**Erasmus, Desiderius**  
Rotterdam 1466? – 1536 Basel

**Opus de conscribendis epistolis, quod quidam & mendosum, & mutilum aediderant, recognitum ab autore & locupletatum. Parabolarum siue similium liber, ab autore recognitus.**

**Basel, Johann Froben, 1522 (August)**

Two parts, quarto (223 × 150 mm), (308)ff. signed a–z4 A–Z4 Aa–Ff4 Ee–Zz4 aa–ff4 and paginated 1–409 (i.e. 415, errors in numeration) (201). Woodcut compartment on title-page, two pages enclosed by borders of wood- and metalcut strip ornament, woodcut compartment on sub-title, initials from several alphabets, and printer’s device on last page.

PROVENANCE annotations on front endpaper in Latin and Greek; marginalia in the same hand over the first six leaves, then attention evidently lost — inkstamp E[gon]J[aal] in upper corner of the front paste-down, denoting the book’s former location in the Einbandsammlung (the so-called Max-Egon-Saales) in the Fürstlich-Fürstenbergische Bibliothek at Donaueschingen, but no other library stamps or markings — Reiss & Sohn, ‘Auktion 68: Aus einer Süddeutschen Fürstenbibliothek, Teil 1’, Königstein im Taunus, 20 October 1999, lot 56

A fresh and attractive copy in its original binding. Leather across the back of the binding partly worn away in top and bottom compartments, rubbed, small loss on lower cover, clasps lacking (catches remain), nonetheless a good specimen.

BINDING contemporary calf over wooden boards; covers decorated in blind by an anonymous ‘candelabra’ roll (145 × 15 mm) featuring a standing figure and cherub’s head.

**FIRST AUTHORISED EDITION** of Erasmus’ early pedagogical work ‘On the Writing of letters’, begun some thirty years previously, complemented by his collection of aphorisms or ‘Parallels’ gathered out of Plutarch’s *Moralia*, Seneca, Lucian, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Aristotle, Pliny, and Theophrastus. Numerous later editions were printed of both school books;¹ however the texts printed here are the basis of modern critical editions.

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In the dedicatory letter of the treatise on letter-writing (dated 25 May 1522), Erasmus complains that he had been forced to take the work up again, at the insistence of friends, because of the publication of an unfinished draft in England (at Cambridge, printed by John Siberch, October 1521). For the authorised edition, Erasmus rewrote many letters, substituting fictitious for real names, suppressing personal remarks, frivolous subject-matter, and open references to contemporary events; he also composed new letters, including an ‘Epistola consolatoria’ (pp.250–266) and a letter of advice (pp.312–315). The text of De conscribendis epistolis remained afterwards fundamentally unchanged through numerous reprints.2

Erasmus’s corrections and additions of August 1522 became ignored, until restored to the canon by Jean-Claude Margolin in 1975.3

The title-page compartment (183 × 123 mm) was designed by Hans Holbein the Younger and first used in Glareanus’ Isagoge in musicen printed by Froben in May-June 1516.4 The first page of text (folio a3 recto) has metalcut side-borders by Jacob Faber after Hans Holbein, ‘Two Satyrs trumpeting’ (134 × 116 mm) and ‘Nude men attacking satyrs’ (134 × 270 mm), used in conjunction with the famous ‘Venus and Cupid’ border by Hans Franck.5 On the sub-title (folio Ee1 recto) is Urs Graf’s signed border ‘Fool and a Satyr on columns’ (168 × 106 mm), first used in Erasmus’s Moriae Encomium printed by Froben in March 1515.6 The author’s dedicatory letter to Nicolas Bérault (folio a1 verso) and Froben’s device (folio ff4 verso) are enclosed by strips of ornament, one block signed by Jacob Faber. The printer’s device is a version designed by Ambrosius Holbein and signed by the blockcutter CB, first employed in May 1517.7

Only four copies are traced by the writer in North American libraries, of which two are imperfect

● Cambridge, Harvard University, Houghton Library, *NC5 Er153C 1522 ● New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, BEIN Gr11 g522 (imperfect: Parabolae lacking) ● Urbana-Champaign, University of Illinois Library, IUA04555 ● Washington, dc, Folger Library, 220–608q (imperfect: Parabolae lacking)


5 Hollstein, op. cit., XIV, p.199 nos.24a–b. The large metalcut initial (46 × 46 mm) is by Holbein; see Müller, op. cit., p.314 no. 133 (alphabet reproduced pp.201–202).


7 Hollstein, op. cit., XIV, p.22 no. 4.