



Johannes Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books

David Price

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The early sixteenth century saw a major crisis in Christian-Jewish relations: the attempt to confiscate and destroy every Jewish book in Germany. This unprecedented effort to end the practice of Judaism throughout the empire was challenged by Jewish communities, and, unexpectedly, by Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522), the founder of Christian Hebrew studies. In 1510, Reuchlin wrote an extensive, impassioned, and ultimately successful defense of Jewish writings and legal rights, a stunning intervention later acknowledged by a Jewish leader as a miracle within a miracle. The fury that greeted Reuchlin's defense of Judaism resulted in a protracted heresy trial that polarized Europe. The decade-long controversy promoted acceptance of humanist culture in northern Europe and, in several key settings, created an environment that was receptive to the nascent Reformation movement. The legal and theological battles over charges that Reuchlin's positions were impermissibly favorable to Jews, a conflict that elicited intervention on both sides from the most powerful political and intellectual leaders in Renaissance Europe, formed a new context for Christian reflection on Judaism. David H. Price offers insight into important Christian discourses on Judaism and anti-Semitism that emerged from the clash of Renaissance humanism with this potent anti-Jewish campaign, as well as an innovative analysis of Luther's virulent anti-Semitism in the context and aftermath of the Reuchlin Affair. This book is a valuable contribution to study of an important and complex development in European history: Christians acquiring accurate knowledge of Judaism and its history.

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