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Erasmus and the Use of the Print

Lending Weight to his Words

Erasmus's attitude and approach to the visual arts has been examined on a number of occasions.¹ Each time it has been pointed out that he seldom commented specifically on art, and the few passages that could elucidate his thoughts on the matter do not provide us with a firm footing. Nevertheless, printmaking plays an important role in this discussion, since Erasmus occasionally commented, albeit briefly, on his engraved portrait by Albrecht Dürer (cat. 4) and other (painted) portraits of him made by Hans Holbein and Quentin Massys. The portrait engraving was finally produced in 1526, after a lengthy period of preparation. Erasmus was disappointed not to have this portrait as quickly as he had hoped.² After all, it was important to him to have a likeness of himself in the easily distributable medium of the print, and not just as a painting or a portrait medal.³ Dürer had begun to engrave portraits in 1519, but this group remained small: six sheets portraying five sitters. Two of them were reigning princes: Albert of Brandenburg, portrayed twice, and Frederick the Wise, Elector of Saxony. The other three were outstanding scholars of his time: Willibald Pirckheimer (fig. 4, p. 61), Melanchthon and Erasmus).⁴

It has sometimes been inferred from the correspondence between Erasmus and Pirckheimer that Erasmus was unhappy with this engraving. However, Mende has recently pointed out that this conclusion holds water only if linked to a remark made some time later in a letter to Henri de Bottis, in which Erasmus admits that he has aged and therefore the resemblance is less striking than it was. The high esteem in which Erasmus held Dürer as an engraver is apparent from the few short passages the scholar dedicated to the artist. In these passages Dürer is praised as the new Apelles and esteemed for his outstanding ability to achieve with only a burin that for which a painter needs colours and brush.⁵ This is far more than an allusion to the corresponding passage in Pliny; indeed, it implies an understanding of various forms of printmaking, which are not discussed in detail – an understanding that plays an important part in their appreciation. Significantly, Erasmus extols Dürer the engraver and dwells on the

technical possibilities of the art of intaglio printmaking, rather than discussing the woodcut or book illustration. This reveals his understanding of the medium, which subordinates the book-related (and therefore purpose-made) artistic product – be it a title-page woodcut, a decorative border or a book illustration produced in whatever technique – to the results of free production with more wide-ranging technical and aesthetic possibilities. By no means does this differentiation impede the use of such title pages or book illustrations; on the contrary, it simply assigns a different status to purpose-made prints than Erasmus is willing to accord his likeness by Dürer.

Now, how and why did Erasmus put these purpose-made prints to use and when did he consider their use appropriate? To examine these issues, one must decide whether to take the general, cultural-historical approach or one focusing on Erasmus. The two are not mutually exclusive for various reasons, ranging from Erasmus's age and the views typical of his generation to changes – unconnected with Erasmus – that took place shortly after 1500. Book illustration in general and title-page illustrations in particular were undergoing radical changes at this time. Deriving in part from medieval traditions and mainly involving manuscript illumination and theological writings, illustrated title pages took on new forms and functions at an astonishing pace in the last quarter of the fifteenth century up to about 1530. The work process was redefined and the division of labour reorganized, and book decoration came to be used as a marketing tool as well as an instrument of religious persuasion.⁶ Although Erasmus was not responsible for these developments, they are clearly demonstrated by his use of book illustrations and illustrated title pages, as well as by his attitude to book illustration and printmaking.

Early illustrations

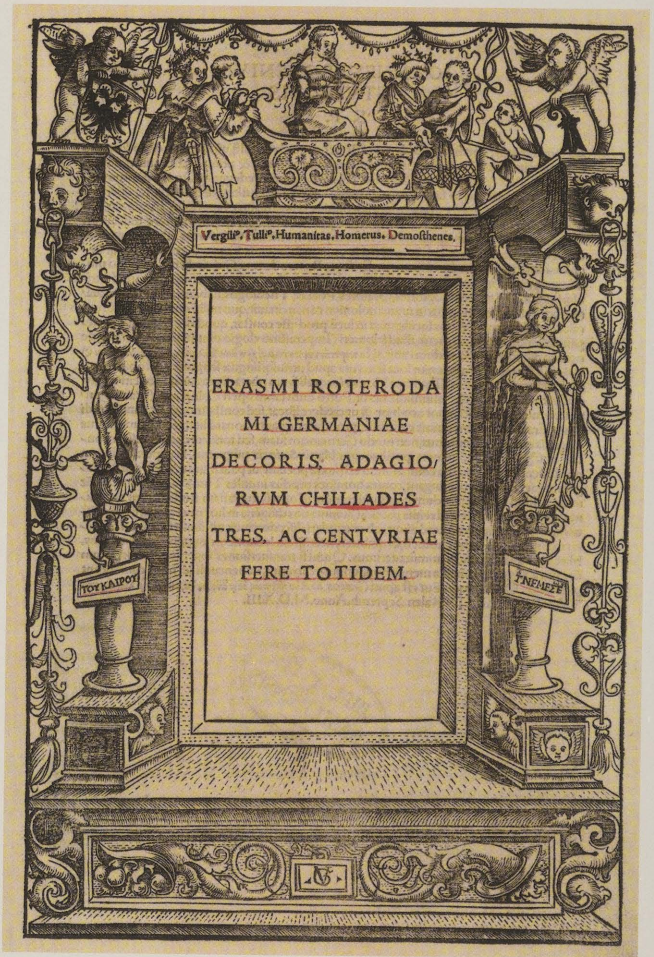
The early writings of Erasmus appeared in Venice, Paris and Louvain. Although produced by important publishers, these volumes mostly lack specific decoration.⁷ Aldus Manutius, for example, used only his print-

er's mark for his 1513 edition of Erasmus's publication on Plato. Other books merely display somewhat more sophisticated typography on the title page, but no further illustrations or decorative borders, even though printed book illustrations were common by this time. After the production of numerous block-books, increasing numbers of books appeared – both north and south of the Alps – which contained, in addition to mainly decorative embellishment, extensive narrative illustrations. Most of these books, however, were either recognized classics, editions of the Bible or prestigious volumes in large format.⁸ Why numerous publications remained largely undecorated is a matter for speculation; sources documenting the reasons are understandably lacking. All the same, from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, in both Germany and Italy increasing numbers of books were published with illustrated title pages, although the pictorial traditions and the use to which such title pages were put differed considerably at first, as did the characteristic style of the illustrations.

In the end, the answers to the above question should tell us how the writings of Erasmus were produced and marketed, and whether he or anyone from his immediate circle had a say in the matter. The aim, of course, is to establish the connection between the subject of a book's title-page illustration or other decorative depictions and the text which they embellish. What seems matter of course with regard to the illustrations proper – that is, a connection between the image and the text it illustrates – is not necessarily the case with title-page woodcuts, which came into use in Germany only in the late fifteenth century. In Italy their use was more pronounced, but the Italian forms and cutting techniques differed remarkably.⁹

Visual Summary

The first illustrated edition of a book by Erasmus was published – without his knowledge – in 1513 in Basel.¹⁰ The text of the *Adagia*, containing around eight hundred Greek and Roman proverbs, was first published in 1500 by Josse Badius in Paris. In 1506 Badius reprinted this edition in slightly expanded form. In 1508 a completely revised edition appeared, published this time by Aldus Manutius in Venice. This volume contained roughly four times as many proverbs. Thus in about 1509 there were two editions in circulation, though neither one had any special embellishment. The reprint of the sec-

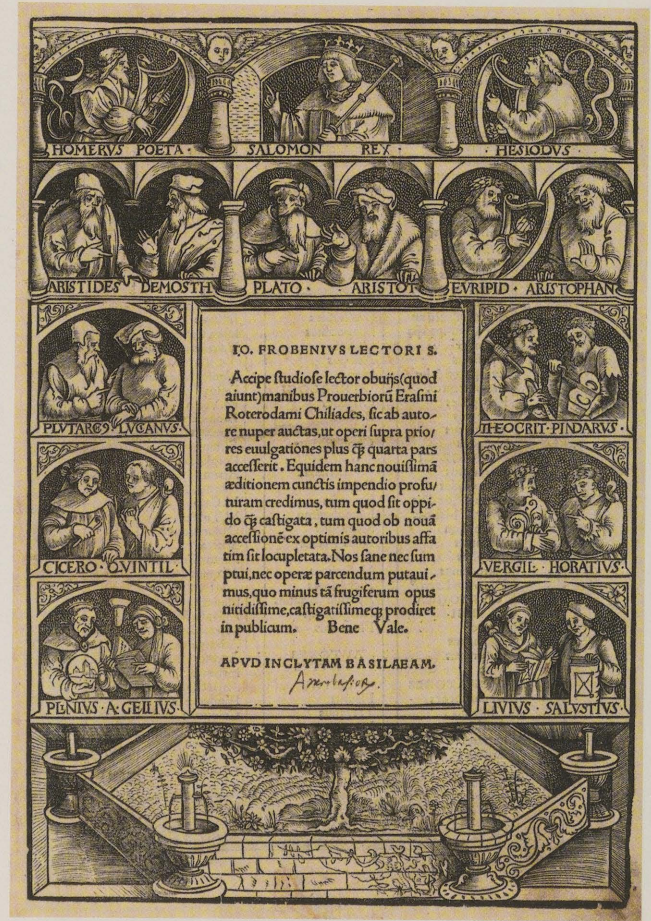


1 Urs Graf, *Title-page with Kairos, Nemesis, four poets and Humanitas*. Woodcut, in: *Erasmi Roterodami Germaniae decoris Adagiorum Chiliades tres, ac centuriae fere totidem*, Basel: Johannes Froben, August 1513. Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Basel, DB IV 10

ond Paris edition, produced this time by the Strasbourg publisher Matthias Schürer, was less notable for its decoration than for its new alphabetical index. The text had been brought to Schürer's attention by the humanist Beatus Rhenanus, who studied from 1503 to 1507 in Paris, where he acquired all the available writings by Erasmus.¹¹ This reprint appears to have been a great financial success, which is why Schürer presented Rhenanus with the Venetian edition when the latter moved to Basel to continue his studies. There, Rhenanus appears to have found another publisher, Johannes Froben, who was willing to produce another edition of the *Adagia*, again without Erasmus's knowledge (fig. 3, p. 19).¹² In addition to the edition published by Aldus Manutius, Froben could rely on a manuscript by Erasmus that had actually been intended for Badius in

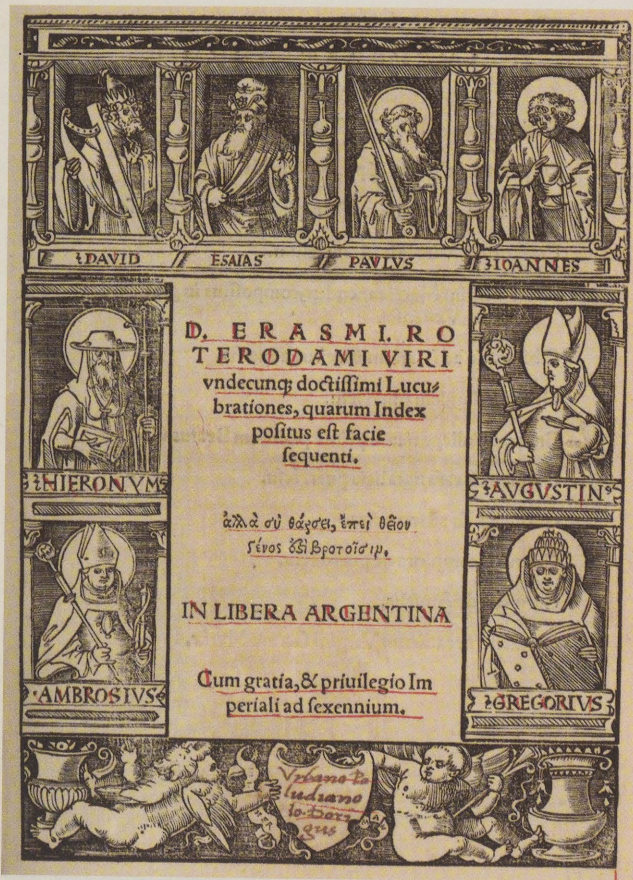
Paris. Why the bookseller Franz Birckmann of Cologne gave the volume to Froben remains unclear. One can only speculate on the background to this story, but this manuscript enabled Froben to correct numerous errors in the edition by Aldus Manutius. Moreover, the book was enriched with an elaborate, illustrated title page (fig. 1). This title-page woodcut by Urs Graf displays antique architecture with Kairos (Caerus) and Nemesis on either side. Appearing in the upper frieze – between the arms of the Holy Roman Empire and the city of Basel – are Virgil, Cicero (Tullius), Homer and Demosthenes, who push and pull the chariot of *humanitas*. It is a perfectly appropriate title page, presumably composed by Beatus Rhenanus. The decorative programme of this sheet includes instructions for the *ars vivendi* and a summary of important authors. The spirit of opportunity, or luck – embodied by Kairos standing on the globe – is only to be had for a short while: if one does not seize Kairos by the lock of hair on his forehead as he approaches, his otherwise bald head prevents his being grasped from behind, once he has passed by. One must take advantage of a fleeting opportunity before it is too late. Standing opposite him is Nemesis, the goddess of retribution; it is her righteous indignation which ensures that humans receive their just deserts. She encourages restraint, and joins Kairos in requesting that mankind exercise moderation when it is called for.

Even if Erasmus was not directly involved in the conception of this sheet, it is indirect proof that there was a dawning interest in the opportunities such title pages presented to authors. The architectonic structure derives from the woodcut text borders developed by Lorenzo di Rossi around 1493 in Ferrara.¹³ It is a formal reference to the architecture of side altars, an image that Rossi thought suitable for use in the *Vita* of St Jerome. Graf, by contrast, employs the architectural border at the beginning of a book, isolated from any textual context, thereby raising it above the author and the theme in general. This gives the title-page border a new function, serving to enhance the book's attractiveness,¹⁴ thereby increasing sales, as well as giving the publisher an opportunity to comment on the author and to provide a visual summary of the book's content. Even though this title-page border was not the first to be used in a German folio volume, it remains one of the first employed to link in so compact a form various levels of book production.



2 Urs Graf, *Title-page illustration with arcades and poets*. Woodcut, in: *Io. Frobenius Lectori S. Accipe studiose lector obvijs (quod aiunt) manibus Proverbiorum Erasmi Roterodami Chiliadas...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, 1515. Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Basel, DB IV 13

Erasmus could not have failed to notice this new approach, and it must have persuaded him to continue his collaboration with Froben. Indeed, after the scholar's temporary move to Basel in 1514, he handed over to Froben a revised manuscript of the *Adagia* originally intended for publication by Badius in Paris. This manuscript contained an additional 140 proverbs and commentary that had been revised considerably with respect to the earlier volume, which made it about one-fifth longer than the previous edition.¹⁵ It can no longer be ascertained whether it was at Erasmus's behest, Beatus Rhenanus's recommendation or Froben's own initiative that the publisher commissioned Urs Graf to make a new title-page woodcut (fig. 2).¹⁶ This time, however, the subject of the illustration was not how to lead a virtuous and humanistic life; instead, it focused on a spectrum of important poets and philosophers, who are



3 Hans Herman, *Text borders with playing children, the church fathers, prophets and the evangelists*. Woodcut, in: *D. Erasmi Roterodami viri undecunq; doctissimi lucubrations, quarum index positus est facie sequenti*, Strasbourg: Matthias Schürer, September 1515. Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Basel, FG VII 92:3

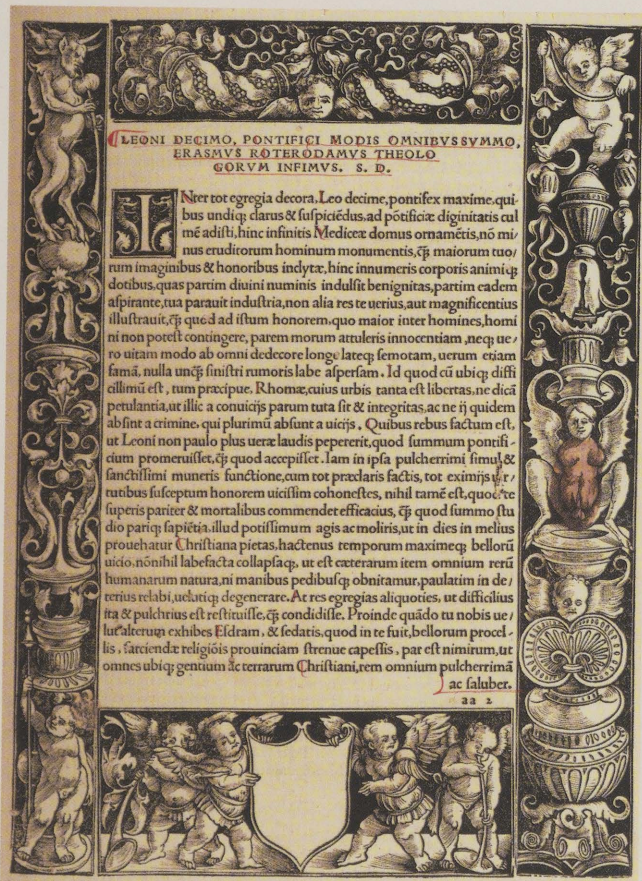
presented in five rows of arched niches. With the exception of the top row – which features three individuals, with Solomon in the middle – the men are grouped in pairs, facing each other. The background is accentuated by means of small dots, an interesting reference to the dotted manner of engraving. Admittedly, the people portrayed in that older technique are mostly single, full-length figures, seen – as here – frontally or nearly so, which lends them a striking monumentality. Once again, it is unclear whether the title-page woodcut was conceived by Erasmus or Rhenanus, but obviously neither objected to the ambiguity of the image and its various references, both technical and formal.

Around 1515, however, Erasmus was not collaborating only with Johannes Froben. With Matthias Schürer in Strasbourg he also published an anthology – reprinted a number of times – containing shorter theological writings, again including the *Enchiridion Militis Chris-*

tiani (The Handbook of the Christian Knight) (fig. 3).¹⁷ As was the case with Froben's publication of the same year, both the title page and the preface were appropriately illustrated. For the title page, Schürer used four borders by Hans Herman. The bottom border is a free copy after Urs Graf's border with putti holding an empty escutcheon, and the other three borders follow the general idea of the *Adagia*, though they include far fewer figures: in addition to the four Church Fathers on either side of the text, there are four biblical authors in the upper border, namely David, Isaiah, Paul and John the Evangelist. The striking horizontal hatching, most likely borrowed from Hans Schüfelein,¹⁸ prevents the ambiguity that occurs in the title page of the *Adagia*.¹⁹ On the whole, however, it is clear that Schürer sought to adopt the evidently successful concept of a high-quality product with an illustrated title page and suitable illustrations and embellishment.

Re-use of Decorations

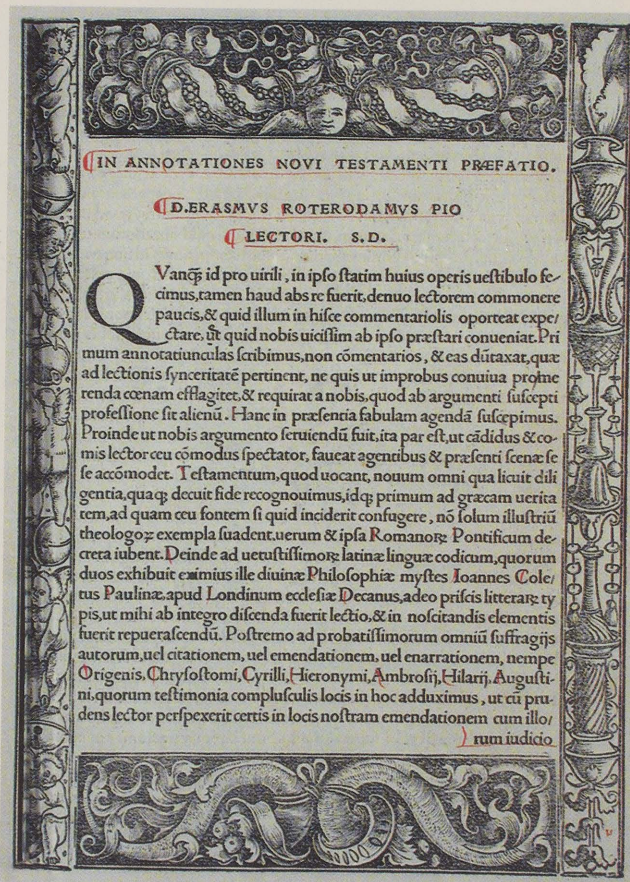
After these early publications of Erasmus's books, all of which were provided with new title pages, it became too expensive to commission new title-page woodcuts every time, and Froben therefore began to employ borders or woodcuts previously used in other publications, especially for the smaller volumes of Erasmus's writings. When recycling these borders and illustrations, however, Froben made sure that their themes did not contradict the textual content. There was little danger of this occurring in the case of works in small format, whose title-page illustrations or borders were usually neutral, displaying columns, candelabra, ornaments, or at most fools and putti, for example, but rarely anything alluding to the book's contents.²⁰ From time to time, however, Froben also commissioned special title-page illustrations for octavo editions and anthologies.²¹ Erasmus published numerous books in this smaller format, examples being the *Moriae Encomium* and the various editions of *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*. It seems that large editions were more likely to be given a new title page than less easily marketable volumes. Short treatises and pieces written for special occasions were sometimes published in anthologies, whose title pages could not possibly refer to the individual pieces of writing to the extent they did in longer works or in publications in quarto or folio format, whose higher prices naturally justified costlier and higher-quality illustrations and decoration. Even so,



4 Urs Graf, *Text borders with satyr to the left and putto to the right, putti above and below*. Woodcuts, in: *Novum Instrumentum omne, diligenter ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum & emendatum...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, February 1516.
Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Basel, FG v 39

Froben consistently adhered to the principle of designing his publications – including the volumes in small format – with meticulous typography and appropriate illustrations.

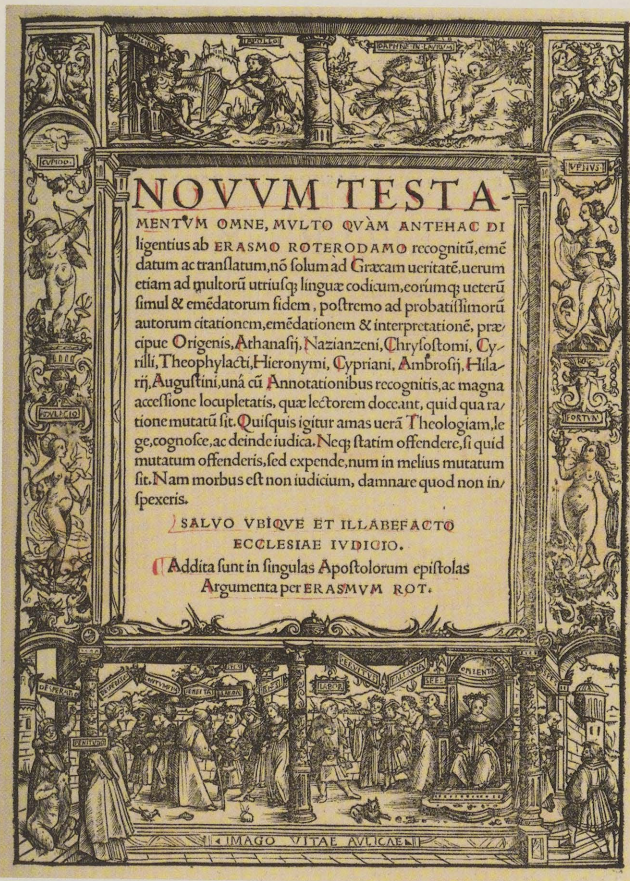
In addition to commissioning title-page borders clearly intended for use in particular books, Froben and other printers used large numbers of borders that were either purely ornamental or whose obvious thematic neutrality precluded direct references to given publications. Books by Erasmus were no exception, and it seems that he paid less attention to the title-page borders for quarto and octavo editions. Both Ambrosius Holbein and his brother Hans designed title pages whose wide applicability had probably been requested by the publisher. While such illustrations frequently referred to humanistic themes and were sometimes made for (and often re-used in) books by Erasmus, their thematic content did not tie them to a certain



5 Urs Graf, *Text borders with playing children and a candelabra, above putto with tendril*. Woodcuts, in: *Novum Instrumentum omne, diligenter ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum & emendatum...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, February 1516.
Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Basel, FG v 39

type of publication. Examples include the title-page woodcut, designed by Ambrosius Holbein, which depicts the suicide of Lucretia,²² and the title-page border designed by Hans Holbein the Younger that depicts the beheading of John the Baptist.²³ This list could easily be expanded to include numerous instances of the use of such title-page illustrations or borders in publications of Erasmus's writings.

Much more interesting, however – for an understanding of both the publisher's biases and the connection between an illustrated title page and the contents of the book in which it appeared – are those publications for which new illustrations were made or whose decoration, even when it consisted of older blocks and borders, was chosen to elucidate the book's contents. Most of these books were in large format and were therefore relatively expensive and prestigious, outstanding examples being the two editions of the New

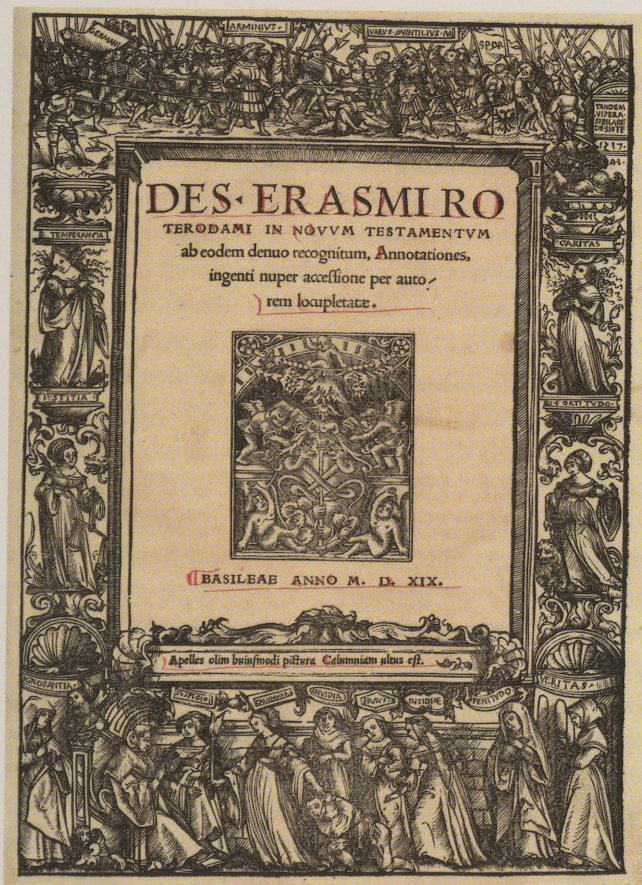


6 Ambrosius Holbein, *Imago Vitae Aulicae*, text border. Woodcut, first used in: *Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, Ex recognitione Erasmi Roterodami*, Basel: Johannes Froben, June 1518, here used for: *Novum Testamentum omne, multo quam antehac diligentius ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum, emendatum ac translatum...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, March 1519. Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Basel, FG 40

Testament published in 1516 and 1519. As was the case with the 1513 and 1515 editions of the *Adagia*, the decoration and embellishment of the second edition of the New Testament was altered and even more finely tuned to the content. The title page of the first edition had contained typographic design but no further embellishment.²⁴ The text was illustrated with seven black-ground borders by Urs Graf, three of which had already been used by Froben in the second edition of the *Adagia* (fig. 4), whereas the others were new illustrations that complemented the decorative programme of the three existing borders (fig. 5).²⁵ The four new borders were used to embellish Erasmus's dedicatory letter to Leo X, the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew and the opening of the *Annotationes*. They display columns and candelabra with figures standing on them, and while

they follow the general interest in grotesques and therefore the current Italian fashion, they have no thematic content specific to the New Testament. The beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, for example, is decorated with the vertical satyr border of the dedicatory letter and the three borders used for the second edition of the *Adagia*, but they are obviously neutral in content and unconnected with the text. The reasons for this approach remain unclear. We can exclude any problem with the workshop's capacity or possible financial difficulties, so it was probably Urs Graf's absence that caused the lack of new book embellishment.²⁶

As was the case with the new edition of the *Adagia*, Erasmus continued to work on his edition and translation of the New Testament after his manuscript had gone to press. Having experienced something similar when publishing the *Adagia*, Froben now took this opportunity to plan the publication of the new, revised edition. It is not clear to what extent Erasmus was involved in the design of the new edition or whether he even considered a new layout necessary. In his letters to Pirckheimer he reported on the progress he was making with the New Testament edition, but did not mention any new illustrations or decoration.²⁷ The new edition was clearly costlier and more elaborate than the first edition.²⁸ Urs Graf's four borders, which had framed the opening of the Gospel of Matthew in the first edition, were re-used, though in a different arrangement. In addition, Froben used two title pages and a text border by Ambrosius Holbein, which had recently been produced for other publications. Even though these three borders were not directly connected with the New Testament, altogether they reveal a programme that delves more deeply than the first edition into Erasmus's situation and his understanding of the world. The decorative programme is interrupted only by Graf's four borders; otherwise it follows a consistent line of reasoning. The volume contains the title-page woodcut with the *Imago Vitae Aulicae* (Depiction of Courtly Life), representing the dubious destiny of the courtier who is rich when he arrives at court but is impoverished and mocked when finally expelled (fig. 6). The four figures of antiquity on either side of the title strengthen this interpretation.²⁹ The title-page woodcut for the volume of commentary, likewise designed by Ambrosius Holbein and probably also executed by him, displays 'The Calumny of Apelles' in the bottom border, four virtues (to the left, Justice and Temperance; to the right, Charity



7 Ambrosius Holbein, *Title-page illustration with the battle of Varus and the calumny of Apelles*. Woodcut, first used in: *Maximi Tyrrii philosophi Platonici Sermones...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, January 1519, here used for: *Novum Testamentum omne, multo quam antehac diligentius ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum, emendatum ac translatum...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, March 1519. Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Basel, FG 40

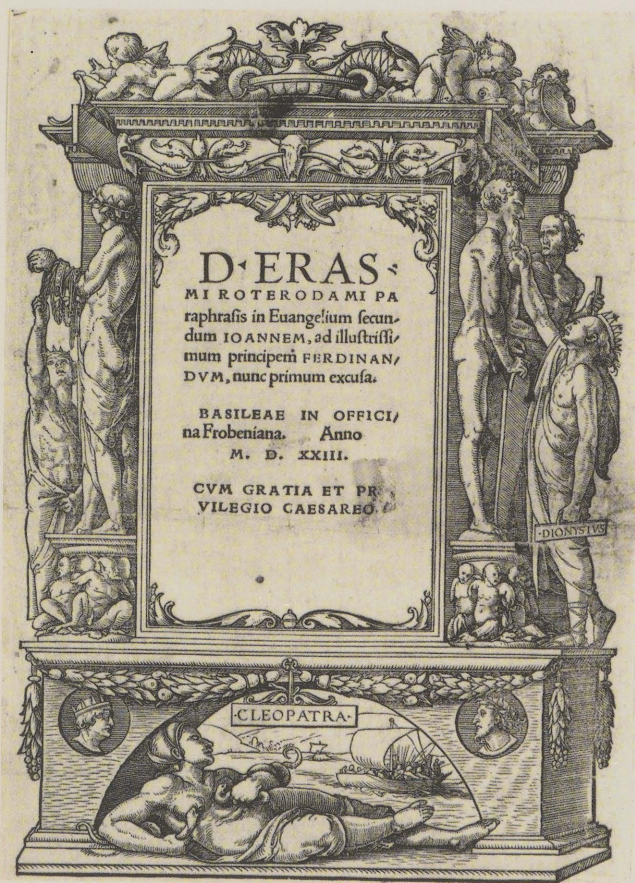
and Fortitude) and above, 'The Battle between Arminius and Varus' (fig. 7). This title-page woodcut, too, was neither designed specially for this volume nor used here for the first time,³⁰ but it focuses on such human weaknesses as deceit and mendacity, which are juxtaposed with the four virtues. The aim of human behaviour should be to ponder these virtues and to promote the liberal arts. Accordingly, it cannot have been a purely practical necessity to use Ambrosius Holbein's title-page illustrations with playing children as personifications of the liberal arts as the title-page border marking the beginning of Erasmus's annotations to the New Testament (fig. 8). It is tempting to assume that it was either Beatus Rhenanus or Erasmus himself who decided on this arrangement, since it is clearly a pointed criticism of envy, secular power and human misbehaviour.



8 Ambrosius Holbein, *Title-page illustration with children as the Artes Liberales*. Woodcut, first used in: *Gaius Suetonius Tranquillius, Ex recognitione Erasmi Roterodami*, Basel: Johannes Froben, June 1518, here used for: *Novum Testamentum omne, multo quam antehac diligentius ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum, emendatum ac translatum...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, March 1519. Basel, Universitätsbibliothek Basel, FG 40

Moral Guideline

Some years later Erasmus expressed these views openly in the dedication of his Paraphrase of the Gospel of John.³² As noted on the title page, the book was dedicated to Archduke Ferdinand, the brother of Emperor Charles v. In his dedicatory letter, Erasmus discusses in detail the importance – for rulers in particular – of the Gospel, which constitutes a guideline for morally correct and exemplary behaviour. Rulers are not responsible only for themselves, as lesser mortals are; rather, their elevated position is accompanied by increased responsibility towards their subjects. Sinful behaviour would inevitably harm their subjects and the country as a whole, and bring their government into disrepute. For this reason alone, every ruler must behave with a clear conscience and in good faith before God, his actions



9 Hans Lützelburger after Hans Holbein the Younger, *Title-page illustration with Cleopatra and Dionysius of Syracuse*. Woodcut, in: Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Evangelium secundum Ioannem, ad illustrissimum principum Ferdinandum, nunc primum excusa...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, February 1523. Basel, Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. X.2145

attuned to the message of the Gospel. In the case of a Christian ruler, this means, above all, renouncing all power, earthly possessions and pleasures of the flesh, for only in this way can he avoid comparison with the bad example of heathen potentates. It is precisely such wanton behaviour that was depicted – probably at Erasmus's suggestion – in the title-page illustration (fig. 9),³³ which shows Cleopatra – whose defeat at the hands of Octavian is imminent – holding to her breast the snake by which she intends to commit suicide. Her lover, Mark Anthony, has already killed himself. The upper part of the illustration displays Dionysius I of Syracuse, looting treasures from various statues of the gods. On the left, he steals the votive offerings from the arm of an unidentified statue; on the right, he rips the golden beard off Asclepius. Dionysius thus committed a sacrilege against the gods and the votive offerings they had

received; indeed, the scornful glance cast by Apollo at the statue of his father clearly shows his disapproval. Like the dedicatory letter, the title page thus condemns covetousness and a yearning for riches and power as wrongful and immoral behaviour.

In some instances we can only assume that the decorative programme consisting of title page and text borders was the idea of Beatus Rhenanus or Erasmus, but here the careful wording of the dedicatory letter and the clear connection between the dedication and the title page are obvious signs of their involvement. Even though Erasmus does not openly refer to the persons portrayed, it is nevertheless clear that he chose this image because it lent weight to his words. This is underscored not only by the unusual and technically complicated form of the altar-like architecture but also by the specific cutting technique. As it says in the dedicatory letter, both potentates are caught in the act, as it were; their actions are not put in any temporal context or inferred from their result, but themselves become the subject of the image, clearly highlighting the negative aspects of wrongful behaviour. This title page is exceptional not only in its formal and thematic aspects, but also for another reason: it is one of the few title pages designed by Hans Holbein that lacks a border around the edge, which means that the printing block was much more fragile. It remains one of only two title pages – in both Holbein's oeuvre and Erasmus's publications – to have no such stabilizing frame.³⁴

However, the close thematic connection these title pages bore to the contents of the books they embellished made them much more difficult to use in other publications. Even though this particular woodcut was copied almost as soon as it appeared, its image was understandable in only a few contexts. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that even Froben rarely re-used this title page outside its original context.

Nevertheless, most instances of its use make sense, even when it alludes rather obliquely to the contents of the book. The direct reference – such as the re-use of the title page for the new edition of the New Testament or the Paraphrase of the Gospel of John – remains the exception, but it clearly reveals an otherwise vague interest on the part of Erasmus and Rhenanus in decorating publications with high-quality illustrations related to the books' contents. After 1519, however, Erasmus – sensing his vulnerability – acted with increasing circumspection.³⁵ This may explain why the phenomenon

manifests itself mainly in the years before 1519, and after that only in costly folio editions.

Lord's Prayer

There is only one properly illustrated book of Erasmus's writings. This is hardly surprising, since his own texts and those annotated by him did not necessarily lend themselves to illustration. The exception is one short piece of writing produced very quickly for a special occasion and published in a great hurry (cat. 74).³⁶ Erasmus wrote his commentary on the Lord's Prayer (*Precatio Dominica*) at the request of Jostus Ludovicus Decius (Dietz), born in Weissenburg in Alsace, who was secretary to King Sigismund of Poland. Dietz had suggested dividing the Lord's Prayer into seven 'portions', one for each day of the week. Erasmus readily took up this idea, writing a commentary on the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4) and summarizing its origins in his dedicatory letter of 24 October 1523.³⁷

It became one of the most popular editions of Erasmus that Froben ever published: the first, unillustrated edition (1523) was immediately followed by a second edition with illustrations (1524). Moreover, it was reprinted that same year by Johann Bebel in Basel, who used the same eight metalcuts executed by Master cv after designs by Hans Holbein the Younger, but with other ornamental initials.³⁸

This rapid succession of printings was due not only to the great popularity of the commentary itself and the close connection between word and image, but also to the fame and significance of the prayer. Each passage was accompanied by an image that sought to illustrate the content of the prayer as well as Erasmus's commentary. The series takes the Gospels as its point of departure, starting with the passage in which the disciples ask Jesus to teach them how to pray properly. He responds by explaining the difference between the correct way to pray and the incorrect manner of hypocrites. The first illustration (fig. 10), which shows Jesus standing on a small elevation, forms the pictorial and thematic overture to the series. Each entreaty is accompanied by a separate image. Surprisingly, however, Erasmus – and Holbein in his wake – did not confine himself to a purely evangelistic interpretation of the Lord's Prayer. Only the first, third and seventh images depict the actual biblical-historical content, whereas the others focus more on the daily devotions of the faithful. These three images show Jesus's prelude to the Lord's Prayer,



10 Master cv after Hans Holbein the Younger, *First entreaty*. Metalcut, first used in: *Precatio Dominica in septem portiones distributa (iuxta septem dies) per D. Erasmus Roterodamum*, Basel: Johannes Froben, early 1524. Basel, Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. x. 2184.2

the miracle of Pentecost and a summary of various miraculous healings performed by Jesus.³⁹ The fifth entreaty is reminiscent of Dürer's woodcut of Christ in Limbo, but there is no more than this rather superficial iconographic reference. The image is connected to Erasmus's commentary, but not to the text of the Gospels. This is not the case with the first illustration, and another exception is the image accompanying the sixth entreaty, which represents a pictorial summary of the story of Job. Here Holbein departed from the tradition of biblical illustration that isolates individual scenes, depicting instead the sum total of all the episodes of the story. This allowed him to include everyday situations, such as seen in the first and third entreaty, whose illustrations depict the worship of God (fig. 10) or the humility of the faithful, carrying their crosses and thus following Christ. The fourth entreaty, too, illustrates an aspect of daily life, in this case a priest preaching to a multitude, while the sacrament of the Eucharist is



11 Jacob Faber after Hans Holbein the Younger, trial proofs for a *Hortulus Animae*. Eight metalcuts. Basel, Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. x.2170

celebrated in the background (cat. 74). The resemblance of the church to Basel Cathedral was certainly deliberate, and figures' contemporary attire brings the depiction into the world of Holbein, Erasmus and his readership, while the celebration of Communion is reminiscent of the Passion of Christ.

It has been pointed out on various occasions that these images do not fit easily into Holbein's later work. This is due, first of all, to the idiosyncratic technical approach of Master CV, who executed the metalcuts, as well as to the deepening of the spatial conception, which Holbein had developed in a series made just before this, a *Hortulus Animae* (fig. 11),⁴⁰ which at first glance seems to be unconnected to the illustrations for the *Precatio Dominica*. However, it clarifies several artistic issues and perhaps explains Holbein's – and probably also Erasmus's – specific approach. The depiction of Pentecost in the *Hortulus Animae* series, for example, is divided into earthly and heavenly spheres. The prominent border of clouds and the striking frontality of the figures constitute the formal basis of some of the representations of the *Precatio Dominica* metalcuts, such as the illustrations to the first three prayers: the Worship of God, the Miracle of Pentecost and the Kingdom of God, respectively. The spatial conception of the other depictions, too, is clearly derived from the *Hortulus Animae*

sheets. The pronounced development of depth had begun in the *Hortulus* series, however, and was merely continued in the *Precatio* illustrations. That Holbein was unable to come up with completely new pictorial solutions was no doubt due to the short period of time available for the design and execution of these illustrations, and to the importance of retaining a close connection between text and image. At any rate, the *Precatio Dominica* metalcuts differ clearly from most of Holbein's other prints, owing to their particular technique and small format. Before executing prints after designs by Holbein, Master CV had developed a technique in which fine but uniform parallel hatching defined the forms but in no way expressed the volumes. This was in stark contrast not only to previous metalcuts, executed exclusively by Jacob Faber, but also to the more modern appearance of the woodcuts used in book illustration. Both Kogler and Reinhardt emphasized that this tonal effect had been Holbein's intention,⁴¹ but overlooked the role played by Master CV's cutting technique. Even though the composition was derived, as Reinhardt rightly pointed out, from the metalcuts of the *Hortulus Animae*, he did not point to the cutting technique which, in the end, is responsible for the deployment of light and shade. The definition of space, as well as the arrangement and grouping of the figures, had to some extent

been determined by Holbein's drawing; the engraver changed these things, if at all, only in detail. He was responsible for the sheet's final appearance, and herein lies the clear difference between Master CV and Faber: Faber himself, however, needed several years and close examination of the woodcuts executed by Lützelburger to achieve the much clearer effect of the *Hortulus Animae* metalcuts. In the purely technical sense (but not as regards composition), the *Precatio Dominica* illustrations reveal parallels to the metalcuts previously designed (around 1519) for a first *Hortulus Animae* series.⁴² There, too, Faber's cutting technique differs markedly from his later approach. Producing metalcuts was obviously much more labour-intensive than making woodcuts, the latter process allowing a much more precise transcription of Holbein's ideas and admitting of the precision he had in mind. Thus the illustrations designed for the *Precatio Dominica* closely resemble copies after Holbein's designs or, at the most, freely composed compilations, but cannot be compared with the illustrations Holbein made in collaboration with his engravers, Faber and Lützelburger. This explains in part the lack of clarity and openness in the treatment of line, but changes nothing as regards pictorial expression and the connection between text and image. For an author like Erasmus, however, such technical questions were of secondary importance.

Conclusion

It has become apparent – not only from the treatment and use of these illustrations for the *Precatio Dominica*, but from title pages and text borders overall – that there was a much closer relationship between text and image than has generally been assumed. Even though Erasmus scarcely commented in his letters on such book illustrations or their production, it is obvious from the publications important to him that he paid special attention to their decoration and took pains – to a much greater degree than was usual in those days – to choose illustrations that were thematically suitable. A book's title page, text border and illustrations thus became a means of enhancing its content or clarifying a general stance without recourse to further text. Erasmus and Beatus Rhenanus were evidently aware of the possibilities offered by this new medium, which goes some way towards explaining their use and re-use of existing designs and their decision to commission many new inventions.

1 See Giese 1935; Panofsky 1951; Panofsky 1969; Nauwelaerts 1973; Hayum 1985; Schmidt 1995. In this context see the remarks made by Peter van der Coelen in his essay in this catalogue.

2 It is not possible to mention here the extensive literature on this engraving. See Matthias Mende's recent comments in Schoch/Mende/Scherbaum 2001-2004, no. 102, with a list of the most important literature.

3 The complex problems involving the portraits of Erasmus cannot be dealt with here. Cf. Winner 2006.

4 For a recent assessment of Dürer's portrait engravings, see Matthias Mende, 'Die Porträtstiche', in Schoch/Mende/Scherbaum 2001-2004, vol. 1, pp. 218-220.

5 *De recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronuntiatione*, 1528; CWE 26, pp. 398-399; ASD 1, 4, pp. 39-40.

6 See Rümelin 2002; Noll 2004; Thum 2006.

7 An exception is the title page to the *Moria* published in 1512 by Dirk Martens in Antwerp; it shows a personification of 'eloquent folly' at a lectern (fig. 8, p. 26). More elaborate title-page illustrations began to appear with increasing frequency only later in Basel.

8 De Simone 2004 provides a good introduction to this subject.

9 For an overview, see, among others, Harthan 1997; Bartram 2001; De Simone 2004.

10 *Erasmi Roterodami Germaniae decoris Adagiorum Chiliades tres, ac centuriae fere totidem*, Basel: Johannes Froben, August 1513 (VD16, E1931). For further details of this title page, see H., XI, C. 296; Hieronymus 1984, nos. 148 and 149 (for its further uses); Hieronymus 1992, no. 12; Koppe 1995, no. 23; Müller 2001, no. D33.

11 Beatus Rhenanus (né Beat Bild, 1485-1547) was born in Sélestat, where he attended the Latin School. After studying in Paris, he became a corrector and proofreader for Matthias Schürer in Strasbourg. From 1511 onwards he worked in Basel as

a corrector for Johannes Froben and finally as Erasmus's collaborator. See, among others, Walter 1986 and Hirstein 2000.

12 Johannes Froben (c. 1460-1527) settled in Basel in 1491, where he first worked with Johannes Amerbach and Johannes Petri, and later on his own. These three printers were eventually responsible for Basel's development into a centre of humanist publishing. After Erasmus settled in Basel, Froben published roughly half of the first editions of his work. For more details of Froben's life, see Pfister 1961, pp. 638-640; Hieronymus 2005.

13 See Hieronymus 1984, no. 148a; Koppe 1995, no. 22.

14 Other incentives to buy the book were its meticulous typography, the clearly distinguishable numbers marking the various proverbs, numerous decorative borders and the index compiled by Schürer.

15 *Io. Frobenius Lectori S. Accipe studiosae lector obvius (quod aiunt) manibus Proverborum Erasmi Roterodami Chiliadas, sic ab autore nuper auctas, ut operi supra priores evulgationes plus quam quarta pars accesserit. Equidem hanc novissimam aeditionem vinctis impendio profuturam credimus, tum quod sit oppido quam castigata, tum quod ob novam accessionem ex optimis autoribus affatim sit locupletata...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, 1515 (VD16, E1934). See H., XI, C. 341; Hieronymus 1984, no. 151; Hieronymus 1992, no. 14; Koppe 1995, no. 23; Müller 2001, no. 35. Two of these commentaries were later published separately under the title *Sileni Alcibiadis. Per Des. Erasmy Roterodami. Cum Scholijs Ioannis Frobenij*, Basel: Johannes Froben, 1517 (VD16, E1990).

16 In addition to the title-page illustration, Froben used some ornamental initials and black-grounded text borders from four blocks, which depict Venus or Amor standing on candelabras, a garland with a

putto's head above and two putti below, presenting an empty escutcheon, as well as his printer's mark. For more details see H., XI, C.340a-h; Hieronymus 1984, no. 151; Müller 2001, nos. G38.1 and G38.2. The text border, which was used for Erasmus's preface, was later employed in a number of Froben's publications.

17 *D. Erasmi Roterodami viri undecunq̄ue doctissimi lucubrationes, quarum index positus est facie sequenti*, Strasbourg: Matthias Schürer, September 1515 (VD16, E2745). See Hieronymus 1984, no. 153.

18 Hans Schäufolein had occasionally used this horizontal hatching, which can be seen, for example, in a 1512 title-page illustration with symbols of the Four Evangelists and prophets. For the title page in question, see Schreyll 1990, no. 436.

19 The four borders of the following preface are also based on a border designed by Graf, but are inferior in the quality of their execution.

20 Examples are the metalcut borders portraying Caesar and Hector by Jacob Faber after designs by Hans Holbein, which were used in various books by Erasmus published by Froben.

21 An outstanding example of his typographic invention is *In hoc opere contenta: Ludus L. Annaei Senecae, De morte Claudij Caesaris, nuper in Germania repertus, cum Scholijis Beati Rhenani. Synesius Cyrenensis de laudibus Calvitij, Ioanne Phrea Britanno interprete, cum scholijis Beati Rhenani. Erasmi Roterodami Moriae Encomium, cum commentarijs Gerardi Listrii, trium linguarum periti*, Basel: Johannes Froben, August 1515 (VD16, E3183), see Hieronymus 1984, no. 171 (including a list of the other publications – by Erasmus and others – for which it was used); H., XI, no. C.319; Hieronymus 1992, no. 15; Müller 2001, no. G36.

22 First used in *Des. Erasmi Roterodami de duplici copia*

verborum ac rerum commentarii duo; Erasmi de ratione studii, deque pueris instituendis commentariolus ad Petrum Viterium Gallum; Erasmi de laudibus literariae societatis, reipublicae ac magistratuum urbis Argentinae, epistola plane Erasmica..., Basel: Johannes Froben, 1517. On this border, see Hieronymus 1984, no. 248; H., XIV, no. 3; Koppe 1995, no. 27.

23 First used in *Scipionis Carteromachi Pistoriensis oratio de laudibus literarum graecarum*, Basel: Johannes Froben, 1517 (VD16, E3184); see Hieronymus 1984, no. 238; H., XIV, no. 13; Koppe 1995, no. 47; Müller 1997, no. 14.

24 *Novum Instrumentum omne, diligenter ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum & emendatum...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, February 1516 (VD16, B4196). See Hieronymus 1984, no. 175a; Hieronymus 1992, no. 16.

25 The vertical border with the depiction of Eve standing on a column was not used. See H., XI, no. C.340a-h; Müller 2001, no. D38.2.

26 Urs Graf is known to have taken part in the Marignano campaign. It is not clear when he returned to Basel. Froben dated his preface and therefore the beginning of printing to 25 February 1516, but it is unlikely that Graf had returned from Northern Italy by then.

27 Letters to Willibald Pirckheimer 16 October 1515, 12 May 1516 and July–August 1518; Ep. 362, 407, 856.

28 *Novum Testamentum omne, multo quam antehac diligentius ab Erasmo Roterodamo recognitum, emendatum ac translatum...*, 2 vols., Basel: Johannes Froben, March 1519 (VD16, B4197/E3093). See Hieronymus 1985, p. 249, no. 259; Hieronymus 1992, no. 380.

29 This title-page woodcut was first used in *Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, Ex recognitione Erasmi Roterodami*, Basel: Johannes Froben, June 1518 (20). Regarding this title-page woodcut, see Hieronymus 1984, nos. 262/263, H., XIV,

no. 14a; Hieronymus 1992, no. 380; Koppe 1995, no. 39.

30 According to the date at the upper left, the woodcut was designed around 1517 for an edition that was not published until 1520: *P. Vellei Paterculi Historiae Romanae duo volumina ... per Beatum Rhenanum ... ab interitu utquinq̄ue vindicata*, Basel: Johannes Froben, 1520, 20 (VD16, V516). See Hieronymus 1984, no. 367. It was first used in *Maximi Tyrii philosophi Platonici Sermones e Graeca in Latinam linguam versi Cosmo Paccio interprete*, Basel: Johannes Froben, January 1519. See Hieronymus 1984, no. 259; H., XIV, no. 19a and Koppe, no. 41, with a detailed discussion of the delay and the background. One must agree in principle with Koppe, who maintains that the title page was intended for Beatus Rhenanus's edition of Velleius Paterculus, but this does not exclude the possibility of other suitable uses of this image.

31 This border, too, first appeared in Suetonius (see note 29), where it opened up a similar discourse.

32 Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrasis in Evangelium secundum Ioannem, ad illustrissimum principum Ferdinandum, nunc primum excusa...*, Basel: Johannes Froben, February 1523 (VD16, E3344).

33 See, most recently, Basel 2006, no. D10, with a list of the older literature and a comment on the technical aspects of this woodcut, designed by Hans Holbein and executed by Hans Lützelburger. Another book illustration that could be considered political in nature – if one accepts the usual attribution of this text to Erasmus – is the title page to *Julius exclusus* (cat. 50). It remains an isolated case, however, since Erasmus's involvement is doubtful.

34 Only a few examples originated in the Upper Rhine region. They include a title page attributed to Urs Graf in the form of an epitaph, which was first used in *Der Ritter vom*

Turn..., Basel: Michael Furter, 1513 (VD16, L651) and Ambrosius Holbein's title-page border featuring the Coat of arms of the Holy Roman Empire and Froben's coat of arms first used in Homer, *Batrachomyomachia*, Basel: Johannes Froben, January 1518 (VD16, H4611; see Hieronymus 1984, no. 143, Hieronymus 1992, no. 19; Koppe 1995, no. 33), as well as Hans Holbein's title page depicting Aristotle and Phyllis (see, among others, Müller 1997, no. 36).

35 See Bietenholz 1977.

36 First used in *Precatio Dominica in septem portiones distributa (iuxta septem dies) per D. Erasmus Roterodamum*, Basel: Johannes Froben [early 1524]. See, most recently, Basel 2006, no. D20, with a list of the older literature.

37 For an overview of the translations and other editions, including those produced outside Basel, see the list in Hieronymus 1984, no. 436.

38 This clarification of the differences between the early editions was made by Reinhardt 1977, p. 238.

39 Reinhardt 1977, p. 238, rightly recognized in this depiction a contemporary death scene, though it also refers to Hans Holbein's painting of the dead Christ and more generally to the late-medieval tradition of depicting the *Ars moriendi*.

40 See, most recently, Basel 2006, no. D18, with a list of the older literature.

41 Koegler 1936, p. 183; Reinhardt 1977, p. 238.

42 Regarding these metalcuts, see Müller 1997, no. 80.