

The first printed edition of the Greek text of Aristophanes' nine comedies, published by Aldus Manutius.

Aristophanes. *Comoediae Novem*. Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1498. Folio, 13 inches x 9 1/16 inches (330 x 230 mm), 696 pages.

The earliest printed texts of the ancient classics were almost exclusively Latin. Only toward the end of the fifteenth century was a programmatic effort made to bring the Greek classics into print. The campaign was led by Aldus Manutius (ca. 1450–1515), a sometime classical tutor, with the assistance of several Greek exiles, chief among them the Cretan scholar Marcus Musurus (ca. 1470–1517). Aldus was not the first to print books in Greek—editions of Homer, Theocritus, and Hesiod had already been produced elsewhere—but he did publish the first editions of some 30 classical authors. These *editiones principes* included the Greek texts of Aristotle (1495), Aristophanes (1498), Herodotus (1502), Sophocles (1502), Euripides (1503), Demosthenes (1504), Plato (1513), Pindar (1513), Pausanias (1516), and Aeschylus (1518).

This *editio princeps* of Aristophanes includes a preface recommending the plays not as masterworks of literature but as a guide to conversation: a reader steeped in Aristophanes (the editors claimed) could not help but have learned to speak a pure and fluent Attic Greek. This stance was in perfect keeping with Aldus's attitude to typography. His fonts imitated the swift cursive Greek in contemporary commercial use, with its many ligatures and abbreviations, rather than the formal uncial types of earlier printers. It was not always possible to gather together an author's entire surviving work: this edition contains only nine of the plays. *Lysistrata* and the *Thesmophoriazusae* were then unlocated, and not published until the Giunta edition, produced in Florence in 1515. (Similarly, Aldus's *editio princeps* of the works of Aristotle lacked such talismanic texts as the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*—later discoveries enabled Aldus himself to add these to the canon).

The early works from the Aldine press were Greek classical texts and grammars, usually in handsome, costly, and not altogether saleable folios. It was not until 1501 that Aldus launched (with an edition of Virgil's works) his popular series of *libelli portatiles*, pocket editions of

classical texts, which at last brought him financial stability in addition to fame, and a reputation as the greatest scholar-printer of his day. Smaller books required smaller types, which were also useful, even in folios or quartos, for bringing an expansive author's collected works within the compass of a single volume.

Aldus commissioned four Greek fonts in all, the last being for his octavo classics, first used in the *editio princeps* of Sophocles in 1502. The main text of the Aristophanes marked the last appearance of Aldus's first Greek type. The surrounding annotations, Musurus' scholia, required a smaller subsidiary character, which was apparently especially designed for use in this particular book—at all events, the scholia is the first text to be set in Aldus's second Greek type. This arrangement of text and notes mimics the practice of contemporary manuscript copies.

This copy of the 1498 Aldine Aristophanes is bound in gilt-stamped brown calf. The spine is divided into six compartments, with title in the second, and the endpapers are marbled. The stamp of a previous owner ("Ex libri [A.?] Ciccolini") appears on a front blank recto above handwritten bibliographical notations in Latin and French. On the previous blank is a bookplate acknowledging the book as a bequest to Stanford from Mr. and Mrs. William H. Crocker. The book is now in the Cecil H. Green Library, which comprises roughly a third of the Stanford University Libraries' 8.5 million volumes, and it houses special collections amounting to a quarter million rare volumes. Among the rarities are an extensive collection of Aldine editions and numerous incunables.