

Johannes Reuchlin. *Briefwechsel: Band 4, 1518–1522*.

Ed. Matthias Dall'Asta and Gerald Dörner. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 2013. 1 + 522 pp. €128. ISBN: 978-3-7728-1986-5.

With this volume, Matthias Dall-Asta and Gerald Dörner have brought to a magnificent conclusion their monumental edition of the correspondence of Johannes Reuchlin. Although the correspondence comprises only 405 letters (184 by Reuchlin), Dall'Asta and Dörner's extensive commentaries swell the four-volume collection to over 2600 pages. The quantity may be modest, but the correspondence is of extreme significance, above all because it offers multifaceted insiders' views on these unusually formative decades of German history. The powerful and influential make regular appearances in these pages because Reuchlin was not only the leading German humanist of his generation, still celebrated as the founder of Christian Hebrew studies, but also a political figure who over a long and successful career networked extensively with many courts, including Württemberg, the Palatinate, Bavaria, Electoral Mainz, as well as the imperial courts of Friedrich III and Maximilian I. Reuchlin also maintained close contact with the Vatican, which he visited as an emissary during three separate pontificates (Sixtus IV, Innocent VIII, and Alexander VI). Reuchlin first encountered Leo X, the pope who would play such a major role in his life, as a boy with his tutors in the Medici palace

in 1482 (letter 309). Moreover, the widespread controversy over his defense of Jewish books, an issue that for nearly a decade was the unofficial rallying cry of humanists throughout the empire and beyond, made Reuchlin a familiar name to European leaders.

Volume 4 covers important and fascinating topics: the complex denouement of the heresy trial, the spread of Christian Hebrew studies (and humanism more generally), as well as the eruption of the Reformation. Since Reuchlin was at the center of the German intellectual world, it is not surprising that his biography thrusts us into the early years of the Reformation in so many ways. Philipp Melanchthon was his relative (raised by his sister) and devoted protégé. Indeed, it was in his 1518 correspondence with Elector Friedrich of Saxony (letter 331) that he arranged for Melanchthon to take a professorship in Wittenberg. Later, Reuchlin would be unable to coax him away from Wittenberg and Luther to accept a position at the orthodox stronghold of Ingolstadt (letter 383). We also see Franz von Sickingen and Ulrich von Hutten, to their bitter disappointment, trying in vain to rally Reuchlin to Luther's cause (letter 395). Reuchlin's Hebrew research, moreover, was decisive for Luther's early exegesis, and his defense of Judaism created the context for some of Luther's early reflections on Judaism. It is all but certain that the final papal verdict against Reuchlin was motivated by the urgent need to support inquisitional authorities in Germany and quash Luther: Leo issued the condemnation on 23 June 1520, just eight days after signing the initial condemnation of Luther ("Exsurge Domine"). In December 1518, Luther himself sent a fawning tribute to Reuchlin in which he tried to portray the controversies swirling around him as an extension of the Reuchlin affair (letter 352). It may well have been a strategic mistake for Reuchlin to publish this letter in his 1519 *Illustrium virorum epistolae*. After the papal condemnation, some of Reuchlin's great adversaries — Hoogstraeten, Cajetan, Prierias, and Adrian of Utrecht (soon to be Hadrian VI) — turned from his trial and devoted themselves entirely to the harsh crackdown on Luther.

The correspondence also offers many glimpses into the early history of printing. From the beginning of his studies at the University of Paris to his final tenure as a professor of Greek and Hebrew at the University of Tübingen, Reuchlin associated with major figures in the burgeoning world of printing: Heynlin von Stein, Guillaume Fichet, the Amerbachs, the Kobergers, Aldus Manutius, Thomas Anshelm, Johannes Setzer, and, not least, Daniel Bomberg. The last surviving letter addressed to Reuchlin was from Bomberg, the most significant Renaissance publisher of Hebrew. Despite his preoccupation with producing the first complete edition of the Talmud, Bomberg announces that his presses have just completed a special edition in Hebrew of Proverbs, the Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes for use in Reuchlin's Tübingen classroom (letter 402). We know from Reuchlin's last letter (letter 403) that the University of Tübingen had also ordered 100 copies of Bomberg's rabbinic Bible for their students preparing to enter the new world of Christian Hebrew studies for the first time.

The truly great achievement of Dall'Asta and Dörner's monument lies in the impeccable textual scholarship and expansive commentary. They have traced every reference and explained every unfamiliar allusion with consummate judgment and erudition. The commentary is a model for editions of Renaissance correspondence, and one could only wish that the authors of other outstanding editions, such as the correspondence of Luther, Melanchthon, and Pirckheimer, could have pored over every detail as carefully as have Dall'Asta and Dörner. Naturally, many editors do not have the luxury of dealing with a corpus of such manageable size. It is, however, somewhat disappointing that translations of the Latin letters are not included in these volumes. They appear in a separate imprint by the same publisher: Johannes Reuchlin, *Briefwechsel: Leseausgabe in deutscher Übersetzung*, translated by Georg Burkard and Adalbert Weh, 4 volumes (2000–11). Sadly, by not translating the numerous Latin sources cited in their notes, the authors have probably limited their future readership.

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