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978-1-107-02421-2 - The Stoic Sage: The Early Stoics on Wisdom,  
Sagehood and Socrates

René Brouwer

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## THE STOIC SAGE

After Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics, from the third century BCE onwards, developed the third great classical conception of wisdom. This book offers a reconstruction of this pivotal notion in Stoicism, starting out from the two extant Stoic definitions, ‘knowledge of human and divine matters’ and ‘fitting expertise’. It focuses not only on the question of what they understood by wisdom, but also on how wisdom can be achieved, how difficult it is to become a sage, and how this difficulty can be explained. The answers to these questions are based on a fresh investigation of the evidence, with all central texts offered in the original Greek or Latin, as well as in translation. *The Stoic Sage* can thus also serve as a source book on Stoic wisdom, which should be invaluable to specialists and to anyone interested in one of the cornerstones of the Graeco-Roman classical tradition.

RENÉ BROUWER is a lecturer at the University of Utrecht, where he teaches on law and philosophy in the Faculty of Law. He works on theory of law and topics in ancient philosophy, with a special focus on Stoicism, its origins and reception, and the tradition of natural law.

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Aelbert Cuyp, *Herdsmen with Cows*

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## PREFACE

My interest in the topic of wisdom dates back to the time when I first read Plato's *Apology*. I became particularly interested in how the Stoics seemed to have picked up on this Socratic theme, and it is to their treatment of wisdom that I devoted my Cambridge dissertation. After I had published one article, 'Stoic Sagehood', directly out of it, and developed sections of the dissertation into longer articles, I became convinced that I needed to present them as part of a more integrated account, which has now resulted in this book on the Stoic sage. Chapter 2 goes back to 'The Early Stoic Doctrine of the Change to Wisdom', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 33 (2007), Chapter 3 is a reworked version of 'Stoic Sagehood', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 23 (2002), and an earlier version of sections in Chapter 4 appeared in 'Hellenistic Philosophers on *Phaedrus* 229B–230A', *Cambridge Classical Journal* 55 (2008). I am grateful to the publishers for their permission to re-use this material.

In the long period of gestation that led to this book I have benefited from the help of many people. Here I wish to thank those who have been particularly important in the writing of the present book: Alice van Harten for discussing its set-up; the editors of Cambridge Classical Studies for taking the book for the series; the readers for the Press for their generous and constructive comments at various stages; David Sedley for annotating – in his inimitably careful manner – the penultimate version, and thus for making me rethink a number of passages; Jörn Mixdorf, for his proof-reading, and help throughout. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude towards Malcolm Schofield, who already as the supervisor of my PhD thesis formulated these pertinent, fundamental questions that always turned out to advance my work. He has remained supportive

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## Preface

of it ever since, giving me valuable advice even at the very last stages of writing.

For the cover image I have chosen a painting by the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Aelbert Cuyp, *Herdsmen with Cows*, now in the Dulwich Picture Gallery, which I take to show some of the characteristics of the Stoics' 'ordinary' ideal of living in harmony with nature, in its idyllic version. Even more than the low viewpoint, the evening light is the most striking feature of the painting. It can be seen as a reminder of the elusiveness of the ideal: if it can be attained at all, it will be only late in life, or as Cleanthes put it, 'at the setting of the sun'.