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Erasmus and Geography

by  
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# Erasmus and Geography

Nathan Ron \*

*Koyré argued that Renaissance humanistic scholarship had been the enemy of science: humanists preferred pouring over ancient texts much more than exploring nature and promoting knowledge associated with it—namely science. Later research, predominantly Grafton's works, contradicted Koyré's view and showed that Humanism played an important role in the development of science, actually paving the way for Galileo. Undoubtedly, Erasmus contributed to that development. His non-dogmatic and skeptical mind—as well as that legacy of his which is dubbed Erasmianism—influenced and irrigated, often as an undercurrent, the intellectual soil, and thus enhanced the emergence of later science.*

*Erasmus considered geography as a mathematical science, as he stated in the preface to his edition of Ptolemy's Geography. But this conception was common; Erasmus, far from being engaged with mathematics, also had not much attentiveness to geography. I shall argue that his scholarly interest in geography was limited and marginal, and that the fact that he took upon himself to prepare Ptolemy's Geography for print in its original language was for him more of a textual-philological task than a truly geographical challenge. This should raise a question mark over any alleged 'Erasmian science'.*

## 1. Introduction

Decades ago Alexandre Koyré argued that Renaissance humanistic scholarship had been the enemy of science: humanists preferred pouring over ancient texts much more than exploring nature and promoting knowledge associated with it—namely science. Koyré held the Renaissance guilty of developing an

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aesthetic spirit, imbued of rhetorics and erudition (and of magic, up to a certain degree), which delayed the later findings of 17<sup>th</sup> century science<sup>1</sup>. Later research, predominantly Anthony Grafton's works, contradicted Koyrés' view and showed that humanism played an important role in the development of science, actually paving the way for Galileo<sup>2</sup>. Undoubtedly, Erasmus contributed to that development. His non-dogmatic and skeptical mind—as well as that legacy of his which is dubbed Erasmianism—influenced and irrigated, often as an undercurrent, the intellectual soil, and thus enhanced the emergence of later science<sup>3</sup>.

Erasmus considered geography to be a mathematical science, as he stated in the preface to his Greek *editio princeps* of Ptolemy's *Geography*: “geography became more attractive and more necessary than other mathematical disciplines (...).”<sup>4</sup>. Though such a conception of geography was common, particularly by those who studied Ptolemy's works<sup>5</sup>, Erasmus, far from being engaged with

<sup>1</sup> Alexandre Koyré, “L'apport scientifique de la Renaissance”, in *Études d'histoire de la pensée scientifique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 38-40. The issue is discussed by Brian P. Copenhaver, “Did Science Have Renaissance?”, *Isis* 83 (1992): 387-407.

<sup>2</sup> See Anthony Grafton, “Humanism, Magi and Science”, in *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe*, ed. Anthony Goodman and Angus MacKay (London: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1990), 99-117; Id., *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in the Age of Science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 1-15; Ann Blair and Anthony Grafton, “Renaissance Humanism and Science”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 535-540.

<sup>3</sup> Erasmus' skepticism in doctrine and politics (respectively): Erika Rummel, *Erasmus* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 90-105; James D. Tracy, *The Politics of Erasmus: A Pacifist Intellectual and his Political Milieu* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 109-114. On Erasmian legacy (Erasmianism), from Grotius to Trevor-Roper and Pocock: Johannes Trapman, “Grotius and Erasmus”, in *Hugo Grotius Theologian: Essays in Honour of G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes*, ed. Henk J. M. Nellen and Edwin Rabbie (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 77-98; Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, “Desiderius Erasmus”, in *Men and Events: Historical Essays* (Hippocrene Books, 1977; first published by Harper, 1957), 35-60; Id., “The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment”, in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change and other essays* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 193-236; J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 5 vols., 1, *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon 1737-1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 131.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Zur Shalev of Haifa University for his inspiring guidance and comments. My translation of Erasmus' preface appended to this paper is an outcome of his advice.

<sup>5</sup> On mathematics as a prerequisite of Renaissance science and on the mathematical side of geography: Eugene F. Rice, jr. and Anthony Grafton, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe 1460-1559* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1994; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), 22; Specific references to mathematical aspects in studying Ptolemy: Alexander Jones, “Ptolemy's *Geography*: A Reform that Failed”, in

mathematics, also had not much attentiveness to geography. I shall argue in the following that his scholarly interest in geography was limited and marginal, and that the fact that he took upon himself to prepare Ptolemy's *Geography* for print in its original language was for him more of a textual-philological task than a truly geographical challenge. Ptolemy's importance is thoroughly emphasized by Erasmus, so far as to state that without Ptolemy the new geographical discoveries could not have been achieved, and geography could not obtain its new status as an attractive and necessary discipline<sup>1</sup>. I shall also point to Erasmus' underrating of the recent discoverers and discoveries, practically ignoring them, both in his general conception of geography and in his Greek edition of Ptolemy's *Geography* in particular.



## 2. Erasmus and Ptolemy's Geography

The study of Ptolemy's *Geographike hyphegesis* (*Guide to cartography*), usually known as *Geography*, has attracted much scholarly interest ever since the Renaissance. A partial bibliographical list compiled half a century ago specified thousands of entries<sup>2</sup>. The first Latin translation of Ptolemy's *Geography* was

*Ptolemy's Geography in the Renaissance*, ed. Zur Shalev and Charles Burnett (London and Turin: The Warburg Institute and Nino Aragno Editore, 2011), 16: "I would guess that Ptolemy had in mind a comprehensive presentation and perhaps reform of the empirical and mathematical foundations of positional geography"; Lesley B. Cormack, "Ptolemy at Work: The Role of the geography in geography and Mathematics Teaching in Early Modern England", in Shalev and Burnett, *Ptolemy's Geography in the Renaissance*, 205-224.

<sup>1</sup> In his preface to Ptolemy's *Geography*. See my Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> On the importance and influence of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the Renaissance: Zur Shalev, "Main Themes in the Study of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the Renaissance", in Shalev and Burnett, *Ptolemy's Geography in the Renaissance*, 1-14 (with a survey of the Ptolemaic editions and references to

prepared by Jacopo Angeli of Scarperia in 1406-1409<sup>1</sup>. The first printed edition, prepared by the 15<sup>th</sup>-century mathematician and astronomer Johann Müller of Königsberg (1436-76), known as Johannes Regiomontanus, appeared in 1475, and then dozens of others followed<sup>2</sup>. In its general outlines, the history of editing and publishing Ptolemy in the Renaissance is well known and documented<sup>3</sup>. Yet, the numerous printed editions of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the Renaissance require specific studies in order to place each in its particular context. All important humanists and scholars who edited Ptolemy's text—such as Erasmus, Servetus, Pirckheimer, Mercator—have prefaced their editions and thus provided significant testimonies of their perception of the author and his work<sup>4</sup>. Erasmus' edition, the *princeps* of Ptolemy's *Geography* in its original Greek version (1533, at the Froben print, Basle), deserves more research than it has received so far<sup>5</sup>. In the following, I shall elaborate on various aspects of Erasmus' edition and its preparation, so that Erasmus' own views, not only concerning

modern studies). This collection of 11 studies (and an appendix) covers every significant aspect of Ptolemy's *Geography*. For a wide scope survey of the presence and influence of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the West, including extensive modern research: Patrick Gautier-Dalché, *La Géographie de Ptolémée en Occident (IV<sup>e</sup>-XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

<sup>1</sup> Shalev, "Main Themes in the Study of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the Renaissance", 4; Dario Tessicini, "Definitions of Cosmography and Geography in the Wake of Ptolemy's *Geography*", 32-38; Roberto Weiss, "Jacopo Angeli da Scarperia (c.1360-1410-11)", in *Medioevo e Rinascimento. Studi in onore di Bruno Nardi* (Firenze: Sansoni 1955), 2, 801-27 (reprinted in *Medieval and Humanist Greek. Collected Essays by Roberto Weiss*, Padua, Antenore, 1977, 255-77). On the translation of the *Geography*, see Sebastiano Gentile, "Emanuele Crisolora e la 'Geographia' di Tolomeo", in *Dotti bizantini e libri greci nell'Italia del secolo XV*, ed. Mariarosa Cortesi and Enrico V. Maltese (Napoli: D'Auria, 1992), 291-308.

<sup>2</sup> On Regiomontanus' contribution to the study of Ptolemy's *Geography*: Shalev, "Main Themes", 5; Dario Tessicini, "Definitions of Cosmography and Geography in the Wake of Ptolemy's *Geography* in the Renaissance", in Shalev and Burnett, *Ptolemy's Geography in the Renaissance*, 40-44; Angelo Cattaneo, "Map Projections and Perspective in the Renaissance", *ibid.*, 70-73; Benjamin Weiss, "The Geography in Print: 1475-1530", *ibid.*, 114-115.

<sup>3</sup> Shalev, "Main Themes", 3-8; Benjamin Weiss, "The Geography in Print: 1475-1530", in Shalev and Burnett, *Ptolemy's Geography in the Renaissance*, 91-120.

<sup>4</sup> This point is made by Shalev, "Main Themes", 12.

<sup>5</sup> The only research dedicated to Erasmus' edition is Antoine De Smet, "Érasme et la cartographie", in *Scrinium Erasmianum*, vol. 1, ed. Joseph Coppens (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 277-291. Although extensive and comprehensive, Gautier-Dalché's *La Géographie de Ptolémée en occident* devotes only one sentence to Erasmus' edition, in the last page of the book. For Weiss, "The Geography in Print", Erasmus' edition is, unfortunately, out of scope.

Ptolemy and his work, but also on geography as a field of study and on the geographical discoveries of his time, be better traced and reconstructed.

Erasmus' preface to his edition was originally a letter of February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1533, written by Erasmus to the learned physician Theobald Fettich, a man of letters and a seeker of Greek manuscripts, who also possessed some knowledge of Hebrew<sup>1</sup>. He served as physician to the Elector Palatine, Louis, and later on became Wolfgang von Affenstein's physician<sup>2</sup>. As Erasmus tells us in his preface, Fettich supplied to Froben (*gratis*) a copy of the manuscript of the *Geography*, that he had made some time before. Once the edition was completed, the letter was chosen to serve as a preface<sup>3</sup>. The manuscript from which Fettich had made his copy was identified as *Vaticanus Palatinus Græcus 338*, a 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of 280 paper folios. From the autograph found on the 150<sup>th</sup> folio it was deduced that it was made in 1435-1437 by a certain Dukas, a notary or copyist of the Hagia Sophia church at Constantinople, for Johannes Stojković of Ragusa<sup>4</sup>. Paul Schnabel proved it to be the manuscript, of which Erasmus used a copy for his edition<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> See P.J. Allen's preface to *Allen* 1767.

<sup>2</sup> Affenstein was a legal procurator connected to a few elector counts in Germany as well as to the imperial court. In Worms he was in charge of the library of John von Dalberg. In December 1526, he was approached by Fettich, who acted on behalf of Erasmus and asked him to provide a Greek manuscript to Froben. Erasmus translated and published it as *Fragmentum commentariorum Origenis in Evangelium secundum Matthæum* ("A fragment of Origen's commentaries to the Gospel of Matthew", Basel: Froben, 1527). See: CoE, I, 11 (Affenstein); II, 25-26 (Fettich).

<sup>3</sup> On the letter (besides Allen's preface and notes to *Allen* 2760), see De Smet, "Érasme et la cartographie", 279-280.

<sup>4</sup> A Dominican Cardinal (c. 1380-1443) who spent years in Basel, visited Constantinople (1435-1437), and shortly before his death bequeathed his Greek manuscripts to the Dominican convent of Basle. See Alois Krchňák, *De vita et operibus Ioanni de Ragusio (Lateranum n. s. 26; Roma: Istituto Grafico Tiberino, 1960)*, 3-4; André Vernet, "Les manuscrits grecs de Jean de Raguse", *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 61 (1961), 75-108; John P. Kraljic, "John of Ragusa (1390/95-1433)", in *Nicholas of Cusa: A Companion to his Life and his Times*, ed. Morimichi Watanabe, Gerald Christianson and Thomas M. Izbicki (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 190-192 (including bibliography).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Schnabel, "Die Entstehungsgeschichte des kartographischen Erdbildes des Klaudios Ptolemaios", in *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, phil.-hist. Klasse, 14 (1930), 232-233; Id., *Text und Karten des Ptolemäus* (Leipzig: K. F. Koehlers Antiquarium, 1938), 11-14. De Smet, "Érasme et la cartographie", 281-285, accepts this identification and so does Florian Mitthenhuber, *Text und Kartentradition in der Geographie des Klaudios Ptolemaios: eine Geschichte der*

We have to consider also the role played by Froben—the outstanding printer of Basle, and Erasmus’ close associate and publisher—in the making of the Ptolemaic edition which is attributed to Erasmus. Until Schnabel published his work, it was thought that Froben had edited the Greek text of the *editio princeps* and that he, rather than Erasmus, should be credited for it. But this has been refuted. Although the edited Greek text itself (542 numerated pages, plus 2 innumerate) does not bear Erasmus’ name at all, and from the preface—the letter to Fettich—it may be inferred that Froben was the editor (“You were so kind as to prepare for the printer a copy of a work in Greek”), there is nowadays a consensus that Erasmus was the editor of the Ptolemaic text<sup>1</sup>. Although one should not underestimate Froben’s contribution, it was Erasmus who should be, and rightly is, recognized to be the editor. Admittedly, Erasmus made only a few and rather minor interventions throughout the manuscript. It means that the manuscript was quite uncorrupt and that Fettich had made a good work copying it.

In his preface Erasmus praises two of the past editors of the *Geography*, Johannes Regiomontanus and Willibald Pirckheimer of Nuremberg. Erasmus mentions Regiomontanus’ work in very general words, without referring to its title or contents. The printed edition of *Annotationes Joannis de Regio Monte, in errores Commissos a Jacobo Angelo in translatione sua* (“The Annotations of Johannes Regiomontanus on the errors committed by Jacopo Angeli in his translation”) appeared in Vicenza, 1475. It is a detailed examination of the first Latin edition of Ptolemy’s *Geography* published by Jacopo Angeli, in the light of Ptolemy’s text. Each Greek passage is compared with its Latin translation and followed by Regiomontanus’s annotations. It had an impact on later editions and especially on the one produced by Willibald Pirckheimer in 1525, and which, as I mentioned, Erasmus praised in his preface<sup>2</sup>. Pirckheimer published

*Kartenüberlieferung vom ptolemäischen Original bis in die Renaissance* (Bern: BoD-Books on Demand, 2009), 20–21.

<sup>1</sup> P. S. Allen (*Allen 2760*) commented: “Neither the title-page nor the contents suggest that Erasmus had anything to do with the editing”. The attribution of the work to Erasmus was established by Paul Schnabel, “Die Entstehungsgeschichte”, 232–233. See also De Smet, “Érasme et la cartographie”, 281–285. Schnabel relied mainly on three indications which are to be found in the edited text of the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of Ptolemy’s 7<sup>th</sup> book: two explanatory notes in the Latin handwriting of Erasmus, as Schnabel argued, as well as a drawing, attributed by Schnabel to Erasmus, and different from the (erroneous) one in the manuscript.

<sup>2</sup> On Regiomontanus’ work, see fn. 2 on page 4.

a translation into Latin of Ptolemy's *Geography* based on Greek manuscripts and added to his work Regiomontanus' critical remarks to Angeli's translation. Pirckheimer's work included also fifty maps, copies of maps which were published in various earlier editions originally prepared by the group of humanists known as "Gymnasium Vosagense" in Saint-Dié-des-Vosges, the center of scholarship and printing in the province of Lorraine<sup>1</sup>. The Ptolemaic editions published there by Martin Waldseemüller, Matthias Ringmann and their colleagues during 1513-1525 included not only the *Geography* (translated into Latin), but also important references to the geographical discoveries and appendices containing the finest state-of-the-art world maps<sup>2</sup>. Pirckheimer's edition was considered the best Latin edition to have appeared and soon replaced Angeli's work as the publishers' preferred choice. It improved Angeli's version in many ways, not least in the elegance of the Latin<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Grafton, April Shelford and Nancy Siraisi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), 52; Robert W. Karrow, *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth Century and Their Maps: Bio-Bibliographies of the Cartographers of Abraham Ortelius, 1570* (Chicago: Speculum Orbis Press for The Newberry Library, 1993), 581; Toby Lester, *The Fourth Part of the World: The Race to the Ends of the Earth, and the Epic Story of the Map That Gave America Its Name* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 327-393; Shalev, "Main Themes", 6; Alfred Hiatt, "Mutation and Supplement: The 1513 Strasbourg Ptolemy", in Shalev and Burnett, *Ptolemy's Geography in the Renaissance*, 143-166.

<sup>2</sup> The appendix of modern maps (*Supplementum modernior*) which Waldseemüller added to his 1513 edition is often praised as the first modern atlas of the world. In his introduction to these maps Waldseemüller explained that he and his colleagues limited their edition of Ptolemy to the first part. It is clear to everyone that Ptolemy, since time passes by and things change, deviated significantly from the findings of the modern explorers. This should not be attributed to Ptolemy's ignorance and the appendix is intended to update the reader to the most recent discoveries. See: Karrow, *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth Century*, 579.

<sup>3</sup> It was first published by Grüninger in Strasbourg in 1525: *Claudii Ptolemæi Geographicae narrationis libri octo Bilibaldo Pirckeymhero Interprete. Annotationes Ioannis de Regio Monte in errores commissos a Iacobo Angelo in translatione sua*, Argentorati, Iohannes Grieningerus, communibus Iohannes Koburger impensis excudebat. Pirckheimer also criticized another translation, that of the Nürnberger Johann Werner (Ioannes Berenherus). In his prefatory letter Pirckheimer said that Angeli lacked knowledge of both Greek and mathematics, whereas Werner, whom he praised as a great mathematician, did not possess a sufficient knowledge of Greek. Werner's translation was incomplete and included only the first part of the seventh book of Ptolemy's *Geography* and had no reference to the geographical discoveries of the period. See: De Smet, "Érasme et la cartographie", 286-287 e n. 27; Shalev, "Main Themes", 6-7; Tessicini, "Definitions of Cosmography", 44; Cattaneo, "Map Projections", 70-72.

Erasmus, although in his preface he praised Pirckheimer's translation and expressed his sorrow for the latter's death while preparing a Greek edition of Ptolemy, also stated out sharply: "I do not deny that we owe a lot to Willibald, but anyone familiar with Greek, who reads Ptolemy in Greek, will admit that the water of a pool, be it pristine as it may, is by far inferior to the spring itself"<sup>1</sup>. His mission, as he saw it, was to prepare a text as close to Ptolemy's original as possible. So he declared his intention to go "ad fontes", just as he had done in his translation of the *New Testament*—cleansing the text from the errors and distortions it had incorporated throughout the ages and restoring it by reliance on the best Greek sources available. Pirckheimer's outlook was somewhat different, in the sense that his attention was not just directed to the ancient text. In his edition, some of the maps which he enclosed, namely the 1513 Waldseemüller's map and two others,<sup>2</sup> included references to modern geographical discoveries. Contrarily, Erasmus' edition was purely textual—no maps were to be found. Moreover, throughout the edition, including his preface, Erasmus made no specific reference to any of the geographical discoveries of his time. Erasmus' work, in fact, was not a very demanding task: Fettich had made the most part of it by copying the manuscript, and Froben went through the manuscript as well—at least this should be assumed from Erasmus' preface. Throughout more than 540 folios, Erasmus found it necessary to intervene only three times.

It seems, unsurprisingly, that Pirckheimer's importance and reputation in the fields of geography and cartography were superior to those of Erasmus. In April 1525 Johann Grüninger, the printer from Strasbourg, had asked Pirckheimer to take upon himself a geographic-cartographic ambitious assignment: "I have a letter from you in which you expressed your willingness when I wrote to you that Martin Waldseemüller started to map out the roads of the world for me (...) I ask you to assist and advise me so that this will not disappear. For eight years I did not deal with it, but I would like to have it supplemented and include also the many new discoveries"<sup>3</sup> The reference is to the *Chronica mundi* ("Chronicle of the World") which Waldseemüller started but not completed, because of an

<sup>1</sup> See my appendix; De Smet, "Érasme et la cartographie", 289-290.

<sup>2</sup> Carlos Alberto Campos, *Technology, Scientific Speculation and the Great Discoveries* (Coimbra: Imprensa de Coimbra, 1985), 534-535 (separta da *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, XXXIII, 1985, 485-482); Karrow, *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth Century*, 581.

<sup>3</sup> The letter is quoted from Karrow, *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth Century*, 582.

illness followed by his death. The letter indicates, sure enough, the important position of Waldseemüller, but it demonstrates Pirckheimer's prominence in the fields of geography and cartography as well<sup>1</sup>. Pirckheimer worked also on a Greek edition of Ptolemy's *Geography*. His death—on December 22, 1530—brought it to an end. A substitute was needed who mastered ancient Greek, so Froben and his associates turned to Erasmus. Unlike Erasmus, who did not practice geography and for whom the edition of Ptolemy was a small exception in comparison to the bulk of his other works (which were, on the whole, ethical and theological), Pirckheimer gained a reputation for his admirable Ptolemaic edition, which combined geography and cartography. Erasmus' purely textual Greek edition, with no maps and no reference to the geographic discoveries, had a much lesser impact on later editions and scientific figures<sup>2</sup>

Erasmus' preface has references to Greek and Roman scholars (beside Ptolemy, Pliny and Strabo are warmly praised), including the rare mention of Marinus of Tyre. It is the only remaining mention of that otherwise unknown scholar, whom Ptolemy used as a major source, in spite of the fact that Ptolemy often disagreed with him and corrected many of his determinations<sup>3</sup>. Though Erasmus stated his appreciation for geography and welcomed its progress, he was not really engaged in it, and it is unclear how familiar—if at all—he was with the publications of Waldseemüller and his colleagues. He does not mention any of them, neither in his preface nor in any of his writings. In reality, Erasmus' contribution to geography was restricted, as one could expect, to his philological-textual expertise, i.e. to his contribution in the preparation of the Ptolemaic Greek text.

Although not mentioned in his preface, Erasmus may have known—at least heard of—the works of Peter Apian (1495-1552), which included a partial re-

<sup>1</sup> On Pirckheimer as a scholar knowledgeable in the geographical discoveries and thoroughly examined the writings of the ancient geographers to determine whether they knew the way to India by going around Africa, see Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 2, *A Century of Wonder*, book 3, *The Scholarly Disciplines* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1977), 459.

<sup>2</sup> On Regiomontanus importance for Copernicus: William Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 196-197.

<sup>3</sup> On Marinus: Schoeck, "The Geography of Erasmus", 201; De Smet, "Érasme et la cartographie", 288 e n. 31; Alexander Jones, "Ptolemy's *Geography*: A Reform that Failed", in Shalev and Burnett, *Ptolemy's Geography in the Renaissance*, 17-19.

lease of Ptolemy's *Geography* in Greek and Latin, published in the *Introductio geographica Petri Apiani in doctissimas Veneri Annotationes* ("Peter Apian's geographical introduction to Werner's most learned annotations", Ingolstadt, 1533)<sup>1</sup>. Apian was a prominent geographer, knowledgeable and trained in mathematics. He published in 1522 a map of the world, *Typus orbis universalis*, based on Waldseemüller's map, which included America. Apian produced various maps and globes and in 1524 published his book on cosmography. In addition to the professional recognition he won honors and awards bestowed on him by Charles V<sup>2</sup>. An attempt to combine geographical innovations with Ptolemaic worldview stands out in Apian's maps and writings: f.i., a heart-shaped world map, published by Apian in 1530, presents the old view of the world along with the discoveries of Vespucci and others. Moreover, Apian openly denounced those who clung to the exclusive authority of Ptolemy and stated that in case of a conflict between ancient sources and testimonies of modern travellers, the reports of the latter, based on eyewitness's accounts, must be taken as more reliable<sup>3</sup>. This approach is obviously different from that of Erasmus, according to which there was no need to update the image of the old world.

In his preface, Erasmus also discussed whether Ptolemy was wrong when he stated that one degree in the movement of the sky corresponds to a distance of 500 stades on the surface of the earth, while Eratosthenes, followed by Pliny, Strabo and others, had proposed a value of 700 stades<sup>4</sup>. Erasmus suggested indeed the possibility that Ptolemy had used a different measure for the stade, but his final word was that the specialists in this field were to find the solution. Who were these scholars? Erasmus mentioned no names. Likewise, in a letter of 1520, Erasmus referred to his Dutch origin and noted: "Whether I am a Bata-vian by origin, is still not clear enough. I cannot deny that I am a Dutchman,

<sup>1</sup> See Allen 2606:18-28, a letter sent in February 1532 by Anselmus Ephorinus (in Basle) to Erasmus (in Freiburg), in which Ephorinus informs Erasmus about Apian's plan to publish Ptolemy's *Geography* in Greek and Latin. This project was not completed and it was re-cast in Apian's annotations to the work of Johannes Werner; also see De-Smet, "Érasme et la cartographie", 289 n. 34.

<sup>2</sup> See Allen's fn.19 to Allen 2606; Klaus A. Vogel, "Cosmography", in *The Cambridge History of Science: Early Modern Science*, vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 484-485; Lester, *The Fourth Part of the World*, 376-377.

<sup>3</sup> Lach, *The Scholarly Disciplines*, 460.

<sup>4</sup> See Irina Tupikova and Klaus Geus, *The Circumference of the Earth and Ptolemy's World Map* (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Preprint 439, 2013).

born in a region that, if we believe the recordings of cosmographers, is closer to France than to Germany, although there is no dispute that all this area border on both France and Germany.<sup>1</sup> Who were these cosmographers? Where were there specific names behind this general reference? I doubt it. In Erasmus' writings there is no mention of specific works of cosmography or cosmographers, except the Greek and Roman ones. R. J. Schoeck shows that Erasmus was fond of maps and even had one or two in his possession<sup>2</sup>, but this does not balance out Erasmus' disregard of contemporary prominent geographers and cartographers. Schoeck has also rightly pointed out that Erasmus was close to the Swiss humanist Heinrich Loriti, or Henricus Glareanus (1488-1563). Glareanus, a humanist who worked in various fields including geography and cartography, was familiar with the publications of the "Gymnasium Vosagense" and in 1510 published a world map based on Waldseemüller's map<sup>3</sup>. Should it be deduced from this, that Erasmus himself studied geography? Their relationship does not indicate any engagement of Erasmus in that field, even if the two—Glareanus and Erasmus—had a close acquaintance. Glareanus, who was a poet, a scholar of literature and manuscripts, studied also mathematics, musical theory, geography and cartography—his publications in these fields are well recognized. Erasmus' exertions were invested differently. Prolific as he was, no work dealing with geography or cartography can be found in his record. Geography and maps were important, and the study of them was worthy and should be recommended, he declared, but his outspoken concerns were ethics and theology and, as far as his scholarship was concerned, the core of the matter was the philological establishment of the text.

<sup>1</sup> Allen 1147: 44-48: "An Batavus sim, mihi nondum satis constat. Hollandum esse me negare non possum, ea in parte natum ut, si cosmographorum picturis credimus, magis vergat ad Galliam quam ad Germaniam: quanquam extra controversiam est totam eam regionem in confinio Galliae Germaniaeque sitam esse".

<sup>2</sup> R.J. Schoeck "The Geography of Erasmus", in *Northern Humanism in European Context, 1469-1625: From the "Adwert Academy" to Ubbo Emmius*, ed. Fokke Akkerman, Arie J. Vanderjagt and A.H. Van Der Laan (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 200: "Erasmus was fond of maps, although this question is unstudied".

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 204; Karrow, *Mapmakers of the Sixteenth Century, 571 -572*; Walter Blumer, "Glareanus' Representation of the Universe", *Imago Mundi* 11 (1954): 148-149; Lester, *The Fourth Part of the World*, 10-12, 376.



### 3. Erasmus and Renaissance geographers

Undoubtedly, Greek and Roman writings dealing with geography have attracted Renaissance humanists, and Erasmus was no exception. He knew all Greek and Roman writings which dealt with tribes, peoples and customs, and he relied frequently on Pliny's *Natural History*, as well as on Pomponius Mela and Ptolemy—e.g. when he discusses the origins of the Turks in his *Utilissima consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo* (“A Most Useful Discussion Concerning the Proposals for War against the Turks”, 1530)<sup>1</sup>. Schoeck argued that Erasmus had a scholarly interest in geography as an evolving field of knowledge and that Erasmus, similarly to other humanists, was interested in cosmography and astronomy. Schoeck thinks that Erasmus' connections with humanists who dealt with cosmography imply that Erasmus considered this evolving field to be important and that he himself showed interest and was proficient in that field<sup>2</sup>. In the following I shall put this argument to test by examining those connections and their essence. First, I will examine Erasmus' connections with the already mentioned Henricus Glareanus.

Glareanus was an esteemed member of the Baslean humanist circle, was involved in composing poetry and editing ancient writers, and wrote on music and arithmetic<sup>3</sup>. He was Erasmus' follower, intimate friend and admirer. In 1514 Glareanus published in Basle a *Descriptio Helvetiæ* (“Description of Switzerland”), a patriotic poem about Switzerland, containing detailed descriptions of

<sup>1</sup> Schoeck, “The Geography of Erasmus”, 201. See also LB V 349F-350F; ASD V-3 38; CWE 64, 220-221.

<sup>2</sup> Schoeck, “The Geography of Erasmus”, 198-205; Id., *Erasmus of Europe: The Prince of Humanists 1501-1536* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 1993), 258-259.

<sup>3</sup> Schoeck, “The Geography of Erasmus”, 204; CoE, II, 106.

Swiss regions, landscapes, peoples, customs, cultural and political characteristics<sup>1</sup>. Prior to this “Description of Switzerland” Glareanus had composed, probably in 1512, the manuscript of his work on geography (*De Geographia liber unus*), which was printed in 1527 in a slightly different version. The manuscript included a number of colored world maps, which were not present in the printed edition: one of them was Waldseemüller’s Ringmann map of 1507. Erasmus referred to Glareanus first and foremost as an excellent humanist and a scholar of ancient languages, and therefore recommended him to head the planned *Collegium trilingue* in Paris<sup>2</sup>. For Erasmus he was, above all, a first rate philologist and therefore fit to head an institution devoted to the study and research of Greek, Latin and Hebrew scholarship. To Glareanus’ engagement and works in the field of geography Erasmus did not refer.

Celio Calcagnini, an Italian humanist living in Ferrara, was a kind of link between Erasmus and Nicolaus Copernicus. Calcagnini made an important contribution in mathematics and astronomy. His *Quod cælum stet, terra moveatur* (“While the sky stands still, the Earth moves”), which appeared in Ferrara around 1520, argued for the idea that the Earth revolves around its axis. Erasmus met Calcagnini in Ferrara in December of 1508 and he also mentions him in the *Adagia*<sup>3</sup>. Several letters, demonstrating mutual appreciation, were exchanged between Erasmus and Calcagnini regarding the latter’s book *De libero animi motu* (“On the free movement of the soul”), which was published by Froben. In his *Dialogus cui titulus Ciceronianus sive de optime dicendi genere* (“The Ciceronian Dialogue, or a Dialogue on the Best Style of Speaking”), Erasmus de-

<sup>1</sup> Gerald Strauss, *Sixteenth-Century Germany: its Topography and Topographers* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959); Schoeck, “The Geography of Erasmus”, 204.

<sup>2</sup> On 25 January 1515, Francis I was crowned. Shortly after, the King announced his plan to establish an institute which will serve as a center of classical culture, probably a trilingual college based on the example of Louvain. Assisted by Guillaume Budé, France’s senior humanist, and with the help of Étienne de Poncher, bishop of Paris, the King asked Erasmus to come to Paris and head the institute in exchange “mountains of gold” (as Erasmus described in a letter of April 1518 the proposed salary of a 1000 francs and more). Erasmus rejected the offer, explaining that he could not come because of his age and of his commitment to Charles, his emperor and patron. Instead, he recommended Glareanus. See: Allen 138-145; 522: 53-61; 1342: 614-621; 1558: 324-330; Cecil H. Clough, “Erasmus and the Pursuit of Early Patronage in 1517 and 1518”, *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 1 (1981): 131 and n. 26; Robert. J. Knecht, *Francis I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 136.

<sup>3</sup> Allen 1578; *Adagia* II i 34; II iv 91.

scribes Calcagnini's Latin as elegant and polished, although not free of traces of Scholastic philosophy. In a letter of September 1533 Calcagnini thanked Erasmus for these comments and for the reference in the *Adagia*. The connection between the two was kept alive in subsequent years<sup>1</sup>, but it did not concern matters of astronomy. Erasmus showed no interest in natural science: one should bear in mind that it was Erasmus who stated that eloquent writing (*eloquentia*) is the most important thing<sup>2</sup>.

A close friend of Calcagnini was Jacob Ziegler (c. 1470-1549)<sup>3</sup>. Erasmus exchanged letters with this German scholar, who was a theologian and geographer, to mention only two of his many occupations. In a few letters to different correspondents, Erasmus mentioned Ziegler favorably. Ziegler asked Erasmus in 1522 to prepare an edition of Augustine and also expressed his dislike of Diego López Zúñiga (Jacobus Lopes Stunica, d. 1531), one of Erasmus' most harsh rivals. Ziegler even composed a booklet against Zúñiga<sup>4</sup>. The Portuguese humanist Damiao de Góis, who was Erasmus acquaintance and correspondent, recommended to him Ziegler's book on Scandinavia in order to draw Erasmus' attention to the Lapps and their problems with the church. At that time Ziegler was already leaning towards the Lutherans<sup>5</sup>. The warm relationships between the two lasted until Ziegler became Lutheran and then he even wrote against

<sup>1</sup> Allen 1552; 1576; 1578; 2869; 3076, 3085; 3113; LB I 1011B; ASD I-2 671; CWE 28, 420; CoE, I, 243.

<sup>2</sup> Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1996), 44, 231-243.

<sup>3</sup> Siegmund Günther, *Jakob Ziegler, ein bayerischer Geograph und Mathematiker*, Forschungen zur Kulturund Literaturgeschichte Bayerns, 4 (Leipzig: Ansbach, 1896); Karl Schottenloher, *Jakob Ziegler und Adam Reissner: eine quellenkritische Untersuchung über eine Streitschrift der Reformationszeit gegen das Papsttum*, diss. (München: C. Wolf & Sohn, 1908); Id., *Jakob Ziegler aus Landau an der Isar: Ein Gelehrtenleben aus der Zeit des Humanismus und der Reformation*, Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte, Hefte 8-10 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1910); Kristian Nissen, "Jacob Ziegler's Palestine Schondia Manuscript, University Library, Oslo, MS. 917-4<sup>o</sup>", *Imago Mundi* 13 (1956), 45-52; CoE, III, 474-476.

<sup>4</sup> Allen 1260; 1294; 1342; CoE, III, 474-476. On Zúñiga and his rivalry with Erasmus: Richard H. Graham, "Erasmus and Stunica: A Chapter in the History of New Testament Scholarship", *Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook* 10 (1990): 9-60; Erika Rummel, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 209 fn. 9; CoE, II, 348-349; Alejandro Coroleu, "Anti Erasmianism in Spain", in *Biblical Humanism in the Age of Erasmus*, ed. Erika Rummel (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 77-79.

<sup>5</sup> Allen 2826; Elisabeth Feist Hirsch, *Damiao de Góis: The Life and Thought of a Portuguese Humanist, 1502-1574* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 73.

Erasmus<sup>1</sup>. All in all, the two did not discuss science or geography. Theology was their shared interest, as well as the cause for their break up with one another.

Erasmus had also contacts with Joachim Sterck van Ringlberg (d. 1535). Born in Antwerp, Sterck was a humanist, mathematician and astronomer. Erasmus's ties with van Ringlberg may indicate some degree of interest in astronomy by Erasmus: we learn from a letter of October 1528 about two meetings that were held between the two and which brought pleasure to Erasmus. Erasmus also mentions Sterck as involved in some kind of reformist incitement<sup>2</sup>. The only thing which indicates that Erasmus recognized and appreciated Sterck's astronomical work is that two of Erasmus' poems praise Sterck's *Institutiones Astronomicæ* ("Foundations of Astronomy", Basel, 1528; Paris, 1530) and were intended for publication within this work<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, let us consider the connection which existed between Erasmus and the German humanist and geographer Johann Koclaiois (Johannes Cochlaeus, originally Johann Dobneck, 1479-1552), who was a humanist engaged in many fields, among these also geography, in which he was professionally linked to Willibald Pirckheimer. Cochlaeus prepared a new edition of Pomponius Mela's *Cosmography*, published in Nuremberg, 1512. The epistolary exchange between Erasmus and Cochlaeus, in the years 1525-1535, was quite extensive. The contents of their letters reveal topics such as Cochlaeus' concern for his aged mother, asking Erasmus to write against the Anabaptists, which Erasmus ignored in his reply. Erasmus, who disliked Cochlaeus' tendency to polemic writing, be it against Luther or others, said that he tried to moderate his polemicist acquaintance<sup>4</sup>. No geographical issues were shared between the two.

<sup>1</sup> CoE, III, 475.

<sup>2</sup> *Allen* 2058, 2079.

<sup>3</sup> Schoeck, "The Geography of Erasmus", 202; CoE, III, 162.

<sup>4</sup> *Allen* 1688; 1729; 1928; 1974. Cochlaeus maintained a correspondence with a few of Erasmus' dearest friends, John Fischer and Thomas More: *Allen* 1863, 1928. On Erasmus' attempt to moderate Cochlaeus' polemical tendency: LB X 1537B (*Purgatio adversus epistolam Lutheri*, 1534); on Cochlaeus in general: CoE, I, 321-322; Johannes Cochlaeus, *Brevis Germaniæ Descriptio*, ed. Karl Langosch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1976): with introduction and German translation, originally appeared in 1512 as an appendix to Cochlaeus' edition of Pomponius Mela; Martin Spahn, *Johannes Cochlaeus; Ein Lebensbild aus der Zeit der Kirchenspaltung* (Berlin: Verlag von Felix L. Dames, 1898; reprint Nieuwkoop: Hes & de Graaf, 1964; Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2009); Remigius Bäumer, *Johannes Cochlaeus: Leben und Werk im Dienst der ka-*

So far for Erasmus' relations with humanists who dealt also with geography and astronomy and to which Schoeck refers in his work. In the following lines I shall expand the scope of Erasmus' connections and acquaintances with contemporary geographers or their works, and refer to those which Schoeck does not mention. Just as I have done previously, I shall examine the nature of these relationships: whether they were focused on geography, science, or any other field of interest. Basle, Erasmus' basis of operation, even when he left for Freiburg, was a major printing center for works of geography. Thereby, Simon Griener or Griner (c. 1494-1541), otherwise known as Simon Grynaeus, the theologian and humanist, published in 1532 his work *Novus orbis regionum ac insularum veteribus incognitarum* ("New world of regions and islands unknown to the old ones"), the most comprehensive review of travels and discoveries up to his time<sup>1</sup>. Erasmus knew him and their ties tightened after Grynaeus was appointed professor of Greek at the University of Basle. Erasmus also supplied him with a letter of recommendation addressed to Thomas More, a letter which helped the German scholar to win More's patronage in 1531, during Grynaeus' stay in England<sup>2</sup>. Joachim von Watt (1488-1563), or Vadianus, was a poet and scholar in the field of medicine at the University of Vienna. He had connections with Erasmus and met him in Basle in 1522<sup>3</sup>. In 1515 he published a short essay arguing decisively in favor of the Antipodes' existence and stressing the mistakes of ancient and medieval writers on this issue<sup>4</sup>. In 1518 Vadianus published a large-scale critical edition of Pomponius Mela in which he elaborated on his arguments against the ancient writers on the issue of Antipodes<sup>5</sup>.

Erasmus maintained correspondence with Simon Riquinus (c.1501-1559) a

*tholischen Reform*, *Katholisches Leben und Kirchenreform im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung*, vol. 40 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980); Remigius Baumer, "Johannes Cochlaeus und die Reform der Kirche", in *Reformatio Ecclesiae: Beiträge zu kirchlichen Reformbemühungen von der alten Kirche bis zur Neuzeit: Festgabe für Erwin Iserloh*, ed. Remigius Baumer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1980), 333-354; Monique Samuel-Scheyder, *Johannes Cochlaeus: humaniste et adversaire de Luther* (Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1993).

<sup>1</sup> Vogel, "Cosmography", 486.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*; CoE, II, 143.

<sup>3</sup> Allen 1314

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Hiatt, *Terra Incognita: Mapping the Antipodes before 1600* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008). No reference to Vadian in that book.

<sup>5</sup> Vogel, "Cosmography", 494.

German humanist and physician who was connected to Sebastian Münster and assisted him with his *Cosmography*, Münster's great work. Münster turned to Riquinus, a resident of Trier, who provided him with information and charts of the cities of Trier and Köln. Some of his drawings are to be found in Münster's *Cosmography*<sup>1</sup>. The connection between Erasmus and Riquinus had nothing to do with any geographic or scientific issues, as it is evident from their correspondence.

Sebastian Münster's *Cosmography* appeared between 1544 and 1628 in 36 editions of nearly 60000 copies, in Latin, German, French, Czech, Italian and English. Münster's work demonstrates, more than anything else, the flourishing of cosmography as a popular field of study and research, attractive to many readers in Europe at that period of time. Some degree of acquaintance existed between Erasmus and Münster. Evidence is indeed circumstantial and indirect—no correspondence is extant, and there is nothing to indicate any meeting—but it hints at the existence of some kind of connection. They both spent most of their productive years in the city of Basle. Erasmus lived in Basle in 1514-1516 (not continuously), in 1521-1529 (continuously) and throughout the year 1536. Münster lived in Basle from 1518 to 1520/1521 and from 1529 until his death in 1552 (continuously). Münster chose to live in Basle due to its tolerant, anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan atmosphere, and Erasmus was the center around which the city's spirit revolved<sup>2</sup>. Münster informs that he and his friends drank, on an occasion, Sicilian wine (made in Catina) sent by a certain merchant from Augsburg to Erasmus<sup>3</sup>. Also, both scholars published their books at Froben's

<sup>1</sup> CoE, III, 163-164. Riquinus wrote to Erasmus in 1530: *Allen* 2246, 2298. He is mentioned by Erasmus in *Allen* 2222 (written in 1529) and maybe also in *Allen* 2256: 62 (written in 1530). In *Allen* 2274 (written in 1530), Erasmus praised Riquinus for his medical scholarship after Riquinus stood up against Erasmus' attacker Noël Beda (*Allen* 2077).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 341-342. On Münster see also: Karl Heinz Burmeister, *Sebastian Münster* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1963); Gerald Strauss, "A Sixteenth-Century Encyclopedia: Sebastian Münster's *Cosmography* and Its Editions", in *From Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation. Essays in Honor of Garrett Mattingly*, ed. Charles H. Carter (New York: Cape, 1965); Stephen G. Burnett, "Dialogue of the Deaf: Hebrew Pedagogy and Anti-Jewish Polemic in Sebastian Münster's *Messiahs of the Jews* (1529/1539)", *Archive for Reformation History* 91 (2000): 168-190; Id., *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500-1660): Authors, Books, and the Transmission of Jewish Learning Library of the Written Word* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster*, 434: "The fine wine of Catina, which once we

reputable printing house and their relations with the Basler printer—Froben was a major figure in their lives—led to the creation of literary and social ties between the two.

Erasmus' correspondence contains more than three thousand letters. Münster's correspondence was just less extensive. At least two prominent figures and close associates of Erasmus, who were major correspondents of his, were also among Münster's correspondents: the important humanist Beatus Rhenanus, who helped Erasmus editing and typesetting much of his work, and the Basler jurist Bonifacius Amerbach<sup>1</sup>. In my opinion, this may indicate that Erasmus and Münster shared certain scholarly and intellectual interests. Was cosmography one of their shared interests? We do not know. Personal acquaintance and a certain degree of socializing did exist between the two, but whether they discussed anything scholarly, or anything at all, remains anybody's guess.

Johann Albrecht Widmanstetter (1506-1557), a correspondent of Erasmus, who became acquainted with him in Basel, mentioned that his teachers were Münster, Glareanus and Amerbach. Widmanstetter himself wrote a history of the bishopric of Salzburg (ca. 1548) which was published as part of Münster's *Cosmography*. So, Widmanstetter provides another example of someone who might well have served as a link between Erasmus and Münster. One may hence hypothesize the existence of an active circle of scholars dealing with literary arts and cosmography, which included Erasmus, Münster, Glareanus, Amerbach and other figures which we mentioned earlier. Both Erasmus and Münster were indeed editors of Ptolemy. In 1540 Münster published an edition of Ptolemy's *Geography*, containing 48 maps, which was, in many ways, a precursor for his *Cosmography*<sup>2</sup>.

There also existed between them an affinity of Christian doctrine. Münster's Irenicism, the ideal of Christian "concordia"—expressed in his *Cosmography*—was very near to Erasmus' own attitude. Münster, who became Lutheran, advocated "simplicitas Christiana", i.e. a Christianity committed to principles of the Gospels. This was to a great extent what Erasmus preached and worked

drank here in Basel, sent for Erasmus of Rotterdam of good memory by a merchant of Augsburg".

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 159-160.

<sup>2</sup> McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster*, 168; Margaret Small, "Warring Traditions: Ptolemy and Strabo in the *Geography* of Sebastian Münster", in Shalev and Burnett (eds.), *Ptolemy's Geography in the Renaissance*, 169.

for, a return to the original sources of Christianity (*ad fontes*) and the repudiation of the scholasticism. Moreover, Münster was a well known Hebraist. He learned Hebrew from the Jewish scholar Elias Levita and translated four of Levita's works on language, which were published by Froben<sup>1</sup>. Erasmus was no Hebraist, certainly not on a par with Münster; nevertheless, he had some knowledge of Hebrew<sup>2</sup>.

In Münster's *Cosmography*, first published in 1544, the description of the Turks is not entirely negative, an attitude that is not incompatible with the complex way in which Erasmus deals with the question. As a source for his writings on the Turks Münster relied probably, and not solely, on Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini's *Cosmography*, which was very influential in the Renaissance, especially in Germany<sup>3</sup>. Piccolomini wrote a number of works on Germany, which were popular among German humanists. His *Cosmography* might have been known to Erasmus, who praised the epistolary talent of Pius II<sup>4</sup>. Erasmus also mentioned Pope Pius II's concerns with the Turks and his attempt to initiate a crusade against them<sup>5</sup>. Piccolomini himself is mentioned several times in Erasmus' writings, but never as a cosmographer. He is mentioned as an eloquent writer, as a Pope who tried to initiate a crusade against the Turks, but never as a scholar who wrote an influential *Cosmography*.



<sup>1</sup> McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Münster*, 13, 39-40, 287.

<sup>2</sup> Erasmus, according to one of his letters, did not know Levita; see *Allen* 2447, a letter of March 1531 in which Erasmus says: "Heliam non novi". See also: *CoE*, II, 328.

<sup>3</sup> *CoE*, III, 97-98. For a detailed list of Piccolomini's works as well as secondary literature: John L. Flood, *Poets Laureate in the Holy Roman Empire: A Bio-bibliographical Handbook*, Vol. I (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 1531-1542.

<sup>4</sup> *Allen* 1206: 99: "Verum autem illud epistolarum genus quod mores. Cuius generis fere sunt Epistolæ Ciceronis ad Plinium, et inter recentiores Æneæ Pii".

<sup>5</sup> *Allen* 2285;120-123: "Nihil omissum est a Bessarione, a Pio secundo. Genuit ea res multos ordines cruciferorum"; *De bello Turcico*: *LB* V 359D; *ASD* V-3 66; *CWE* 64, 248.

## 4. Conclusion

As I argued, even in his later years—specifically the year 1533, during which he dealt with Ptolemy—Erasmus did not mention the geographical discoveries of his age, nor any of the individuals responsible for them. The newly discovered parts of the world were neither Erasmus’ concern, nor a component of his drive to deal with Ptolemy. Unlike Schoeck, who concluded, out of Erasmus’ connections with humanists who practiced cosmography or geography, that Erasmus himself was interested and involved in those fields, I am of the opinion that we should not overestimate Erasmus’ scholarly interest in geography. Erasmus considered the geographic discipline as subsidiary, secondary to history and literature. Geography as ‘the eye of history’ was a common concept, shared by many Renaissance scholars, predominantly Ortelius, who specifically conceptualized it<sup>1</sup>. Erasmus expressed it in his essay *De Ratione Studii* (“On the method of study”, 1511):

“Also geography, used in studying history, not to mention poetry, should be mastered. This have done Pomponius Mela, in a most concise way, Ptolemy with utmost scholarship, and Pliny with great precision. In fact Strabo is not the only one who writes about it. The most important thing is to have observed which vernacular names used for mountains, rivers, regions, and cities match the original ancient names”<sup>2</sup>.

The paragraph demonstrates Erasmus’ approach to geography, which was not unique. The task he specified was a major preoccupation of geographers at the time. As regards his willingness to edit Ptolemy’s *Geography*, it was derived by Erasmus’ humanistic desire to study and renovate ancient Greek and Roman writings. It is not very different, in terms of scholarly approach, from the will to

<sup>1</sup> Ortelius’ phrasing and concept of ‘the eye of the history’: Walter Goffart, *Historical Atlases: The First Three Hundred Years, 1570-1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1; John R. Short, *Making Space: Revisioning the World, 1475-1600* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 76; Daniel Rosenberg and Anthony Grafton, *Cartographies of Time: A History of the Timeline* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010), 76-112; Simone Pinet, *Archipelagoes: Insular Fictions from Chivalric Romance to the Novel* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xi.

<sup>2</sup> CWE 24, 673; LB I 523C: “Tenenda Cosmographia, quæ in histories etiam est usui, nedum in Pometis. Hanc brevissime tradit Pomponius Mela, doctissime Ptolemæus, diligentissime Plinium. Nam Strabo non hoc tantum agit. Hic præcipua pars est observasse quæ montium, fluminum, regionum, urbium, vulgo recepta vocabula, quibus antiquis respondeant”.

reconstruct the correspondence between modern and Greek and Roman names, which Erasmus emphasized above. Another passage, this time from Erasmus' *Ratio veræ theologiæ* ("Method of the Real Theology", 1519), is relevant here:

"In his book *On the Christian Doctrine*, Augustine recommended to teach, for a time, carefully and gently, the most elegant disciplines such as Dialectic, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music. They must be accompanied by the knowledge of natural things, such as celestial bodies, animals, trees, plants, especially in referring to those places that are commemorated by the sacred texts. In fact, as we recognize the places with the help of Cosmography, we follow in our mind a travelling narration (...) so if we learn from the writings of historians not only the places where the different nations—those whose history is narrated, or to which the Apostles wrote—were situated, but also the origin, customs, institutions, religion, and spirit: it is marvelous how much light and, so to speak, life, is added to the reading. (...) [it is the opposite of when translators being] ignorant of the names of almost all things, either impudently hazard a guess, or consult such dubious dictionaries, so that sometimes they turn a tree into a quadrupede, a fish into a plant, a guitar player into a river"<sup>1</sup>.

Erasmus recommends the study of ethnography with a special emphasis on the world in which Jesus and the Apostles lived<sup>2</sup>. This can explain why the study of geographical discoveries was almost irrelevant as far as Erasmus was concerned. Besides, Erasmus did not feel a need to address or respond to what was happening outside Christian Europe. It exceeded his scope of interest and thought.

<sup>1</sup> LB V, 79C-F: "quod in libris de Doctrina Christiana placuit Augustino, ut cautim ac moderate degustatis elegantioribus disciplinis per ætatem instituatur, ac præparetur, nempe, Dialectica, Rethorica, Arithmetica, Musica: cum primis autem Rerum Naturalium cognitio, velut siderum, animantium, arborum, gemmarum, ad hæc locorum, præsertim eorum, quos divinæ litteræ commemorant. Fit enim ut agnitis ex Cosmographia regionibus, cogitatione sequamur narrationem obambulantem (...) Jam si gentium, apud quas res gestas narratur, sive ad quas scribunt Apostoli, non situm modo, verum etiam originem, mores, instituta, cultum, ingenium, ex historicorum litteris didicerimus: dictu mirum quantum lucis et ut ita dicam, vitæ sit accessurum lectioni (...) et omnium pene rerum ignorantur vocabula: adeo ut nonnumquam vel impudenter addivinantes, vel sordissimos consulentes Dictionarios, ex arborem faciant quadrupedem, e gemma piscem, e citharoedo fluvium".

<sup>2</sup> On that point: Kristine Louise Haugen, "A French Jesuit's Lectures on Vergil, 1582-1583: Jacques Sirmond between Literature, History, and Myth", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 30 (1999), 967-85 (p. 979 n. 38). What I define as 'ethnography' here, Haugen considers geography. She rightly emphasized Erasmus' contextual and multidimensional approach to Biblical exegesis.

Erasmus referred, incidentally, to navigation and explorations in his second apologetic response to his Carthusian attacker Pierre Cousturier (Petrus Sutor), *Appendix respondens ad quædam antapologiæ Petri Sutoris* ('appendix of response to the formal argument of Petrus Sutor', 1525), in which Erasmus, with characteristic ambiguity, described daring to sail across the ocean as a folly: "chance is often a companion to folly: in fact, where judgment and reason prevail there are neither chance nor folly. Also, much can be taught by experience, which is a teacher to fools. But wise men are hesitant and reluctant to experience unknown things. Indeed, the one who first dared to sail across the ocean was not wise"<sup>1</sup>. This approach is similar to the medieval "peregrinatio in stabilitate"<sup>2</sup>, and it is also expressed by Erasmus in one of his colloquies, *Γερωντολογία sive ὄχημα* ("The old men's chat, or the carriage", 1524). Glycion, who represents a decent and righteous Christian, asserts:

"Change of place does afford some pleasure, to be sure; but distant journeys, while they may increase practical wisdom, yet have most dangers. I am convinced I travel around the world more safely on a map, and observe not a little more in histories, than I would by roaming over all lands and seas for twenty years like Ulysses. I have a little country place no more than two miles from town. There I sometimes change from citizen to countryman, and after refreshing myself I return to town a stranger; I greet people and am greeted as if I had sailed back from the newly discovered islands"<sup>3</sup>.

These expressions would clearly correspond to Erasmus' reservations, or lack of interest, regarding geographical discoveries and discoverers. It is an attitude,

<sup>1</sup> LB IX 805E: "casus *Moriæ* comes est: ubi enim consilium et prudentia, ibi nec casus est, nec *Moria*. Multa item reperit stultorum magistra experientia. Sapientes autem ad experiendum incognita segnes sunt et cunctabundi. Non enim sapiens fuit, qui primus ausus est per Oceanum navigare".

<sup>2</sup> David K. Connolly "Imagined Pilgrimage in the Itinerary Maps of Matthew Paris", *The Art Bulletin* 85 (1999): 598-621.

<sup>3</sup> Craig R. Thompson (trans.) *The Colloquies of Erasmus* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 195; CWE 39, 453: 24-32; LB I 735A-B: "Habet quidem loci mutatio voluptatis nonnihil: longinquæ vero peregrinationes, ut prudentiam addunt fortalis, ita plurimum habent periculorum. Mihi videor tutius ut totum orbem obire in tabula geographica, neque Paulo plus videre in historiis, quam si viginti totos annos, ad Ulyssis exemplum, per omnis terras mariaque volitarem. Habeo prædiolum, quod abest ab urbe non plusquam duobus millibus passuum: ibi nonnunquam ex urbano fio rusticus: atque ibi recreatus, redeo novus hospes in urbem: nec aliter saluto ac salutor, quam si renavigassem ex insulis nuper inventis."

in the end, very much contrary to empirical geography and, one may say, to science in general. This should raise a question mark over any alleged ‘Erasmian science’, unless this is to be interpreted as Erasmus’ anti-dogmatism and skepticism, a form of “dubito ergo cogito” which is necessary to any scientific thinking.



## 5. Appendix

*Erasmus’ Letter to Theobald Fettich (Allen 2760), which was chosen to serve as the preface to Erasmus’ edition of Ptolemy’s Geography.*

### 5.1. Des.[iderius] Erasmus Rot.[erodamus] eximio viro Theobaldo Fettichio, medicæ rei peritissimo S.[alutem]

Ut intelligas non temere dictum a priscis sapientibus, vir ornatissime, παλιμβόλους εἶναι τὰς χάριτας, redit ad te tuus Ptolemæus, quem non dubito quin pro ingenii tui candore iam tibi chariorem sis habiturus, magisque tuum existimaturus quod tibi cum universis optimarum disciplinarum studiosis futurus est communis. Bracteata fortunæ bona communione decrescunt: vera bona, quo latius diffuderis, hoc et meliora redduntur et illustriora. Gratis typographo Græci voluminis fecisti copiam. Non poteras, mihi crede, felicius vendere, etiamsi Herculem tibi decimis obstrictum, ac Mercurium faventem habuisses. Nunc tot studiosorum milia Theobaldi nomen celebrabunt, Theobaldi candorem exosculabuntur, Theobaldi munificentiae gratias agent. Quam vero mercedem cum hoc præmio conferat generosus animus?

Sepenumero mirari soleo tam vetustum autorem (nam floruisse sub Traiano et Antonino Pio satis liquet, tum ex quinto capite septimi libri *De magna constructione*, tum ex capite primo libri secundi eiusdem operis), ad hæc eum qui Geographiam (qua vix alia inter mathematicas disciplinas vel iucundior est vel magis necessaria) sic tractarit ut facile superiores omnes qui de ea scripserunt obscurarit, posteris præluxerit, tot seculis neminem fuisse nactum a quo pro dignitate Latinis auribus traderetur. A duobus interpretibus quomodo tractatus sit, quid attinet commemorare, quum et ipsa res per se clamitet, et vir excellenti doctrina Ioannes a Monte Regio, iusto volumine prodiderit. Nuper vir semipiterna dignus memoria Bilibaldus Pyrchemerus pulcherrimum opus feliciter aggressus est, quod utinam absolvere licuisset; mors et illi successum et nobis fructum hunc invidit. At nunc opera Frobenianæ officinæ prodit Ptolemæus ipse sua lingua loquens. Nam licet Alexandrinus fuerit, tamen Ægyptus id temporis maxima ex parte Græce loquebatur, in qua lingua apparet hominem non infacundum fuisse, quanquam huiusmodi disciplinarum tractatio magis requirit sermonem distinctum, sanum ac perspicuum quam splendidum aut copiosum. Equidem non nego plurimum laudis deberi Bilibaldo, sed tamen qui Græce peritus Græcum legerit Ptolemæum fatebitur nonnihil interesse inter lacunam quamvis puram et fontem ipsum.

Complures quidem tum apud Græcos, tum apud Latinos mixtim de Geographia et Chorographia conscripserunt, inter quos nemo Strabone vel diligentior vel copiosior. At Ptolemeus omnium primus hanc disciplinam ad certiore rationem redegit, commentus dimensionem latitudinis universi orbis a polo ad polum, longitudinis ab exortu ad occasum, adhibita collatione terræ habitabilis ad celum, ut iam non facile quis toto quemadmodum aiunt coelo possit aberrare. Utinam et numerorum notas sicut a Ptolemeo traditæ sunt incorruptas habereamus, præsertim libro octavo. Sed hanc quoque, ut spero, provinciam aliquis arripet, cui et ingenium et eruditio et ocium suppetet tam arduo negotio par. Unum tamen est, quod librariis imputari vix potest: in gradibus mira est dissensio. Siquidem Ptolemeus libri primi cap. 7, rursus libri 7, capite 5, scribit singulis maiorum circularum in coelo gradibus in terris respondere stadia quingenta. Eratosthenes autem, quem Plinius et Strabo ac veterum plerique sequuti videntur, septingenta. Id unde acciderit, nondum assequor. Vix enim credibile est, tantos viros in singulis gradibus ducentis stadiis variare: nec multo probabilius est Ptolemeum veteres omnes tam insigni damnasse errore, præsertim

quum eum nusquam coarguat, alioqui non indiligens et hac in parte, quippe qui tam multa reprehendat in Marino. Quod si forte Ptolemeus aliter accipit stadium quam superiores, erat et super hac re non levis momenti iector admonendus. Verum hoc quicquid est scrupuli doctis excutiendum relinquo.

Qui præsunt liberalibus studiis probe consuluerint iuventuti solidæ doctrinæ candidatæ, si eam omnibus stimulis ad geographiam excitent, et si hanc exemplo veterum statim post degustatam grammaticam tradant. Plurimorum magnis laboribus effectum est ut hec disciplina iam nec ita multum laboris nec multum temporis desideret. Olim plus habebat negotii, quum ambigeretur an coelum esset sphericæ figuræ, quum essent qui affirmarent orbem terræ sic innatare Oceano quemadmodum pila innatat aquæ, prominente tantum vertice, cæteris aqua tectis: atque in aliis item multis errarent, qui scriptis artem prodiderunt. Nunc quum ab aliis compluribus, tum a Ptolemeo præcipue, porrectum est filum cuius ductu quivis facile possit sese ex his labyrinthis explicare, strata est via qua sine dispendiis celeriter ad huius artis fastigium peruenias; quam qui negligunt, eos oportet frequenter in evoluendis bonis autoribus hallucinari. Ego vero, vir eruditissime, tibi gratias ago, ut par est, maximas, non tam typographi meoque nomine, quam studiosorum omnium, quos æquum est pro hoc non vulgari beneficio tibi tuisque semper leta faustaue precari omnia. Vale. Apud Friburgum Brisgoæ. Calendis Febr. anno a Christo nato 1533.



## 5.2. Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam to the Medical expert Theobald Fettich

Most noble man, as the saying of ancient sages rightly goes, “the maidens returned the ball”<sup>1</sup>, so does your Ptolemy return to you. I have no doubt, thanks

<sup>1</sup> P.J. Allen remarks that Erasmus is neglecting here his interpretation of *παλιμβόλους* as “hominem, qui (...) facile in diuersum reuoluitur”, in *Adagia* 1635 (II, vii, 35), and considers it equivalent to *παλιन्द्रόνους*, “returning to the owner (or the author)”. See the note to *Allen* 2760: 2.

to the candidness of your spirit, that you will appreciate and estimate it more, now that it will be shared with you by all those who study the most excellent disciplines. Those goods veneered with gold, that luck bestows upon us, are diminished by sharing. Real goods, the more we disperse them, the greater their value and splendor become. You were so kind as to prepare for the printer, without payment, a copy of a Greek tome. You could not make a better deal, believe me, even if Hercules undertook to pay you a tithe<sup>1</sup> and even if you won the favor of Mercury. Today, a thousand scholars will praise the name of Theobald, cheer for him and thank his generosity. What profit can match such a prize?

I keep marveling that an author so ancient—indeed he flourished under the emperors Trajan and Antoninus Pius, as can be inferred both from the fifth chapter of the seventh book of the *Almagest*, and from the first chapter of the second book of the same work—who discussed geography (of which nearly none among the mathematical disciplines is more attractive, nor more necessary) in such a way as to overshadow all his predecessors who wrote on this topic, and to light the way for the future generations, for such a long time had no one to adequately translate him into Latin. How the task was performed by the two translators, is not worthy to mention, since it is made clear by the texts themselves and since Johannes Regiomontanus, an expert in his field, has illustrated it in an ample work. Lately Willibald Pirckheimer, whom we shall forever remember, a most notable person, who until recently was still with us, took upon himself to perform a very fine work, if only he could have completed it. Death has befallen him and did not allow us to enjoy the fruit of his labor. But now, thanks to the work of the Froben's printing press, Ptolemy himself, speaking in his own language, is to appear. Indeed he was a man of Alexandria, but most of Egypt at that time spoke Greek. Evidently, his Greek was fluent, although dealing with this kind of disciplines requires a precise language, correct and accurate, rather than glowing and copious. I do not deny that we owe a lot to Willibald, but anyone familiar with Greek, who reads Ptolemy in Greek, will admit that the water of a pool, be it pristine as it may, is by far inferior to the spring itself.

Many among the Greeks and Latins have written on the subject of geography

<sup>1</sup> *Adagia* 3993 (IV, x, 93)

and topography, but no one was as diligent or copious as Strabo. But Ptolemy was the first of all geographers, who established within this discipline a very accurate method, who calculated to a certain degree the latitude of the globe from one end to another and the longitude from east to west, by comparing the inhabited earth to the sky, so that now it is difficult to get lost throughout the sky, as it is customary to say. If only we could obtain them uncorrupt, those numbers that Ptolemy provided, especially in his eighth book. I hope that someone with ability and diligence will carry out this difficult task, especially the one thing librarians find extremely difficult to calculate: the amazing difference in measuring the degrees. Ptolemy wrote in the seventh chapter of his first book, and again in his fifth chapter of the seventh book, that each degree of the circulation of the sky equals 500 stades on the surface of the earth. Eratosthenes instead, who seems to be followed by Pliny, Strabo and many among the ancient authors, set a value of 700 stades. How this could happen, I still do not understand. It is hard to believe that the calculation of such men varied by a difference of 200 stades for each degree. It is even unlikely that Ptolemy attributed such a major mistake to all these excellent ancient authors, especially as he never argues with them about it, although he was never careless in this regard, and addresses much criticism to Marinus. Whereas if Ptolemy gauged a stade differently than his predecessors did, he should have informed his readers. But I prefer to leave this matters of detail to the experts to solve.

The leading scholars of the liberal arts will rightly advise the youth who desire a solid education, if they use all measures to direct them to geography, and if they use the ancient texts in their teaching, but not before some study of the language. The result of many people's great works is that this discipline requires no longer an immense effort over a long period of time. In the past many more difficulties existed, because it was uncertain whether the sky have the shape of a sphere; some believed the earth to float in an ocean, just as a ball is floating in water, so that only its tip be visible and the rest be covered with water: and the people who treated this discipline were mistaken in other issues as well. Now that many, but especially Ptolemy, discovered the thread by the help of which everyone can find his way out of this labyrinth, the way is set for you to reach the pinnacle of this art, without any deviation. Those who ignore it must frequently err, while trying in vain to understand the best authors. Erudite man as you are, you deserve great thanks, which I confer upon you, not so much on

behalf of the printer and myself, as on behalf of all the scholars who thank you immensely for the outstanding favor which you shed upon them.

Farewell. Freiburg in Breisgau. February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1533.

## Abbreviations

*Allen* = *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, 12 vols., ed. Percy Stafford Allen, Helen Mary Allen and Heathcote W. Garrod. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906-1958.

*ASD* = *Erasmi Opera Omnia*, recognita ed adnotatione critica instructa notisque illustrata, Amsterdam: North Holland Publishing and Elsevier, 1969 f.

*CoE* = *Contemporaries of Erasmus. A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher. 3 vols. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1985-1987.

*CWE* = *Collected Works of Erasmus*, Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1974 f.

*LB* = *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami Opera omnia*, ed. Jean Le Clerc. 10 vols. Leiden: Van der Aa, 1703-06.



*View of Basel from H. Schedel, Liber chronicarum, Nürnberg, 1493,  
c. CCXLIII v.-CCXLIII r. (Morse Library, Beloit College,  
<http://www.beloit.edu/nuremberg/>).*