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### Christ-von Wedel, Christine. Erasmus of Rotterdam: A Portrait.

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Secret avait peu tenu compte dans sa traduction du traité de Reuchlin. Enfin, ceci : les dernières pages de l'ouvrage ouvrent sur l'attitude de chacun des quatre auteurs considérés par rapport aux sources hébraïques. Là encore quelques précisions sont bien utiles.

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**Christ-von Wedel, Christine.**

***Erasmus of Rotterdam: A Portrait.***

Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2020. Pp. 175 + 9 ill. ISBN 978-3-7965-4192-6 (hardcover) €36.

Christine Christ-von Wedel's book is a fine introduction to Erasmus's life and work, and friendly to the reader. The minimal and concise footnotes used by the author, as well as Albert de Pury's amusing cartoons, contribute to achieving this. Confessional and theological issues, some linked to social aspects, predominate in this study. Luther's role is crucial: he and his teachings provide the mirror against which Erasmus and his thought are portrayed, and not just on the issue of the free will. The book opens with Erasmus's youth and continues with his studying and teaching years. Christ-von Wedel concludes her exposition of Erasmus's youth by raising an intriguing question: "Clearly the mature Erasmus was able to sublimate his sexual desires. Could that explain the large body of his scholarly work?" (15). Chapter 3 ends with Erasmus's praiseworthy toleration of heretics (43–45). Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the New Testament and disputes with fellow scholars. Chapter 6 contains a substantial treatment of the issue of Erasmus and the Jews (115–20) but, alas, it is wrong. Based on Erasmus's letter of dedication and Chrysostom's poisonous anti-Jewish sermons which Erasmus sent to King João III of Portugal, Christ-von Wedel deduces that Erasmus demonstrated tolerance toward the Jews, and that "Erasmus counters them [Chrysostom's sermons] and the tradition of hostilities against Jews in his dedication, which goes against the *Zeitgeist*" (116). The following are the relevant lines of Erasmus's letter of dedication (my translation):

Emperor Arcadius thought that his city [...] was not great enough as long as it did not have a notable preacher of the Christian gospel. Therefore [...] John Chrysostom left Antioch and came to Constantinople to serve as a priest. I wish, noble king, that all rulers would follow his example. I wish as many clergymen as possible would follow in the footsteps of Chrysostom! [...] I fear that the blame, at least in part, lies in our way of life, that the Turks, Muslims, Saracens, Muscovites, Greeks and other semi-Christian nations, or those who have schismatized from Christianity, do not join Jesus's flock, and that the Jews did not regret their blindness [...] I would be surprised if such clear-cut arguments of Chrysostom and the unequivocal evidence of the Scriptures would not, in any case, make them ashamed and return from their ongoing disgrace. (*Ep.* 1800: 234–40)

Can tolerance be deduced from these lines? Hardly.

Additionally, Erasmus's act must be tested in its historical context. After the deportation of Portuguese Jews in 1496, a policy of forced assimilation was introduced in Portugal, designed to cause—by using various coercive measures—the conversion of those Jews who remained in Portugal. This intolerant policy was reflected in a number of laws passed by King Manuel. Within a few months after the expulsion order was issued, the king issued an order setting a final date after which every Jew who had not yet left the country would be baptized. Manuel's successor, João III, initiated the establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal (1536) in order to implement the forced assimilation policy. Erasmus's choice of Chrysostom as a model of the recommended preacher for the priests in Portugal indicates that he recognized and accepted the situation in Portugal, namely the transition to a policy of forced assimilation. Erasmus thought that João III, to carry out his assimilation policy, should find suitable priests, such as those who followed in the footsteps of Chrysostom in Antioch. In this chapter, Christ-von Wedel has also misinterpreted “half-Christians” (115, 118). The Jews were never defined as “half-Christians” by Erasmus, except for those who converted to Christianity, and then he always used the term in a negative and derogatory sense. In the closing chapter, Christ-von Wedel soars high: “To the present day, Erasmus' writings inspire readers who support [...] a tolerant coexistence with the Other, a sensitive treatment of other cultures [...]” (164).

Well, not when it comes to Jews and Judaism, nor Turks and Islam. Erasmus's treatise *De bello Turcico* is where Erasmus meditates on the essence of Islam:

But what shall I say about their system of government? Where is the rule of law among them? Whatever pleases the tyrant, that is the law. Where is the power of a parliament? What room is there for philosophy? For schools of theology? For holy sermons? For true religion? Their sect is a mixture of Judaism, Christianity, paganism, and the Arian Heresy. They acknowledge Christ—as just one of their prophets [...] What! do the Turks prefer that pestilent and wicked man Muhammad to Christ, at whose name every knee bows, in heaven, on earth, and in the depth of the earth? (CWE 64, 258–59)

This is as degrading and intolerant as can be. Throughout this treatise, the Turks are referred to as despicable, inhuman, cruel, and uncivilized barbarians of inferior origin whose main occupation is banditry, plus they are referred to as an effeminate race, i.e., spoiled and weak. *Genus Turcarum* is characterized by Erasmus as made of “avarice, ambition, the craving for power, self-satisfaction, impiety, extravagance, the love of pleasure, deceitfulness, anger, hatred, envy” (CWE 64, 242).

In *Praise of Folly* Erasmus pours scorn on nations and cities that ascribe to themselves high cultural virtues, as if they were endowed with them by nature: e.g., the British, who boast of their good looks, musical talents, and fine food, and the Scots, French, Parisians, Italians, and others; each group takes pride in being endowed with one or more distinctive virtues. But two groups are given exceptional treatment: the Turks, who are the real barbarian riff-raff that demand recognition for their religion and cast scorn on Christians for their superstition, and the Jews, who are still awaiting their Messiah and clinging fast to their Moses to this day (CWE 27, 117); the Turks and the Jews are the only ones who are not blessed with any virtue or quality and are defined only by their religion, i.e., by their religious arrogance.

Surely, Christ-von Wedel is right in saying: “For Erasmus all human beings had a right to life, believers as well as non-believers” (156). However, Erasmus perceived Christian existence as the highest degree of human existence. A hierarchic conception of humankind is embedded in Erasmus's thought. In his letter to Paul Volz of August 1518, which prefaces *The Handbook of the Christian*

*Soldier*, Erasmus explains the need to make the Turks convert to Christianity: “for though nothing else, they are at least human beings” (CWE 66, 10).

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**Cole, Michael W.**

***Sofonisba's Lesson: A Renaissance Artist and Her Work.***

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. 307 + 281 ill. ISBN 978-0-691-19832-3 (hardcover) US\$60.

In his brief review of the art of the Cremonese Sofonisba Anguissola and her sisters, in *Le Vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori* of 1568, Giorgio Vasari asks rhetorically why we should marvel at women who paint convincing images of males when, by virtue of their gender, they create “living men.” Thus, he articulates a commonplace Renaissance explanation for female artistic ability. But since Linda Nochlin’s landmark article “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” of 1971, the women of whom Vasari and his contemporaries wrote have been revisited and their reassessment has become increasingly multi-faceted. Michael W. Cole extends this project by proposing that the character of Sofonisba’s practice, production, and biography may all be better appreciated through an explicitly pedagogical framework.

Straddling “teaching and learning” (13), pedagogy speaks to Sofonisba’s training, both in a household that unconventionally nurtured the erudition of its female members and in the studios of Bernardino Campi and Bernardino Gatti, with whom she studied painting beginning in the later 1540s. It encompasses the commentaries on cultural values that Sofonisba often embedded in the subject, iconography, compositional structure, and/or style of her imagery; *The Chess Game* of 1555 is an outstanding demonstration piece. Much of this was probably initially achieved with the assistance of her father, whose presence, Cole claims, is symbolically folded into her work through the 1550s. Pedagogy likewise defines Sofonisba’s relationships with patrons, sitters, and disciples, relationships that occasionally allow Cole to cast her as student and teacher simultaneously rather than simply sequentially. He suggests, for example, that