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AESTICAMPIANUS' EDITION OF THE *TABULA*
ATTRIBUTED TO CEBES

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ACCORDING to one of his biographers,¹ the chief claim to fame of the German humanist Johannes Rhagius Aesticampianus is the fact that he was the first to introduce the *Tabula* (*Tablet* or *Table*) attributed to Cebes to the lands north of the Alps. The time was Easter of the year 1501, and the place, Basel, where Aesticampianus expounded the text to a group of friends.² In 1507 his edition of the work, printed by N. Lamperter and B. Murrer, was published in Frankfurt, and in 1512 it was reprinted in Leipzig by Jacobus Thanner Herbipolitanus.

Who was this Cebes, the supposed author of a work which played such a prominent role in the career of a distinguished teacher and scholar? The historical Cebes was a citizen of Thebes and a disciple, first of Philolaus the Pythagorean, and then of Socrates. Plato records, in the *Crito* (45B), that Cebes was one of a close group of friends who offered money to help effect Socrates' escape from prison. Again, in the *Phaedo* (59D-63B and *passim*), Plato represents Cebes discussing with Socrates the meaning of death on that last day of Socrates' life. Legend has it that Cebes had purchased Phaedo, who had been a slave, and had him instructed in philosophy.³ Little else is known of Cebes, but Diogenes Laertius, in his *Lives of the Philosophers* (II, 125), credits him with the authorship of three dialogues, of which no trace has been found; one of these was entitled Πίναξ, the *Tablet*.

By some curious error of identity, a short philosophical work written in the first century A.D. became known as the Πίναξ⁴ and was long considered to be the work of Cebes the Theban. Modern critics, basing their conclusions upon the internal evidence of quotations from works

of Plato written after Cebes' death and on the presence of late words in the dialogue, are generally agreed that the work could not have been that of Socrates' pupil. This *Tablet* is an allegory of human life in the form of a dialogue. Akin to the early symbolic representation of the two diverse ways of life by the Y of Pythagoras, and to the longer apologue known as the *Choice of Heracles*, which Xenophon reports as the work of Prodicus the Sophist,⁵ it is a kind of proto-*Pilgrim's Progress*.

The *Tablet* receives its title from the focal point in the setting of the dialogue. As some visitors are looking at the votive offerings in a temple of Cronos, their attention is attracted to a tablet upon which are depicted numerous strange figures and devices. An old man agrees to explain the meaning of the picture which he says was dedicated by a philosopher from a foreign land long ago. He then tells them that, in the picture, the circular enclosure with smaller circles inside represents Life, to which a great crowd of people, the unborn, are seeking entrance. At the gate an old man, the Genius or guiding spirit of each individual, offers a scroll with advice to those who are about to enter. Despite this help, the pilgrim setting out on the path of life must endure great temptations and grave dangers as he passes such alluring figures as Deceit, Lust, Avarice, and such awesome personages as Pain, Sorrow, and Despair. Finally, with the aid of Repentance, the wayfarer, though still beset by False Learning, makes for True Doctrine, assisted by Courage and Strength. Eventually he reaches the summit, the radiant meadow of the Blest, where he is welcomed by Knowledge and Happiness, attended by all the Virtues, and is clad in shining garments and crowned with a never-fading garland of flowers. He is then permitted to view the others, who are being held by False Learning and other mistaken values, and he understands that those lives can never find happiness. The whole dialogue is Socratic in spirit as it attempts to show that only by development of his mind by knowledge of the truth and by his attainment of real virtues can man achieve happiness.

6. Cf. *Memorabilia*, II, 1, 21-34. It is retold by Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 32. S. C. Chew, in his *The Pilgrimage of Life* (New Haven, 1962), 174-181, considers the representations of this tale.

1. Cf. H. Grimm, *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin, 1953), I, 92-93.

2. Aesticampianus mentions this in an introductory letter to his text.

3. Cf. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, II, 17.

4. It is first mentioned by Lucian in the second century (cf. *De mercede conductis*, 42, and *Rhetorum praeceptor*, 6). Tertullian also mentions the dialogue, which he says a relative of his had paraphrased in Latin verse (cf. *De praescriptione haereticorum*, Ch. xxxix).

Somehow this short Greek dialogue survived the hazards and vicissitudes to which books were subjected during the Middle Ages. Of the thirteen manuscripts that have preserved the text, only two were written before the fifteenth century: one from the eleventh century is now in Paris (MS. Parisinus graec. 858), and the other, from the fourteenth century, is in Rome (MS. Vaticanus 112). With the revival of interest in the Classics in Italy when the Florentine Academy was endeavoring to recover and study the philosophical texts associated with Plato and his followers, the *Πίναξ* received the attention of scholars. Translated into Latin by Ludovicus Odaxius and edited by the illustrious scholar Philip Beroaldus, it was printed in Bologna in 1497. Strangely enough, the first edition of the Greek text, published by Z. Calliergus in Rome, seems to have been later: although undated, it is considered to have been printed in 1498. Aldus printed an edition of the Greek text with a Latin translation in Venice in 1512, but there is reason to believe that this was not the first Aldine printing: the Beinecke Library has a small manuscript (MS. 59) recording the books printed by the Aldine press before 1534 and listing as the very first item a volume containing Lascaris' *Erotemata*, the *Tabula* of Cebes, the *Carmina* of Pythagoras, and the *Carmina* of Phocylides. It would therefore be reasonable to conjecture that the book was first printed by Aldus sometime between 1495 and 1502.⁷

During this period of high interest by the Italian humanists in the ancient Greek philosophical works, the German scholar Aesticampianus was studying in Bologna. Having become acquainted with the Latin translation of the *Πίναξ*, undoubtedly through Beroaldus, he introduced it to his circle of learned friends in Basel in 1501.⁸

Aesticampianus was one of the first of a class of professors whom one might call international scholars. Born Johannes Rack (Rak), in Sommerfeldt in Lower Lusitania in 1460, he early adopted the name

7. Apparently the Yale manuscript is unique. Its list does not correspond to the one given by A. A. Renouard in his *Annales des Aldes* (Paris, 1825), I, 1. That begins with a volume dated 1495 which opens with the work of Lascaris, but it does not contain the *Tabula*.

8. The boast that Aesticampianus was the first to introduce the *Tabula* to the lands north of the Alps is true only in the very strictest sense, for a Latin translation was printed in Paris by Guy Marchant in 1498. The Beinecke Library has a copy of this book, which contains Athenagoras' *De resurrectione* along with the *Tabula* in Odaxius' translation.

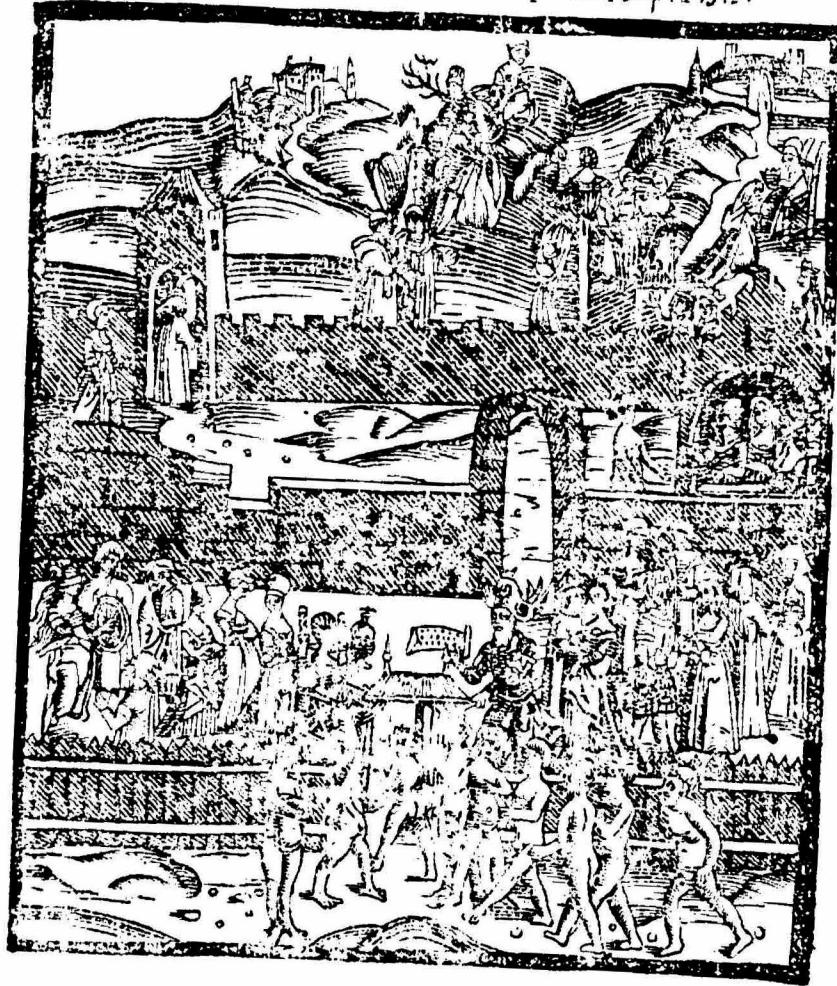
by which he is known to scholarship, Johannes Rhagius Aesticampianus.⁹ Rak is said to be an old dialectical form meaning "crab," hence the Latinized Greek Rhagius, while the cognomen Aesticampianus was the Latin for his birthplace. Nothing is known of his youth until his matriculation at the University of Cracow in 1491, where he studied under Conrad Celtes. With the recommendation of that very eminent scholar, he went to Vienna in 1499, then to Italy, where he became the pupil of Philip Beroaldus in Bologna. Later, in Rome, he became a friend of Jacob Questenberg and was crowned poet laureate by Pope Alexander VI. His studies and his teaching took him to Basel in 1501, thence to Augsburg, Strassburg, and the University of Mainz. In 1506 he was called to serve as professor of rhetoric and poetry at the University of Frankfurt. From 1507 to 1510 he lectured on Pliny and Plautus at Leipzig. There one of his students was the erratic genius Ulrich von Hutten, who later recalled in his *Letters of Obscure Men* that Aesticampianus, like Conrad Celtes before him, was driven from the University because the authorities were opposed to the new learning and the fresh approach of the humanists.¹⁰ Aesticampianus' subsequent wanderings took him to Freiburg, where he seems to have been crowned again as poet laureate by the king, to Cracow, to Italy, to be named doctor of theology, to Paris, where he taught Greek, and in 1513 to Cologne. Finally he spent the years from 1517 until his death in 1520 at Wittenberg as professor of Plinian studies.

Aesticampianus was one of the most active and effective of the German humanists. He was also a friend to the leaders of the Reformation movement, Melancthon and Luther. His extant writings consist of four original works: *Carmina*, *Epigrammata*, *Modus epistolandi*, and *Hymnus in laudem Barbarae*. His need for texts in his teaching led him to edit a number of works: the *De grammatica* and the *De rhetorica* of Martianus Capella; the *Septem epistolae* of Saint Jerome; the *Ad Vespasianum epistola* of Pliny; the *Germania* of Tacitus; the *Libellus de vita Christiana* of Saint Augustine; the *De oratore* of Cicero; the *Grammatica* of Petrus Helias; the *Epistolae* of Libanius, and the *Tabula* attributed to Cebes.

9. This information is supplied by J. A. Fabricius in his *Bibliotheca Latina Mediae et Infimae Aetatis* (Hamburg, 1736), V/VI, 198.

10. Letter I, 17 relates the story of Aesticampianus' difficulties and his eventual expulsion (cf. *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*, ed. F. G. Stokes (London, 1925), pp. 47-51).

Tabula Cebetis philosophi so-
cratici, cū Ioannis Aesticampiani Epistola. 1512.



By some curious turn of circumstances, none of the larger works of Aesticampianus engendered so much enthusiasm as the little dialogue, the *Tabula* attributed to Cebes. His edition stimulated such a vogue for the work that numerous other versions and translations into the vernaculars appeared shortly thereafter. Often it was printed with the *Manual* of Epictetus, the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the *Characters* of Theophrastus, or similar works. Of the many editions before the year 1600,¹¹ the British Museum now has thirty-six. A translation into English, by Sir Francis Poyntz, was published about 1530; an Italian translation, by F. A. Coccio, appeared also in 1530; a Spanish one, by "El doctor poblacion," in 1532; a French one, by G. Corrozet, in 1543, and a German one, by H. Sachs, in 1570. In 1522 Hans Holbein the Younger made a large woodcut title border illustrating the *Tablet* for the title page of Froben's edition of Erasmus' New Testament. He used the same cut again for the *Geography* of Strabo.¹²

It is to the good fortune of Yale that the Beinecke Library owns one of the very few known copies of Aesticampianus' edition of the *Tabula* printed in 1512. It is a slim little book of only twenty-seven numbered pages, with a full-page woodcut of the *Tabula* on the title page (see illustration), apparently copied, like the text, from the earlier edition of 1507. This woodcut is less ornate, but in many respects more charming than the later title-page border of Holbein. The text begins with a Latin letter from Aesticampianus, "rhetor et poeta laureatus," to a beloved pupil, Christopher Ziegler. After complimentary remarks on the noble family of the young man, he suggests that in the *Tabula* Christopher will find a mirror of all human life and lessons to be learned from it. Aesticampianus then gives a Latin poem in the hendecasyllabic meter, which he says he wrote six years earlier (*i.e.* in 1501) in Basel when he was studying the dialogue with his friends. There follows the "Argumentum," a summary of the plot, again addressed to young Ziegler. Still another poem, an "Epigramma," is also directed to the young man. In it Aesticampianus gives a Christian

11. For the most nearly complete listing of the editions see S. F. W. Hoffmann, *Bibliographisches Lexicon der Griechen* (Amsterdam, 1961)—a reprint of the Leipzig 1838-45 edition—I, 438-48. Among these, the first critical edition by H. Wolf, printed in Basel in 1560 and reprinted many times, is one of the most noteworthy, and the first to raise the question of the authorship of the dialogue.

12. This is reproduced as fig. 50, p. 50, in H. Knackfuss, *Holbein*, tr. by C. Dodgson (Bielefeld and Leipzig, 1899).

point of view to the dialogue when he says that he has observed in life that nothing is lasting save virtue, work, and the Grace of Christ, part of which has been indicated in the *Tabula* and part in our free will. The text of the Latin translation of the *Tabula* then follows,¹³ and the book ends with an elegiac poem, an exhortation to virtue, by the brilliant young student, Ulric von Hutten.

The sixteenth century certainly claimed the *Tabula* for its own. Besides the many editions, there was published in Leyden in 1551 another Latin translation by Justus Velsius, who included a 440-page commentary on this "treasury of all moral philosophy." Interest in the work continued to be lively for another century, testified to by the multiplicity of editions¹⁴ and translations into more and more languages. One of the most unusual editions is one prepared by J. Elichmann and published after his death by C. Salmasius in Leyden in 1640: it presents three parallel texts—an Arabic paraphrase, probably of the ninth century; the Latin translation; and the Greek original.¹⁵ Milton, in his famous letter *On Education*, written in 1644, takes the occasion to recommend the study of the *Tablet* as a delightful book to win over the young to a "love of vertue and true labour."¹⁶

The universal love for allegory was doubtless an important factor in the phenomenal popularity of the dialogue, particularly in northern Europe, for two hundred years after it was first printed. But there is an additional clue, perhaps, in Aesticampianus' epitaph. When one bears in mind that Aesticampianus was a dedicated teacher who loved what he was teaching and who had deep concern and affection for his pupils, then the lines have added significance:

Rhetorice, Sophiam vatum monumenta professus,
Annis viginti plusve minusve tribus.
Danubius, Rhenus testatur, et Odera, et Albis,
Spiraque, cum docta Sequana Gallus aqua.¹⁷

13. This is not the Odaxius translation and there is no indication of the translator. It was used again in an edition published in Antwerp in 1547.

14. The text attracted some of the greatest philologists, e.g., Gronovius, who published an edition in 1689 in Amsterdam.

15. Yale has a copy of this unusual text. Since the Greek text is incomplete, many of the Latin translators have used the Arabic to supply the ending.

16. Cf. "Letter to Master Samuel Hartlib on Education" in *The Works of John Milton*, Columbia edition (New York, 1931), XIV, 281.

17. Cf. Fabricius, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

A man who, as the epitaph states, taught rhetoric, philosophy, and the masterpieces of the poets for twenty-three years in the far-spread territory watered by the Danube, the Rhine, the Oder, the Elbe, and the Seine must have passed on his enthusiasm for the *Tabula* to an uncounted number of students and their students. Would it be sheer fantasy to imagine that this little book might be considered the small pebble that set in motion ever-widening circles of interest in the work?

Cebes

Cebetis Tabula. -- Letz C. E. Aesticampianus' edition of the Tabula attrib. to Cebes: YLG XLV 1971 110-117. [Survey of the activities of the German humanist Aesticampianus, especially his introduction and discussion of a copy of the Tabula to lands north of the Alps. Description and discussion of a copy of Aesticampianus' 1512 edition of the Tabula held by the Beinecke Library of Yale University.]
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