

Bibliographical Exercise

The book that I selected to work on is the third edition of Desiderius Erasmus' translation of the New Testament, *Nouum Testamentum omne [...] ab Erasmo Roterodamo*, which was published in 1522.

Title Page extracted from Vol. 2

[within a woodcut border] DES ERASMI RO | TERODAMI IN VOVVM TESTAMENTVM | ab
codem tertio recognitum, Annotationes | item ab ipso recognitæ, & auctario | neutiqz pœnitendo
locupletatæ. | Apud inclytam Rauracorum Bafilæam, | AN. M. D. XXII. | *Apelles olim buiufmodi
pictura Calimniam ultus est.*

Colophon:

Volume 1

FINIS NOVI TESTAMENTI TOTIVS, AD GRAECAM | VERITATEM,
VETVSTISSIMORVM'QVE CODI/ | CVM LATINORVM FIDEM, ET AD PROBA/ |
TISSIMORVM AVTORVM CITATIONEM | ET INTERPRETATIONEM I AM TER | TIO
ACCVRATE RECOGNITI, | OPERA STVDIO'QVE DES. | ERASMI ROTERODAMI |
THEOLOGIAE PRO | FESSORIS. ANNO | M. D. XXII.

Volume 2

ANNOTATIONVM LOCVPLETATARVM ERASMI RO | terodami in Nouum testamentum ab eodem
tertio recognitum, idcēb ad | Græcorum codicum fidem. Deinde as uetustissima & emen | data utriuscū
linguæ exemplaria. postremo ad probato | rum autorum citations * interpretations, | finis. Bafilææ.
Anno salutis humanæ, | M. D. XXII. | Mense Februario.

Format: Folio for both volumes.

Collation: Some of the pages within the first volume of the book were incorrectly signed, quite possibly due to an error by the printer, as well as the fact that this edition contains multiple books within it. Indications are made below:

Vol.1: A³, B-C⁴, D-E⁵ (collation restarts), A-Z⁴, &⁴

Vol. 2: A-Z⁴, Aa-Gg⁴

Pagination:

Vol.1: The first 34 pages of the book are not numbered. Following this, the next section begins from 1-562.

Vol. 2: The first 4 pages are unnumbered. Following this, the book goes from 1-629. Some of the pages within the second volume were numbered incorrectly (mainly pages 160, 294, 296, 463, 520).

In this discursive piece, I aim to provide bibliographical information pertaining to the history of the text, *Nouum Testamentum omne [...] ab Erasmo Roterodamo*. In order to do so, I will firstly provide details of what is known about the publisher of the text and the publication history of the text, making a note of any disparities in the edition of study. Secondly, I will look at the intended readership of the book and lastly, I will conclude this research.

The New Testament text was printed by Johann Froben, a Renaissance Humanist, writer, printer and friend of Desiderius Erasmus. The large volume of work was printed in Basel, a trade centre and hub for Humanist writings. In total, there are five editions which exist of this text, the 1516, 1518, 1522, 1527 and the 1535. The third edition, which is the focus of this research, exists in two volumes and comprises of both Greek and Latin writings. The book underwent multiple revisions, mainly due to the fact that Erasmus sought to ensure the accuracy of his translations and clarity within the text. In addition to this, the text also contained few errors, which could only be attributed to the printer. These errors include anomalies with the signatures on the leaves, unnumbered pages, and incorrect numbering of the book pages in some areas.

Moreover, there are misprints of some letters resulting in the mistranslation of some words. Prior to the printing of the first edition of the text, Erasmus encouraged his friend to learn Latin so that he would be able to read and print the book with accuracy¹. Irrespective of this, Froben is credited for the manner with which he has skilfully produced the work of multiple Humanist scholars, as well as, for the eloquence of his caduceus, which is featured at the back of the first volume and on the title page of the second volume of the New Testament².

Erasmus was a scholar in ancient Latin and Greek texts and is generally considered to be a Christian Humanist. He is commended for the fact that he is completely firm in his beliefs throughout all of his endeavours, writings and ideas in contrast to his predecessors and contemporaries³. The learned Dutch scholar's vision was to initiate a cultural shift within the phenomena of Renaissance Humanism by dedicating his life to producing a 'theology of work'. This idea follows the concept of teaching the people of his era the manner in which they ought to conduct themselves and how to live accordance to the Christ in all aspects of their life and work. His Christian outlook on life, conduct, government, social order among others forms the basis of the majority of his writings. In this instance, the purpose of this book is to correct the Latin translations that were used for teaching by the church.

Thus, at the time of working on the New Testament, Erasmus came to realization that the Latin Vulgate, which was the canon of the scriptures, and that had acclaimed universal status contained errors. He dared, as is common with many other Humanist of his time, to create the most accurate versions of the sacred texts that were possible. His work on translating the texts was not without its

¹ Earle Havens, *Renaissance Printers' Devices; Essays on the Early Art of Printing and the King Memorial Windows of Johns Hopkins University* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, Sheridan Libraries, 2015), p. 43.

² Earle Havens, *Renaissance Printers' Devices*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins, Sheridan Libraries, 2015), p. 44.

³ *Renaissance Humanism: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. and trans., with an Introduction, by Margaret L. King (Indianapolis, Ind.; Cambridge: Hackett, 2014), pp. xi-xii.

struggles, as he faced ridicule from the Catholic church and criticism for the translations and the sources which he utilized to produce the editions⁴.

Erasmus had two primary audiences for his texts. His work contains an alternate title page, which states the following, 'Quisquis igitur amas ueram theologiam, lege, cognosce, ac deinde iudica', being translated reads as follows, 'Whoever therefore loves theology, read, know, and then judge'⁵. This can be helpful in understanding who his intended readership comprises of. Firstly, he wanted his work to be used by the scholars, reformists, and theologians so that they can compare the original Greek text used to the Latin translations.

Secondly, he hoped to reach the wider audience of the common people, to the dismay of the Catholic Church. The idea of having scriptures in a form that the common people would be able to understand was seen not only as a threat to the authority of the Church, but also of the possibility for the development of heretical views within the age⁶. Nevertheless, Erasmus persevered in his determination to provide the text to the common people so that all men would be able to learn scriptures, though he faced criticism.

Aside from having the scriptures in the common language, it is evident that Erasmus also wanted to 'teach his readers that even if a text was no longer identifiable with a stable Latin text legitimized by tradition and liturgical use, it could nevertheless be recognized as a source of Christianity'⁷. These ideas for the time period are radical and Erasmus' views helped to form part of the reformation ideas of the church, which he intentionally also hoped to spark. Though Erasmus states that his intentions were never to challenge the authority of the Canon Law, but to enhance its credibility, it seems that his intentions were not in alignment with the reception which he faced from publishing his work.

Overall, Erasmus' dedication to the general improvement of society and the upholding of Christian values and ethics proved fruitful. While his readership was mainly concentrated in the first audience, it is worth noting that this version of his text was later used by William Tyndale as he worked to translate the first English New Testament. His work was also modelled after the like passions of Erasmus which was to produce a version for the people and was also faced with persecution from the Catholic Church. Although Erasmus sought to bring the scriptures to the people, there was a mixed reception to its publication. On the one hand, some of the people—theologians such as Luther and Tyndale—were joyful at the release of the work and at having the ability to read the scriptures in the common language.

However, on the other hand, there were some who feared having such works in their possessions because they thought it would corrupt their understanding of the scriptures and lead to heresy. In addition to this, some people felt threatened by Erasmus' translations viewing him not as a man of doctrine and Christian order but one who wanted to exalt his authority over them and cared more

⁴ Marie Barral-baron, « The New Testament of Erasmus (1516) » *Encyclopédie d'histoire numérique de l'Europe* (2020) <<https://ehne.fr/en/encyclopedia/themes/european-humanism/cultural-heritage/new-testament-erasmus-1516>> [accessed 01 February 2024].

⁵ Erasmus, Desiderius, and Johann Froben, *Nouum Testamentum omne : tertio iam ac diligentius ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum, non solum ad Græcam ueritatem, uerumetiam ad multorum utriusque lingue codicum, eorumque ueterum simul & emendatorum fidem, postremo ad probatissimorum autorum citationem, emendationem & interpretationem, unâ cum annotationibus recognitis, ac magna accessione locupletatis ... Addita sunt in singulas apostolorum epistolas, argumenta per eundem*. (Basileae: apud inclytam Rauracorum Basileam Iohan Frobenius), 1522).

⁶ Barral-baron, 2020.

⁷ Barral-baron, 2020.

for his reputation and wealth rather than the salvation of souls⁸. Whether these allegations are true is unknown, however, it can be considered that these opinions may have been triggered by the fear of disobeying the authority of the Catholic Church and being penalized for following his writings which some believed to be heresy.

As great as the persecution was concerning Erasmus' New Testament, it is evident that there were readers who greatly benefitted from the work which he undertook, and from the revision that he conducted in order to get back to the purest version of the ancient texts.

In conclusion, I have provided my findings on the bibliographical history of Erasmus' New Testament. I have also provided what is known about the publication history of the book. In addition, I have identified the textual disparities. And Lastly, I have presented the information that I found with regards to the text's intended readership.

⁸ Barral-baron, 2020.

REFERENCE LIST

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4. Havens, Earle, *Renaissance Printers' Devices; Essays on the Early Art of Printing and the King Memorial Windows of Johns Hopkins University* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, Sheridan Libraries, 2015)
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