1930–96) whose research on Sebastian Castellio once again underlined the intimate relationship between 16th-century humanism and the Reformation. While endorsing this perspective, the present volume is not intended to address grand questions about historical narratives. It is, however, firmly committed to a demonstration of the cultural, theological, and literary weight of humanist biblical scholarship highlighted by the appearance of Erasmus' New Testament in Basel 1516.

2. It is a felicitous (and only partly planned) coincidence that the conference was held almost exactly 500 years after Erasmus first arrived in Basel (late summer 1514), and the volume appears almost exactly 500 years after the publication of the New Testament (spring 1516). This relatively short time span reminded the editors of the extreme speed and skill with which Erasmus and Johann Froben brought their publication to completion. This was possible only due to an extraordinary network of craftsmanship, entrepreneurship, and intellectual life. In fact, in the late summer 1514, three lines of force converged on Basel:

- the tendency to ask hard questions about the configuration, function and accessibility of the Bible, a tendency that had emerged or was emerging in certain parts of Europe;
- the entrepreneurial dynamism that had developed in the city and was now seeking an outlet;
- the visionary audacity of a single exceptional individual.

The result of this convergence was magnificent. Basel, with no more than 6,000 inhabitants,¹ took its place as the cultural capital of Europe, retaining this title for some 20 years; Erasmus of Rotterdam, a cleric on the threshold of his fiftieth year,² with neither money nor position, became the most influential man of let-

¹ See F. Gschwind, *Bevölkerungsentwicklung und Wirtschaftsstruktur der Landschaft Basel im 18. Jahrhundert* (Liestal 1977), 172–174.

² *Methodus*, H, 153, ll. 7f.: “Ipse iam undequinquagesimum agens annum ad Hebraicas litteras olim utcunque degustatas cum licet recurro”. The phrase occurs in the *Methodus* prefaced to the 1516 edition of the *Novum Instrumentum*. Probably dating from late 1515 or early 1516, it suggests 1466 as the date of Erasmus' birth. The dedication of the *Novum Instrumentum* to Leo X is in fact dated 1 February 1516.

ters in Europe, courted by princes both secular and ecclesiastical. The enterprise he had planned on his arrival in Basel – or rather the enterprise he had planned thanks to his arrival in Basel (Vessey, pp. 14–18)³ – made a lasting mark on the lexicon and on the *modus cogitandi* of Christendom.

The essays gathered in this book concentrate on the results of research carried out over the last 40 years on this chain of events. As far as research on Erasmus is concerned, the greater part of these results have flowed into one or other of two series: the *Opera omnia* of Erasmus (ASD) promoted by the *Conseil international pour l'édition des œuvres complètes d'Erasme* (Amsterdam and Leiden), and the *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto, CWE). Both of these exhaustive multi-volume enterprises are intended for specialists. Some of the editors of individual volumes have condensed the results of their decade-long research into essays that we publish here. They are joined by several authors of monographs and essays that have made significant contributions to Erasmian studies, whilst other scholars provide a foretaste of research currently being undertaken.

The following overview is not intended as the condensation of a condensation. Our aim has been to indicate certain thematic continuities that pervade the volume, linking the 15 essays into an organic whole, so as to offer the reader a convenient path through the exceedingly varied subject matter. We have also sought to draw attention to recently discovered possibilities for research, potentially innovative avenues in relation to the prevailing state of knowledge in the research on Erasmus.⁴

3. The first subject that lends itself to an examination of our present state of understanding is the cultural context of Erasmus' New Testament. The tension that surrounded the sacred volume, the project to evaluate its textual condition, and the intention to extend its accessibility, are tendencies that go beyond the cultural boundaries of early modern Europe. Here they are examined on four fronts: humanism, and the lesson in philology it imparted to Erasmus (Erika Rummel); the Netherlands, and the proliferation of vernacular translations of sacred scripture (August den Hollander); Spain, and the production of the Polyglot Bible (Ignacio García Pinilla); Basel itself, and the Byzantine influence on the printing of the biblical text (Martin Wallraff).

The instruction in philology that the humanists – especially Lorenzo Valla (Krans, p. 188) – gave to the young Erasmus is vigorously synthesized in Erika

³ References to page numbers in the present volume are given in brackets in the text.

⁴ By the prevailing state of knowledge we mean the stage of research documented in the impressive bibliographical studies of Jean-Claude Margolin (in particular *Neuf années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1962–1979* [Paris 1977]; *Cinq années de bibliographie érasmienne, 1971–1975* [Paris 1997]) and in the works of Margolin himself. This particular stage of research is dominated by Francophone scholars (Charles Béné, Jacques Chomarat, André Godin, Léon E. Halkin, Jean-Pierre Massaut, to mention only the most illustrious, in addition to Margolin).

Rummel's essay, where she draws up the balance for this classic theme, one that is fundamental to European culture. The project of subjecting the sacred text to the same procedures of verification and analysis as were used on the literary works inherited from classical antiquity was a revolutionary idea. True, it was one for which Erasmus had predecessors, but he put it into effect with unprecedented boldness and consistency (pp. 34–37). The dialogue that he entered into with Italian scholars is now being extended to new interlocutors (pp. 28 f., 37, see also Barral-Baron, pp. 240–243) and taken to a new level, developing into a lesson in philological method rather than a mere repertory of readings (pp. 34 f.). Emphasizing the opposition between theology and “grammar” (= language studies), Rummel identifies the celebrated humanist's crucial point of attack, and at the same time she anticipates one of the leading themes of this volume in its entirety.⁵

In the Netherlands, the circulation of vernacular biblical translations is related to the Basel enterprise more by contrast than by affinity. The fervent and astonishing proliferation of vernacular versions of the Bible that is evoked by August den Hollander was intended for practical, everyday purposes – educational, liturgical, devotional – that did not require, let alone demand, an accurate textual restoring of the Word, but simply aimed to make it accessible – especially in key areas, such as the Psalms – to readers without knowledge of Latin (pp. 43–55). As a consequence of this extraordinary addition to our understanding of the history of Bible dissemination, the influence supposedly exerted by the *Devotio moderna* on Erasmus' New Testament project – a commonplace of 20th-century historiography – now looks somewhat dubious (pp. 56–58).

The relation between the Basel New Testament and the Complutensian Polyglot has long been debated, but here textual analysis has led to some precise conclusions, summarized in the essay by Ignacio García Pinilla. We now know that Basel's Spanish rivals – the conceivers and promoters of the *Biblia Complutensis*, the first polyglot Bible ever printed – and the team of philologists, *correctores* and *castigatores* who helped Erasmus to print his New Testament in record time, proceeded, in the initial phase of work, independently of each other. Later, however, the influence of the Spaniards on the Basel New Testament is indisputable: for the fourth edition (1527) it is documented, for the third edition it seems possible or even probable (1522) (pp. 70–74).⁶ The theory of a reciprocal influence of the two enterprises – of Alcalá on Basel, of Basel on Alcalá – is not yet supported by conclusive evidence (pp. 66–68). It remains to consider the 1514 Basel edition of the Bible, to which Martin Wallraff draws our attention. Its role as a forerunner of the *Novum Instrumentum* merits close study (pp. 165 f.). What effect did that

⁵ See below, in the contributions of J. Krans (p. 194), M. Barral-Baron (pp. 245–248) and C. Christ-von Wedel (pp. 294 f.).

⁶ The theme of the plurality of languages in the *traditio* of the Bible is addressed below by S. Henny (pp. 267–281).

prestigious product of Basel's flourishing printing industry have on the scholar who had been received in triumph into the city?

4. The second thematic complex dealt with here places Erasmus at the centre of the stage. This Erasmus is the conceiver, promoter, co-ordinator, commentator, marketing manager, chronicler, apologist and finally censor of his own most ambitious project. As is demonstrated in Mark Vessey's opening essay, the germination of the enterprise can be dated to August–September 1514. This precise dating sweeps away all of the traditional reconstructions that assigned the New Testament publishing project to Erasmus' English period (1509–14), or even earlier (pp. 14–18). Making use of the ego-documents in which Erasmus both conceals and reveals himself, Vessey neatly reconstructs the situation that resulted in the "sudden conception" in the late summer of 1514 (p. 25). This use of autobiographical documentation recurs in some of the later essays.⁷ Indeed, the creative inebriation, the exultant sense of omnipotence and the entrepreneurial flair that shine out from Erasmus' letters in this period seem to us today to have brought about the "prodigious choice" of 1514.⁸ The joke played by the humanist in concealing himself from his publisher Johann Froben, who was anxiously awaiting his leading author, is indicative of the high spirits that characterised this period of Erasmus' life (pp. 10 f.).

That which the ego-documents tell us about the germination of the New Testament project, the manuscripts tell us about its actual implementation. Which manuscripts? The ones that Erasmus used for his reconstruction of the Greek text. In his essay, Andrew J. Brown synthesizes the results of decades of research. The eight codices that Erasmus and his team used in Basel have been identified with certainty and it is also known to which families two of the four codices Erasmus used in England – now probably lost – originally belonged. At a distance of five centuries, philology allows us to reconstruct the working methods of Erasmus and his team with a precision that leaves little room for doubt. Brown's essay ends with a defence of Erasmus' shape of the Greek text (pp. 137–142) – a serious pleading, which, however, runs against the grain of large parts of contemporary Biblical scholarship. Jan Krans, as we shall see, takes a different view (pp. 200–205).

The fact that Erasmus and his collaborators used and collated the Basel manuscripts has conferred such visibility on them as to render them worthy of in-depth study. Patrick Andrist's codicological analysis of these manuscripts and his conjectural reconstruction of their circulation explore the cultural substrate

⁷ Seidel Menchi, p. 207; Barral-Baron, pp. 251–253. For the methodology of ego-documents cf. C. Ulbrich / K. von Greyerz / L. Heiligensetzer (eds.), *Mapping the 'I'. Research on Self-Narratives in Germany and Switzerland*, *Egodocuments and History* 8 (Leiden 2015).

⁸ Seidel Menchi, p. 212; Barral-Baron, pp. 251–253. For the "prodigious choice", see Vessey, p. 16.

that made Erasmus' enterprise possible, investigating aspects of the trade in codices but also discussing problems of present-day conservation and proposals for a future re-ordering (pp. 91–95). In the course of his painstaking cataloguing, Andrist erects a monument to an unsung hero of the cultural history of Basel, the Dominican friar John Stojković of Ragusa (ca. 1393–1443), whose collecting of codices enabled Erasmus to work from exemplars of considerable authority (pp. 81 f., 85, 124).

Andrist's essay and the one by Martin Wallraff are enhanced by numerous illustrations, putting the reader in visual contact with the world of Byzantine codices used by Erasmus, reproducing their glosses and their notes of ownership. In discussing the "paratextual" features – the short textual inserts that Erasmus drew from the tradition to enrich his New Testament – Wallraff shows us the humanist in action as a typographer, i. e. as an author who, in close collaboration with his printer,⁹ takes trouble to furnish the reader with all sorts of additional information, introductory matter and summaries, to accompany the sacred text and to facilitate its consultation, while also keeping a close eye on sales promotion. Especially illuminating regarding the working methods of Erasmus and his team is the whole story, reconstructed by Wallraff, of the canon-tables of Eusebius of Caesarea (pp. 162–172). What at first sight might have seemed to be a theme of secondary importance thus turns out to be of the greatest interest for future research, especially concerning the Greek codices used by the humanist – one codex he borrowed from the monastery of Corsendonck has been identified in Vienna – and the iconographic apparatus that accompanied the 1519 edition (pp. 154 f.).

At this point in our enquiry, the question that arises concerns the balance or lack of balance between the Greek and the Latin text that Basel put out under the name of Erasmus. In the edition of 1516, and in (almost) all the later folio editions supervised by the humanist, the Greek and Latin are elegantly laid out in parallel columns, proclaiming an equality of value between the two texts. Such a proclamation is deceptive, however, as Jan Krans reminds us, because Erasmus' "focus was not the Greek but the Latin" (p. 204).¹⁰ Despite his repeated assertions to the contrary, Erasmus' aim is to discredit the authority of the Vulgate and, with it, the influence of the scholastic theologians who – as the humanist foresees – will spring to the defence of tradition.¹¹ The violence, the many-sidedness and, from 1520, the relative synchrony of the attacks that the work arouses induces

⁹ Cf. A. Vanautgaerden, *Érasme typographe. Humanisme et imprimerie au début du XVI^e siècle*, Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 503 (Geneva 2012).

¹⁰ Also Miekske van Poll-van de Lisdonk emphasizes this conclusion as the result of a well-established scholarly consensus (p. 176).

¹¹ That Erasmus foresaw a hostile reaction from the theologians of the Schools is apparent from the tone of the *Apologia* which he prefaced to the 1516 edition of the *Novum Instrumentum*, now in H, 163–174.

the humanist to erect, and continually to reinforce, a defensive barrier. He feels constrained, in other words, to multiply and amplify the apologetic texts that he prefaces to his New Testament. Krans analyses the two most important of these: the *Capita argumentorum contra morosos quosdam ac indoctos* ("Chief points in the arguments answering some crabby and ignorant critics") and the *Soloecismi per interpretem admissi manifestarii et inescusabiles* ("Palpable and unpardonable solecisms perpetrated by the translator [of the Vulgate]"). He concludes that Erasmus did not attenuate his criticism of the Vulgate except *pro forma*, and that he continued until the very end to invest his authority, prestige and acumen in defence of his own Latin translation (pp. 191–205). In this respect, the essay by Jan Krans is linked to that of Erika Rummel in the first part of this collection. And what is the final balance? If in regarding the Greek text and its Latin translation Krans endorses the harsh judgement expressed by Henk Jan de Jonge (pp. 203–205), he acquits, and indeed celebrates as brilliant, the *Annotationes*, a component of Erasmus' New Testament work that was programmatically – though not inseparably – linked to the Latin translation (pp. 204 f.).

The *Annotationes* (Annotations) are the corpus of notes that Erasmus added to his translation of the sacred texts. They are discussed here in the essay by Miekske van Poll-van de Lisdonk, who has edited three of the six volumes containing the entire series of these notes for the Leiden *Opera omnia* of Erasmus.¹² The *raison d'être* of the *Annotationes* is to explain and justify the deviations from the Vulgate of Erasmus' translation, to interpret and clarify obscure passages, and to forestall any future corruption of the Biblical text (pp. 176 f.). Van Poll-van de Lisdonk's essay is not however focused only on the New Testament component with which she is most familiar – the annotations – but extends to those writings that attest to Erasmus' impassioned dedication to Sacred Scripture, a dedication that goes far beyond the enterprise of 1516 and indeed fills the humanist's entire post-New Testament working life. Since these writings have in part an autonomous printing history and in part are thematically linked to the New Testament, van Poll-van de Lisdonk provides us with the necessary terminology to orient ourselves in the catalogue of Erasmus' production in the period 1520–35, clarifying the connections between the *Paraphrases in Sacra quatuor Evangelia*, the *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, the *Commentarii*, the *Scholia in Hieronymum* and the *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*. From this voluminous scriptural production there emerges the profile of a scholar who not programmatically, but progressively, makes of the sacred texts his lifetime's work.

Three of the essays we have mentioned (Wallraff, Krans, van Poll-van de Lisdonk), while leaving Erasmus in the centre of the stage, extend the temporal perspective and differentiate the socio-cultural phases of his activity. The dates 1516, 1519, 1522, 1527 and 1535 mark only the official stages in his re-managing of the

¹² ASD VI-8; ASD VI-9; ASD VI-10.

New Testament text: these are the publication dates of the luxurious and costly folio editions that Johann Froben was able to present, each time, at the Frankfurt fair as having been revised and perfected by the great scholar. Alongside these, however, were editions of lesser size and cost. These were not pirated editions, but editions addressed to a different type of reader, speaking in a different tone of voice, with *ad hoc* prefaces – but also signed by Erasmus. In Silvana Seidel Menchi's view, the heterogeneous volumes and the piling up of prefaces one after another designate an intellectual journey that is at first ambitious, then contradictory, and then tormented. At the end of this journey the humanist is barely able to recognize himself in the man who, in 1516, had triumphantly proclaimed the rebirth of the Gospel (pp. 219 f.).

5. And what was the reaction, what the reception? Some of the essays presented above (Rummel, Krans) have already made clear that Erasmus' New Testament was perceived as subversion and that it gave rise to bitter and long-lasting controversies. This theme is resumed by Marie Barral-Baron. The image of Erasmus that she presents in the first part of her essay owes much to the Francophone historiography that dominated research in the last century (pp. 239–245); in the second part, however, she takes her distance from that tradition, introducing into the humanist's intellectual biography an element of discontinuity and laceration, the nagging thought of a sense of guilt (*l'enfer d'Érasme*) (p. 250). The epistolary exchange between the humanist and his former fellow-monk Maarten van Dorp prefigures *ante factum* the principal arguments in the war that would break out a few years later over the Basel New Testament, from Alcalá and Leuven, from London and Paris, from Rome and Cologne. It is precisely because Dorp is anxiously seeking to dissuade Erasmus from what is still (in September 1514) only a *project*, precisely because he does not want to accuse him of any *fact*, their correspondence documents a phase when the controversy is not yet poisoned, when dialogue between the two opposed positions is still possible. Yet it is precisely in its relative mildness of language that it shows itself to be radical, irreconcilable, implacable (pp. 251–253).

The scandal caused by the publication in 1516 and of the later editions is the direct effect of the power of the press. This relatively new means of communication ensures an unprecedented breadth of circulation and subverts – not locally, not at the level of individuals or small communities, but on a vast scale that crosses frontiers – the authority of the Word and of the institution that guards it, the Church (pp. 247 f.). This consideration gives rise to a question: what was the effective circulation of Erasmus' New Testament? It is a question that transfers our discourse from the area of cultural history to the area of economic history, calculating productivity, numbers, prices. Thanks to her pilgrimages to European and North American libraries and her systematic reading of the letters of the humanists and printers centred on Basel, Valentina Sebastiani is able to provide

a partial answer to the fundamental question. But here we are venturing into territory that has barely been explored. The quantitative data assembled by Sebastiani hold some surprises, and we may expect more of them when her research is completed. But we still need to know more: the answer to the question of whether the strong reaction against the scandal of Basel was truly justified depends on the effective circulation of the work and on the reaction of its readers in the *longue durée*, i. e. on its posthumous fate.

6. In this volume, the work's posthumous fortune is analysed on three fronts: the Italian area (Greta Kroeker), the area of Francophone Protestantism (Sundar Henny), and the area – by far the most turbulent – of Protestantism in the predominantly Germanophone parts of Europe (Christine Christ-von Wedel).

In her essay on some features of Erasmus' legacy south of the Alps, Greta Kroeker refers not to the New Testament – which in Italy was used and translated only by “heretics” such as Antonio Brucioli (p. 292), and was later condemned by the Holy Office of the Inquisition and by the Congregation of the Index, and was systematically destroyed¹³ – but to the attempts to maintain or revive the unity of the Christian Church in the spirit of Erasmian irenicism. Here her attention is focused on two dignitaries of the Catholic Church, both of them members of the Sacred College: Jacopo Sadoletto from Modena and Gasparo Contarini from Venice. Both of these figures were influential personalities (especially the second), both of them sensitive to the influence of Erasmus, but both of them dying too soon to be able to oppose the involution of the Catholic Church as willed by Gian Pietro Carafa, the future Pope Paul IV.

Was Erasmus' work as an exegete reduced to silence where he, in the final phase of his life, would have wished it to survive? And did it in fact survive where he thought that he had been misunderstood and betrayed? This doubt is justified by the tenor of Sundar Henny's essay. As Henny shows, in reviewing the current state of research, the Basel New Testament made a determinant contribution to the textual configuration of the Bible as used by the Protestant churches. Whereas the first part of his essay considers the New Testament languages that the age of humanism restored to centre-stage – not only the Greek (which for Erasmus was undoubtedly essential), but also Syriac, Hebrew and Aramaic – and illustrates Erasmus' position on them (pp. 267–281), the second part explains how, through the mediation of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and of Robert Estienne, Erasmus' New Testament became the basis of the *textus receptus*, the Greek text that underlies all later Protestant translations (pp. 281–289).

¹³ Cf. S. Seidel Menchi, *Érasme hérétique. Réforme et inquisition dans l'Italie du XVI^e siècle* (Paris 1996); ead., ‘Whether to Remove Erasmus from the Index of Prohibited Books. Debates in the Roman Curia, 1570–1610’, *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 20 (2000), 19–33.

Thus, while the first part of the essay enriches with new variants the Greek/Latin dualism of the Basel experiment – linking itself in this respect to García Pinilla's chapter on the *Biblia Complutensis* – the second part, especially in its consideration of the role of Theodore Beza, an opponent of Erasmus but a promoter of the Erasmian Greek New Testament, is linked to the concluding essay in this collection, which directs our attention as far as the dawn of the present age.

In our present state of knowledge, the most receptive territory for the lesson in hermeneutics that Erasmus imparted to Europe was the German-speaking area of protestant Churches. The tranche of cultural history reconstructed by Christine Christ-von Wedel embraces almost three centuries of Biblical studies and is extremely varied. A fairly evident but far from rigid watershed divides those theologians who place themselves in continuity with Erasmus or who see themselves as his disciples – Theodore Bibliander, Hugo Grotius, Jean Le Clerc, Johann Jakob Wettstein, Johann Salomo Semler – from those who, while adopting Erasmus' edition of the Greek New Testament, reject the historico-critical method developed by the humanist – Luther, Calvin and, with due distinctions, also Zwingli and Bullinger – and elaborate the principle of *Verbalinspiration*, i. e. direct and literal divine inspiration of Scripture, a principle that excludes any possibility of internal contradiction in the Bible and is opposed to any proposal to historicize the sacred texts (pp. 300–305). At the conclusion of this complex panorama, however, the balance swings decidedly in favour of Erasmus. The continuity of his influence in the hermeneutic tradition of the Protestant world turns out to be incontrovertible (pp. 295–300).

There remains nevertheless an ambiguity: we have seen that Erasmus' Latin text, which he so tenaciously defended, was condemned in one of the two confessional areas that emerged from the drama of the Reformation,¹⁴ and in the other was rapidly put aside and forgotten (Henny, pp. 283 f.). The Greek text, "not Erasmus' main concern" (Krans, p. 187), stayed alive for centuries in the Protestant tradition of the *textus receptus* (Henny, pp. 281–289).

If at this point one were to have the temerity to select as crucial a single motif from among those so far discussed, it would have to be the field of tension set up – by Erasmus' merit, or by his fault – between theology and philology ("grammar"), a tension that tormented the humanist in the last 20 years of his life, that split his legacy into two opposing currents, and that still today noticeably characterizes studies devoted to him. As the essays in this volume attest, the "grammarians" generally appreciate Erasmus the hermeneut, or at any rate are indulgent towards him; the theologians much less so.

7. The editors wish to thank all the authors for their participation in the initiative, for their contributions and inspiring discussions, and for re-working the texts

¹⁴ See above, n. 13.

in view of this publication. The conference was held right in the centre of Basel, just a few hundred meters from the Haus zum Sessel (Totengässlein), where the *Novum Instrumentum* was printed. The *genius loci* as well as the treasures of the University Library became visible and vivid, not least thanks to Dr. Ueli Dill, head of the manuscripts department, and eminent scholar on Erasmus himself. Dr. Sundar Henny is not only one of the authors, but also the single person who contributed most to the smooth and pleasant running of the conference. Elisa Frank undertook the tedious task of editorial work with patience, energy and competence. Certain English texts have been read and corrected by Jasper Donelan. Among the three editors, it was Martin Wallraff who coordinated the work. Editors and authors are grateful that the results of their common efforts can appear in the distinguished series “Studies in the Late Middle Ages, Humanism and the Reformation”. This was possible thanks to the support of Prof. Volker Leppin, main editor of the series, and Dr. Henning Ziebritzki of the publisher Mohr Siebeck.

Subsidies were necessary and granted both for the conference, and the publication: for the conference from the Swiss National Science Foundation, and for the whole project from the Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft and from the Fonds zur Förderung von Lehre und Forschung. We are grateful to all sponsors, but especially to the two local foundations, because their aid expresses Basel’s ongoing bond with a specific and significant aspect of her history: Erasmus and the printing of his New Testament. Various institutions of the city will call this heritage to visitors’ attention in 2016 in the initiative “Erasmus MMXVI”. The present volume wants to be a modest contribution to this important *memoria*.

Basel, December 2015

The editors

The *Novum Instrumentum* 1516
and Its Philological Background

Basel 1514

Erasmus' Critical Turn

MARK VESSEY

Conversations with Paul

Like other influential Latin theologians, Erasmus did much of his hardest thinking in conversation with the writer of a letter *Ad Romanos*. The principle was one that he was ready to urge upon others as early as 1501 or 1502, in a work (the future *Enchiridion militis Christiani* or “Handbook of the Christian Soldier”) that reflects a recent sharpening of his interest in biblical studies and the study of Greek.¹ The context is a rich one for understanding Erasmus' theology, his public career, and the ideas of both that he was testing at the time:

Associate with those in whom you have seen Christ's true image; otherwise, where there are none whose society can improve you, then withdraw from human intercourse as far as you can, and take for company the holy prophets and Christ and the apostles. Above all make Paul your special friend; him you should keep always in your pocket and ‘turn over with nightly and with daily hand,’ and finally learn by heart. I have been carefully preparing an interpretation of him for some time. Certainly it is a bold venture. Nonetheless, relying on Heaven's help, I shall earnestly try to ensure that, even after Origen and Ambrose and Augustine and all the commentators of more recent date, I may not appear to have undertaken this task without any justification or profit. Second, I shall try to cause certain malicious critics, who think it the height of piety to be ignorant of sound learning, to realize that, when in my youth I embraced the finer literature of the ancients and acquired, not without much midnight labour, a reasonable knowledge of the Greek as well as the Latin language, I did not aim at vain glory or childish self-gratification, but had long determined to adorn the Lord's temple, badly desecrated as it has been by the ignorance and barbarism of some, with treasures from other realms, as far as in me lay; treasures that could, moreover, inspire even men of superior intellect to love the Scriptures. But, putting

¹ For Erasmus' biblical, Greek and patristic studies around this date, see esp. E. Rummel, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament. From Philologist to Theologian*, *Erasmus Studies* 8 (Toronto 1986), 10–19; J. Chomarat, *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Érasme*, 2 vols. (Paris 1981), vol. 1, 302–304; A. Godin, *Érasme, lecteur d'Origène* (Geneva 1982), 21–32.

aside this vast enterprise for a few days, I have taken upon myself the task of pointing out to you, as with my finger, a short way to Christ.²

“Men of superior intellect” could be expected to hear the jingle with which Erasmus commends Paul as a text to be turned over “with nightly and with daily hand”. Giving advice on how to be a Roman poet, Horace had encouraged his students to be forever unrolling copies of their Greek models: “vos exemplaria Graeca / nocturna versate manu, versate diurna”.³ That was the classical brief for an activity of literary consumption and production that turned night into day, and in Latin prose was also called *lucubratio*, “lamp-work” or “burning of the midnight oil” (here and elsewhere also rendered by Erasmus as *vigiliae*).⁴

So far as we can now tell, the desire to understand Paul better was Erasmus’ original motive for working up his Greek.⁵ Likewise, the project of a commentary on Paul’s Letters seems to have lain at the origin of his New Testament scholarship. In retrospect, the Pauline twist that Erasmus gave in this passage to Horace’s trope of “turning over” Greek manuscripts uncannily prefigures the spin that he

² Allen I, ep. 164, ll. 32–55 (= CWE 2, ep. 164, ll. 35–57): “In quibuscunque vero deprehenderis veram imaginem Christi, cum iis te copula. Porro ubi desunt homines quorum conuictus te reddat meliorem, abducito te quantum posses ab humano consortio et Prophetas sanctos, Christum, Apostolos in colloquium ascisce. In primis autem Paulum tibi facito familiarem. Hic tibi semper habendus in sinu, nocturna versandus manu, versandus diurna, postremo et ad verbum ediscendus. In quem nos iampridem enarrationem magno studio molimur. Audax quidem facinus, sed tamen diuino auxilio freti sedulo dabimus operam, ne post Origenem, Ambrosium, Augustinum, ne post tot recentiores interpretes hunc laborem omnino vel sine causa vel sine fructu suscepisse videamur; atque vt intelligant calumniatores quidam qui summam existimant religionem nihil bonarum litterarum scire, quod politioem veterum litteraturam per adolescentiam sumus amplexi, quod vtriusque linguae, Graecae pariter ac Latinae, mediocrem cognitionem non sine multis vigiliis nobis peperimus, non ad famam inanem aut puerilem animi voluptatem spectasse nos, sed multo ante fuisse premeditatos vt dominicum templum, quod nonnulli inscitia barbarieque sua nimis dehonestarunt, exoticis opibus pro viribus exornaremus, quibus et generosa ingenia possent ad diuinarum scripturarum amorem inflammari. Sed hac tanta re pauculos dies intermissa hunc laborem tua causa assumpsimus, vt tibi veluti digito viam quae compendio ducit ad Christum, indicaremus.” Allen’s ep. 164 To a Friend at Court is a back-construction from the *Enchiridion* of 1503, which was dedicated in those terms and dated by Erasmus in the published text to 1501; for the text quoted here, see *Enchiridion militis Christiani*, LB V, 66A–C. The arguments of Godin, *Érasme, lecteur d’Origène* (op. cit. n. 1), 30 f., would favour 1502 as the actual date of composition.

³ Horace, *Ars poetica*, ll. 268 f.

⁴ For these and related idioms of text-handling in Erasmus, see C. Béné, *Érasme et saint Augustin. Influence de saint Augustin sur l’humanisme d’Érasme* (Geneva 1969), 40, 103; M. Vessey, ‘Erasmus’ Lucubrations and the Renaissance Life of Texts’, *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 24 (2004), 23–51; id., ‘Erasmus’ Lucubrations: Genesis of a Literary Oeuvre’, in S. Partridge / E. Kwakkel (eds.), *Author, Reader, Book. Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice* (Toronto 2012), 232–262. The classical repertoire: J. Ker, ‘Nocturnal Writers in Imperial Rome: The Culture of Lucubratio’, *Classical Philology* 99 (2004), 209–242; W. A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire. A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford 2010), 114–117.

⁵ See Allen I, ep. 181, ll. 31–36 (= CWE 2, ep. 181, ll. 36–41); Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations* (op. cit. n. 1), 13 f.

and his publisher would put on their edition of the New Testament a decade and a half later, by printing a Greek text next to a Latin text newly turned (*versum*) by Erasmus.

“Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God”. Those self-introductory words of Paul’s to the Romans would duly appear, in Erasmus’ Latin paraphrase, under his writing hand in the 1517 portrait of him by Quinten Metsys (Quentin Massys) commissioned as a gift for Thomas More.⁶ By that date, Paul’s call – including one of the most dramatically rendered about-turns in biblical narrative, reinforced by generations of Latin Christian “conversional” discourse since the time of Augustine – could figure graphically in the public styling of Erasmus. As Robert D. Sider has shown, however, Erasmus was not especially interested in the drama of Paul’s conversion; he was much more interested in Paul the preacher and also, from early on, in Paul as a model for the Christian use of classical learning and rhetoric.⁷ Although it is possible to construct a narrative of Erasmus’ personal “conversion” from secular *bonae litterae* to the sacred letters of the Bible, our author offers no direct warrant for applying that or any other scheme of radical reorientation to his own case.⁸ Only a handful of the autobiographical documents that we now rely upon for our sense of Erasmus’ early intellectual development and self-styling were in print before the lines just quoted from the *Enchiridion* appeared in the collection of his *Lucubratiunculae* or “Minor Nightworks” (Antwerp: Martens 1503), and none of them departs from the unitary vision of “literature” in the service of “scripture” that is there set out. The one such text of any consequence, a letter dedicating the *Adagia* (Paris: Philippi 1500) to Lord Mountjoy (William Blount), anticipates the *Enchiridion* and the title-trope of the *Lucubratiunculae*, by setting the work-in-hand in the shadow of “more serious works temporarily deferred”.⁹ Already by the turn

⁶ On the programme of the portrait, see esp. L. Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters. The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton, N. J. 1993), 27–39; followed and expanded by S. Goldhill, *Who Needs Greek? Contests in the Cultural History of Hellenism* (Cambridge 2002), 17–25, 43–56.

⁷ See R. D. Sider, ‘Historical Imagination and the Representation of Paul in Erasmus’ Paraphrases on the Pauline Epistles’, in H. M. Pabel / M. Vessey (eds.), *Holy Scripture Speaks. The Production and Reception of Erasmus’ Paraphrases on the New Testament*, Erasmus Studies 14 (Toronto 2002), 85–109. For Paul as a guide to the Christian use of learning and eloquence, see esp. the *Antibarbari*, ASD I-1, 95, 105–107, 130; all passages present already in the text of 1494–95.

⁸ See esp. Godin, *Érasme, lecteur d’Origène* (op. cit. n. 1), 121 f. and n. 12; Béné, *Érasme et saint Augustin* (op. cit. n. 4), 185 f., 189. Rummel, *Erasmus’ Annotations* (op. cit. n. 1), 3–18, offers a carefully nuanced version of such a scheme, under a heading provided by J. Ijsewijn, “Erasmus ex poeta theologus sive de literarum instauratarum apud Hollandos incunabulis”, in J. Coppens (ed.), *Scrinium Erasmi. Mélanges historiques publiés sous le patronage de l’Université de Louvain à l’occasion du cinquième centenaire de la naissance d’Érasme*, 2 vols. (Leiden 1969), vol. 1, 375–384.

⁹ Allen I, ep. 126, ll. 15 f.: “Intermissis itaque gravioris operae lucubrationibus hoc delicatioris studii genere”.

of the century, we are given to understand, Erasmus was a man with a (Pauline) mission. The chief question raised by his own publicity, then and for some years afterwards, was: Where and when would he apply himself single-mindedly to it?

On the Road to Basel

Recognizing that Erasmus the poet, rhetorician and lover of “pagan” literary classics will never be separated, by any account that he gives of himself, from Erasmus the dedicated student of Holy Scripture, we should not look in his epistolary-autobiographical oeuvre for a set-piece equivalent to the scenes of Jerome’s arraignment in the Syrian desert (“Ciceronianus es!”) or Augustine’s rapture in a Milanese garden (“Tolle lege, tolle lege”), both more or less Pauline in their content and colouring.

That said, Erasmus’ relation of his own life-course comes closer in one place to a Pauline narrative of conversion *in via* than either of the stories of those famously more convulsive converts, neither of whom claimed to have been going anywhere when providence struck. Paul for his part had been going to Damascus, and went on there blinded; in one account, the Lord himself commanded him to go on his way (Acts 22,10); Damascus was where his preaching mission began, and the place itself counted for something in a larger apostolic history. Erasmus’ most Damascene moment occurred on the road to Ghent in the summer of 1514, when his horse took fright at the sight of laundry by the wayside, shied, and twisted its rider’s back so sharply that the least movement became excruciating for him. “Imagine my feelings”, he wrote in a letter to Mountjoy, whose company he had left not long before, at Calais: “I made a vow to St Paul that I would complete a commentary on his Epistle to the Romans if I should have the good fortune to escape from this peril.”¹⁰ Somehow he reached Ghent by nightfall, when the pain returned so acutely that his only thought was of death. Next morning, miraculously, he found he could move freely again. After a few days spent with friends in Ghent while he recuperated, he and his servant continued on their way to Antwerp, their horses laden with baggage that would have included Erasmus’ notes on Romans, along with the rest of his voluminous literary work in progress.¹¹ It

¹⁰ Allen II, ep. 301, ll. 18–20 (= CWE 3, ep. 301, ll. 20–22).

¹¹ See Allen I, ep. 295 (to Andrea Ammonio, written from Calais on 8 July 1514, after the channel crossing), ll. 4–12 (= CWE 2, ep. 295, ll. 6–15): “The crossing was a very good one, but distressing all the same, at least for me. True the sea was calm, the winds favourable, the weather glorious, and the hour of sailing most convenient ... But those pirates had transferred the portmanteau, crammed with my writings (*manticam lucubrationibus meis onustam*) to another vessel. They make a habit of doing this deliberately, in order to steal something, if they can; and if not, then to extract a few pieces of money and sell you back your own property. Accordingly, believing that several years’ work (*tot annorum vigilias*) was lost, I was afflicted by a degree of anguish as keen, I think, as any parent would suffer upon the death of his children.”

was from Antwerp that Erasmus wrote to Mountjoy with the story of his Pauline swerve *in via*, though he delayed sending the letter until he could report safe arrival at his journey's end, which was Basel.

The special providence that brought Erasmus to Basel towards the end of August 1514 has been a favourite theme of scholarship ever since Percy Stafford Allen first laid out the documents for a scientific study of his life. In 1914, by which time the first three volumes of the *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Rotodami* were in print, the Clarendon Press published a series of Allen's lectures under the title of *The Age of Erasmus*. The book's modestly stated aim was "to present sketches of the world through which Erasmus passed"¹² between 1466 and 1536. Unstated but unmistakable was a more ambitious postulate: that Erasmus' personal manner of passing through that world-time was itself somehow critical with respect to the modernity claimed for and by European culture and societies of later date. In place of the relics of an "unbending" Middle Ages, Allen suggested, modern readers of Erasmus and his contemporaries found themselves at last with "a literature", "memoirs", "private letters" at their fingertips. The "age of Erasmus" was the first age after those of classical Greece and Rome that latercoming scholars could effectively reconstruct: it offered a past not only documented but also expressed, a social environment that could be imaginatively reinhabited and from within which the historian could reliably perceive the circumstances that "alter cases".¹³

Only one chapter in *The Age of Erasmus*, the fifth of eleven, focusses steadily on its biographical subject. The title is "Erasmus' Life-work". ("Life-work" now sounds dated in English but the locution once had some currency as a synonym for a writer's *chef d'oeuvre*.) Allen begins his chapter on "Erasmus' Life-work" with him in Cambridge in 1511, and reviews his activities of the previous decade from that standpoint. Among publications to date, only the *Adagia* (Paris: Philippi 1500) and *Adagiorum chiliades* (Venice: Manutius 1508) are mentioned by title. In Cambridge, between 1511 and 1514, Erasmus could be found working on "the Letters of Jerome and the New Testament". Allen spends several pages recounting his biblical studies down to that time, then returns to the main narrative: "By 1514 he was ready. In the last three years he had completed [!] Jerome and the New Testament, and had also prepared for the press some of Seneca's philosophical writings ... A difficulty arose about printing."¹⁴ This is the cue for conjectures about why and how Erasmus changed his allegiance from Josse Bade's press in Paris to Johann Froben's in Basel, for one more flashback – to take in the history of the firm of Amerbach and Froben – and for a capsule biography of Beat Bild of Sélestat (Beatus Rhenanus), who was to be one of Erasmus' closest

¹² P.S. Allen, *The Age of Erasmus* (Oxford 1914), 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7f.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

collaborators in Basel. The pace then markedly quickens. In the summer of 1514, Erasmus arrived in Basel for the first time. The advantages of the place were soon confirmed for him, Allen states,

and gradually, one after another, the books which he had brought were undertaken by Froben, a new edition of the *Adagia* [1514], Seneca [1515], the New Testament [*Novum Instrumentum*, March 1516], Jerome [December 1516]. ... Erasmus had now reached his highest point. ... He enjoyed his position, feeling that he was fitted for it; but he was not puffed up. In his dreams of what he would do with his life, he had ever seen himself advancing not the name of Erasmus but the glory of God.¹⁵

There it was: Erasmus' life-work, realized in Basel by the end of 1516. "Into the discord of the years that followed I do not propose to enter",¹⁶ Allen wrote. Nor did he. Barely a page later, Erasmus (†1536) is already dead.

As a response to the challenges presented to a biographer by Erasmus' oeuvre, Allen's chapter on the "life-work" must be judged extreme. And yet its logic, we can confirm, was dictated by contemporary texts of Erasmus and his associates, precisely marking the critical juncture represented for him by Basel 1514.

Marking the Place and Time

Erasmus recalled his arrival in Basel in a letter originally written in reply to one addressed to him by Jakob Wimpfeling on behalf of Strasbourg's *Sodalitas litteraria*, the company of learned men that had feted him in their city as he made his way up the Rhine valley in the summer of 1514. Wimpfeling's letter is dated 1 September of that year, Erasmus' reply 21 September from Basel. The pair of letters, which are now separated as eps. 302 and 305 in Allen's collection, appeared together in print as a complement to the edition of Erasmus' *De Copia* and (new) *Parabolae* that was issued in Strasbourg by Matthias Schürer in December 1514. Erasmus' letter, reflecting his return to cities and territories of the Holy Roman Empire after a prolonged (and still not quite abandoned) attempt to establish a career in England, contained a finely crafted manifesto for an ideal modern republic, founded on the special sociality of persons united in the pursuit of *bonae litterae* and governed by Christian magistrates under a Christian prince. The passage can be read as a miniature precursor of More's *Utopia*, with Strasbourg, Roman Argentoratum ("City of Silver") – better called Auratum ("City of Gold") according to Erasmus – serving instead of More's Amaurotum as "the image of one of those cities we read of in the ancient philosophers".¹⁷ Crucially for our

¹⁵ Ibid., 158, 162 f.

¹⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹⁷ Allen II, ep. 305, ll. 54–116, quotation at l. 65 (= CWE 3, ep. 305, ll. 62–123, quotation at ll. 72 f.).

purpose, the letter also contains Erasmus' first public statement of a programme of work comprising the main elements of the *Novum Instrumentum* of 1516.

Thanks to Allen, this loaded exchange with Wimpfeling from September 1514 now comes readily to hand and on cue in the *Opus epistolarum*. But it was no part of any epistolary collection organized or authorized by Erasmus in his lifetime. What Allen calls Erasmus' "first essay at publication" of his own letters did not occur until fully twelve months after his arrival in Basel, when he and Froben took the opportunity of a volume entitled for the work of another author (the *Iani Damiani Senensis ... de expeditione in Turcas elegeia*, siglum A in Allen's apparatus)¹⁸ to print expanded texts of three letters of May 1515, together with an apology for the *Praise of Folly* addressed to the Leuven theologian Maarten van Dorp.¹⁹ The main history of the publishing of Erasmus' correspondence begins with the collection of *Epistole ... ad Erasmum* arranged by his friend Pieter Gillis – who would also procure the Metsys portrait mentioned above – and published by Dirk Martens in Leuven in the autumn of 1516 (B). Neither that volume, however, nor the *Epistole elegantes* that followed it in two different forms in 1517 and 1518 (C¹, C²) contained any letter from or to Erasmus datable earlier than October 1514, and it was only with the *Farrago nova epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* published by Froben in late 1519 (E) that an appreciable quantity of letters from the period of Erasmus' life *before* his arrival in Basel came into public view.

Thus, from late 1515 onward, printed texts of letters by and to Erasmus began to appear in batches, almost in "real" time, within a few months – or at most a year or two – of their ostensible original drafting and despatch. By contrast, aside from a handful of items in the *Auctarium* of 1518 (D¹), Erasmus' extant correspondence from 1514 and previous years would remain outside the printed epistolary corpus until nearly the end of 1519, when the aptly titled *Farrago nova* or "New Mash-Up" released onto the market several bucket-loads of letters from his earlier life. In fact, all early collections of Erasmus' correspondence – including the one in the 1538 inaugural volume of his posthumously collected works – were "mash-ups", in the sense that the letters they contained were for the most part arranged promiscuously with respect to the dates of composition assigned (in print or manuscript) or assignable to them. Allen's would be the first truly chronological as well as comprehensive edition, and for that reason alone – aside from its other qualities – would mark a watershed for scholarly interpretation of Erasmus' life and works.

On the basis of data that Allen himself first made conveniently available, we can say that his decision to close Volume 1 of the *Opus Epistolarum* in mid-1514, as Erasmus set out for Basel from Calais, antedates by a year a pivotal moment in the development of the public regime of Erasmian epistolarity, and hence in

¹⁸ For a full list of sigla see Allen I, p. 72.

¹⁹ See Allen I, pp. 593–602 (= Appendix VII: The Principal Editions of Erasmus' Epistolae).

the profiling of any “life-work” of Erasmus that could have been visible to his contemporaries. While the rapid proliferation of letters for the period 1514–17 covered by Allen’s Volume 2 reflects the quantum leap in publicity of this kind that is one of the characteristics of his early “Basel” period, the first forty-odd letters in the volume, preceding as they do the items included with the *Damiani elegeia* in mid-1515, now invite our special scrutiny as tokens of a transitional phase during which we can see Erasmus – in concert with old and new collaborators in Basel and a few other centres of humanist literary activity and print-production – adjusting himself and his public image to the latest alteration in his circumstances. The letter of 21 September 1514 to Wimpfeling, written in Basel, printed at Strasbourg three months later with the *De Copia* and *Parabola*, is the most pregnant of such tokens of change.

As this example reminds us, printed epistolary collections were by no means the only medium of auto-commentary used by Erasmus, his collaborators and friends. Every new issue of one of their original or edited works was likely to contain paratextual material capable of enriching a reader’s sense of its contexts, including the context constituted by the life and other works of the author / editor. Nor were the literary coteries of Erasmus’ day ever more than partly reliant on print for their notions of what was newsworthy in the wider *respublica litterarum*. “Real” letters and colloquies still predominated over printed simulacra and, as Lisa Jardine has demonstrated, the successful production of “charisma in print”, in Erasmus’ case as in anyone else’s, required the constructive interference of non-print media and agents of opinion as well. Jardine’s original arguments for the special efficacy of printed publicity in Erasmus’ case have only been strengthened by subsequent work by her and other scholars.²⁰ The same is true of her contention that it was chiefly at Basel, in the late ‘teens and early ‘20s of the 16th century, between “his middle [and] later life”, that Erasmus acquired his mastery of the medium.²¹ Thanks to the letter to Wimpfeling printed at Strasbourg, we have the illusion of seeing exactly how he set about doing so.

A Letter of Engagement

Confining his contacts on arrival in Basel to a small circle of like-minded humanists, Erasmus presented himself alone and incognito at Froben’s premises. This was the story he told to Wimpfeling and a widening readership:

²⁰ Cf. now esp. A. Vanautgaerden, *Érasme typographe. Humanisme et imprimerie au début du XVI^e siècle*, Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance 503 (Geneva 2012) and contributions to S. Ryle (ed.), *Erasmus and the Renaissance Republic of Letters. Proceedings of a Conference to Mark the Centenary of the Publication of the First Volume of Erasmii Epistolae* by P. S. Allen, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 5–7 September 2006 (Turnhout 2014).

²¹ Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (op. cit. n. 6), 23.

Index of Proper Names

The index of proper names contains the names of all persons appearing in the text (main text and notes, except persons who appear only in bibliographical data). Biblical and mythological figures as well as modern scholars are omitted. Erasmus' name has not been included in the index.

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