

WOLFGANG MIEDER

De Burmania-sprekwurden. Santjinde-ieuske Fryske sprekwurden ferklearre en yn har tiid besjoen. By Frederik Johan van der Kuip. Ljouwert/Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 2003. Pp. 765.

Paremiographical publishing miracles still happen! I will never forget the day when this hefty volume of *De Burmania-sprekwurden* arrived in Vermont as a review copy for *Proverbiwm*. Once I opened the voluminous tome perfectly printed on heavy glossy paper, I was hooked into reading one richly annotated Frisian proverb entry after another until I had reached no. 1133c after several days of intensive linguistic and cultural study. I also thanked my lucky star for having chosen the study of the Dutch language some thirty-five years ago for the fulfillment of one of the Ph.D. language requirements. With my native knowledge of German, my fluency in English, and my ability to read Dutch, I was now perfectly prepared to deal with this important Frisian proverb collection that is not only of highest value for the historical study of the Frisian language and culture but also for the comparative analysis of the proverbs of the Germanic languages as well as the entire European proverb tradition. Congratulations to Frederik Johan van der Kuip for having undertaken this enormous editing and annotating job, and thanks to the Jacob Krol fund for supporting the project financially and to the Fryske Akademy for publishing this magisterial tome. It represents a landmark in Frisian and European paremiology and paremiography, and it will go down in the history of international proverb scholarship as one of its finest accomplishments.

Frederik Johan van der Kuip begins his *magnum opus* with a very detailed introduction (pp. 11-123) in Frisian. It was thoughtful as well as useful to include two extensive summaries of this comprehensive survey of the history of Frisian proverb collections and studies, one in Dutch (pp. 729-746) and the other in English (pp. 747-765). Dutch readers will also benefit from the fact that van der Kuip has provided Dutch equivalents and/or variants for the Frisian

texts in his annotations, citing them primarily out of P.J. Harrebomée's *Spreekwoordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal*, 3 vols. (Utrecht: Kemink, 1858-1870; rpt. in one volume at Amsterdam: Van Hoeve, 1980). Of course, Dutch scholars will not have much difficulty with the Frisian texts in any case due to the close relationship of the two languages. However, this is not necessarily true for other paremiologists interested in the comparative study of European proverbs. So let me mention here the only criticism that I will level against this otherwise perfect work. I wish that the author would have added a literal English (or German) translation underneath each of the 1174 Frisian texts. It would also have been of much use to provide Frisian, Dutch, and English (or German) key-word indices of the proverbs at the end of the volume, enabling scholars to locate each proverb with ease for their comparative work. Perhaps this could be done if a second edition of this important collection were to be published. The fifty or so additional pages would be well worth the effort and price.

Speaking of comparative paremiography, it should be noted that Frisian proverbs have by no means ignored. While they do not appear in most polyglot collections due to the relatively small role that the Frisian language plays on the international scene, references of Frisian texts are, for example, included in Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander, *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon* (citing many foreign equivalents), 5 vols. (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1867-1880; rpt. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964); Ida von Düringsfeld and Otto Freiherr von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, *Sprichwörter der germanischen und romanischen Sprachen*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hermann Fries, 1872-1875; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1973); Gyula Paczolay, *European Proverbs in 55 Languages with Equivalents in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese* (Veszprém: Veszprémi Nyomda, 1997); and very prominently in H.L. Cox, *Spreekwoorden. Nederlands, Fries, Afrikaans, Engels, Duits, Frans, Spaans, Latijn* (Utrecht: Van Dale, 2000). It is a bit surprising that the collections by Reinsberg-Düringsfeld and Paczolay do not appear in the large bibliography (pp. 700-728). The superb polyglot collection by Cox with its 1570 texts and key-word indices would be the best accompanying dictionary to be used by

scholars who are not able to deal with the Frisian texts of the *De Burmania-sprekwurden*. The fact that Frisian proverbs appear in such comparative European proverb collections is solid proof that many of them stem from the same classical, Biblical, and medieval Latin proverb stock that was loan translated into the numerous vernacular languages.

The long introduction to the scholarly edition of *De Burmania-sprekwurden* (pp. 11-123) is divided into eight parts, with the first section (p. 13) serving as a general statement concerning the manuscript history of the Frisian proverbs that are part of this collection. The second section (pp. 14-29) presents a detailed discussion of the position and status of the Frisian vernacular in the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries, dealing especially with French, English, and German as well as Dutch and Frisian developments during the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation, with humanist scholars showing much interest in proverb traditions both from foreign and indigenous sources. This is followed by the third section (pp. 30-46) on the many proverb collections of that time, explaining in particular that paremiographers then did not differentiate among proverbs, proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, proverbial exaggerations, twin formula, wellerisms, curses, exclamations, and other formulaic language. Van der Kuip also points out that the arrangement of the collections varied widely, from purely textual enumerations to richly annotated essays, as for example in the *Adagia* (1500ff.) of Erasmus of Rotterdam or the collections by Johann Agricola, Sebastian Franck, and others.

The important fourth section (pp. 47-71) presents a highly informative history of the Burmania-collection, discussing in much detail the three major manuscripts from 1614 (B with 1133 texts), 1641 (D with 1174 texts; printed as *Oude Friesche Spreekwoorden*), and 1675 (G with all the texts of B and D plus some others). Seven illustrations of manuscript and title pages are included, and there is also a discussion of the structure (the texts are listed in alphabetical order without translation or explanation) and content of the collection. The editor has found equivalents or variants for at least 70% of the texts, indicating clearly that the Frisian proverbs belong to the common European proverb tradition. Of the

remaining 30% of the texts that appear only in *De Burmaniasprekwurden*, at best 50 texts remain that with certainty can be considered of purely Frisian origin. The majority of the proverbs and other proverbial texts are thus of international currency, a phenomenon that has been observed for other European languages as well. But the issue as far as Frisian paremiographical history is concerned is not so much one of origin but rather one of actual use in everyday speech. There is no doubt that Frisian speakers then and today will think of these proverbs as "Frisian", just as English speakers might think that proverbs like "Time flies", "Man does not live by bread alone (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4), and "Strike while the iron is hot" are of British origin which they assuredly are not.

The fifth section (pp. 72-85) covers the vexing question whether the wealthy Frisian nobleman Georgius van Burmania (ca. 1570-1634; see his picture on p. 78) was in fact the compiler of this proverb collection. While much speaks for his having done so, there can be no absolute certainty, since so little is actually known about his life. He definitely was part of the humanist intelligentsia of his time, having studied law at the universities of Franeker, Cologne, and Orléans. This discussion leads quite expectedly to an account of the research history on the Burmania-collection that continues to carry the name of the supposed compiler (section 6, pp. 86-103). Van der Kuip treats its reception by such Frisian and Dutch paremiographers as Franciscus Junius, Janus Vlitius, Michael Honywood, Simon Abbes Gabbema, Johannes Hilarides, Jacques Alexandre de Chalmot, Everwinus Wassenbergh, Jacob Hendrik Hoeufft, Pieter Jacob Harrebomée, and others, thus presenting a valuable historical survey of Frisian and Dutch paremiography, mentioning at the end also the inclusion of proverbial materials in popular collections and major language dictionaries as the *Wurdboek fan de Fryske Taal* (1984ff.) and the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (1882-1998); see also the schematic overview (p. 105) of this paremiographical survey.

In the seventh section (pp. 106-122) van der Kuip reviews his research methodology and approach. While he wanted to present an annotated edition of each text in the Burmania-collection, he

also desired to register the meaning of the texts that is not always immediately apparent because of archaic words and the unfortunate fact that the proverbs are listed without any context. In any case, each proverb is first cited in bold print in the Frisian language as it appears in the old Burmania collection. This is followed by one or more Frisian variants as well as a translation into modern Frisian and, when possible (actually most of the time), by a Dutch reference out of Harrebomée's collection. After that van der Kuip lists references to the many proverb collections of the 16th and 17th centuries as well as later periods (see the list on pp. 112-122). All of this invaluable material is followed by a short semantic explanation of the old Frisian proverbs, making each of the almost 1200 texts a small paremiographical monograph. Finally, the minute eighth section (p. 123) simply states once again that while the Burmania-collection is a clear product of its time, when proverbs and other formulaic language was heavily used, collected, and studied, it is also a proverbial treasure of Frisian linguistic and cultural tradition and identity. As such it merits the tremendous labor and expense that went into producing this superb modern edition of *De Burmania-sprekwurden*.

As a final comment, let me simply list a few texts that I marked as I read through this fascinating Frisian proverb collection. Here and there I will provide a short comment:

- 12 Æst of west / thuis is best /
- 33 Al te folle is ongesoun /
- 81 By tjoester binne alle katten grauw.
- 769 NAchts binne alle katten graaw.
- 87 Borjen mecket sorgjen
- 147 De Gies melckje / [proverbial expression]
- 181 De swarte ouxe hat dy jette næt oppe voet wessen /
[with reference to Archer Taylor's study "The Proverb
`The Black Ox Has not Trod on His Foot' in Renaissance
Literature," *Philological Quarterly*, 20 (1941)],
266-278; also in A. Taylor, *Selected Writings on Prov-*

erbs, ed. by Wolfgang Mieder (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1975), pp. 152-164.]

- 194 Deer ærst komt / deer _rst mælt / [vgl. Sven B. Ek, *Den som kommer föst till kvarns – ett ordspråk och des bakgrund* (Lund: Gleerup, 1964).]
- 249 Dy wirden binne goed / sey d'uwle en sæ yne sauter. [wellerism]
- 262 Een stien ken allinne nin mool mælje /
- 266 Eyn hird / is goud wird /
- 296 Folle hannen meytze licht wirck /
- 297 Folle wijnen / dwaa de hase dæd /
- 303 Fouggelt fin ien feert / flioecht jern to gerre /
- 336 Hat d'aade sjonghe / dat pypje de jonghe.
- 369 Hy fisket after 'tnet. [van der Kuip might have referred to a scene in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559) painting that illustrates this proverbial expression.]
- 383 Hey het ijne Petercely schijten / [this is but one of several scatological expressions in the Burmania-collection.]
- 423 Hy loketter uyt / allijcke de mouws uytte nool poot. [proverbial comparison]
- 429 Him enget fin sijn eyn schaad. [proverbial expression]
- 433 Hinghet lære oon de klock touwe. [proverbial expression]
- 438 Hird 'tjen hird / zey de droes en biet ijnt stiel.
- 410k Hird tjen hird / sey de dæl / en schiet tjen de tonger. [wellerism]
- 477 Hy wol him opt kessen bijne. [here van der Kuip does include a reference to Pieter Bruegel, who illustrates this proverbial expression with reference to the devil.]
- 611 Jsser dæd / soo ijter nin meer bræd.

- 677 Lijtse potten rinne gaau our.
- 750 Moorn ist æck ien dey.
- 777 Nye biesemen feye schien.
- 848a Pisjen voor donsjen / sey de faam. [another example of the earthy character of some of the proverbs in this and other early proverb collections.]
- 895 Sliepende honnen / heertme næt weysten to meysten.
- 899 Soo de moer is soo binne de jonghen.
- 913 Stille wetteren hadde djippe grounen.
- 963 T'himd is my neyer as de roock.
- 967 Tinsen is tol fry.
- 1047 Twiske twaa stoelen ijne ieske. [proverbial expression]
- 1058 Twaa honnen our ien bien / komme seldom our ien. [also once again a scene in Bruegel's proverb painting.]
- 1122 Wa nèt to rieden is / is næt to helpen.

This small florilegium was only meant to whet other scholars' appetites! As can be seen, these expressions are also basically known in most of the other Germanic languages like Dutch, English, German, etc., and to a certain degree also in other European languages. In any case, for each of the texts listed here and all the others in *De Burmania-sprekwurden*, Frederik Johan van de Kuip has provided detailed annotations and explanations, earning him a *summa cum laude* for his scholarly effort.

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