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Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), Celebrated Hebraist Loyal to the Church: Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of His Death

Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), wybitny hebraista wierny Kościołowi.
Upamiętnienie 500. rocznicy jego śmierci

ABSTRACT: The life and work of Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522) has been investigated in the past primarily by Protestant authors pivoting around the views of Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), who was Reuchlin's relative and Martin Luther's close collaborator. The purpose of the present contribution is to liberate the Catholic Reuchlin from the Protestant *Wirkungsgeschichte*. In order to come closer to the real Reuchlin, one has to focus on him as the Catholic Philo-Semite that he actually was. There were multiple cardinals in Rome who were favorably inclined toward Reuchlin; his controversial book *Eye Glasses* was on trial in Rome. Reuchlin had an unshaken and life-long commitment to the Catholic faith under papal leadership. He also maintained good relations with the monastic humanists (German *Klosterhumanisten*) of his time. He was glorified by Christians and Jews. Erasmus thought of Reuchlin as a saint and paid him overwhelming tribute in his eulogy *Apotheosis Capnionis* (*Reuchlin's Ascension into Heaven*).

KEYWORDS: Johann Reuchlin, Leo X, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Caspar Amman, Crotus Rubeanus, biblical languages, Christian Hebraists, monastic humanism, humanist bishops, Rome's humanists

ABSTRAKT: Życie i działalność Johanna Reuchlina (1455–1522) były w przeszłości badane przede wszystkim przez autorów protestanckich, skupionych wokół poglądów Filipa Melanctona (1497–1560), który był krewnym Reuchlina i bliskim współpracownikiem Marcina Lutra. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest „uwolnienie” katolickiego Reuchlina od protestanckiej *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Aby poznać prawdziwego Reuchlina, należy skupić się na nim jako katolickim filosemicie, którym w rzeczywistości był. W Rzymie żyło wielu kardynałów przychylnie nastawionych do Reuchlina; jego kontrowersyjna książka *Zwierciadło oczu* była przedmiotem procesu w tym mieście. Reuchlin konsekwentnie, przez całe życie wiązał się z wiarą katolicką pod przewodnictwem

papieża. Utrzymywał też dobre stosunki z ówczesnymi zakonnikami-humanistami (niem. *Klosterhumanisten*). Cenili go zarówno chrześcijanie, jak i żydzi. Erazm uważał Reuchlina za świętego i oddał mu hołd w laudacji zatytułowanej *Apotheosis Capnionis* (*Apoteoza Reuchlina*).

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Johann Reuchlin, Leon X, Erazm z Rotterdamu, Caspar Amman, Crotus Rubeanus, języki biblijne, chrześcijańscy hebraiści, humanizm monastyczny, biskupi humaniści, humaniści rzymscy

Introduction

The life and work of Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522) has been investigated in the past primarily by Protestant authors pivoting around the views of Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), who was Reuchlin’s relative and Martin Luther’s close collaborator. The purpose of my contribution here is to take Reuchlin out of this context and liberate him from the Protestant *Wirkungsgeschichte* while continuing the search for the historical Reuchlin: a critical, but loyal Catholic lay theologian.¹

The most prominent example of the traditional Lutheran interpretation of Reuchlin’s life and work is a statue of Reuchlin which is part of the world’s largest monument to the Reformation, inaugurated in 1868, called the “Luther Monument in Worms” in Germany. At the center of the composition, we see Luther on a tall platform. He wears a professor’s cloak, although he would certainly dress in the habit of the Augustinian Order when he appeared in 1521 at the imperial Diet of Worms, an event which the monument helps to commemorate. Four medieval or late medieval European heretics sit at Luther’s feet: Peter Waldus (Waldes, Valdes, Pierre Vaudès or de Vaux, France, ca. 1140–ca. 1205); John Wyclef (Wiclif, England, ca. 1320–1384 [not visible on the picture]); Jan Hus[s] (Bohemia, ca. 1369–1415) and Girolamo Savonarola (Italy, 1452–1498). By placing Reuchlin into this company of heretics he appears to be one of them, which he was not.

¹ Cf. M. d’All Asta, *Frömmigkeit und Kirchenkritik: Der Laientheologe Johannes Reuchlin*, [in:] *Wie fromm waren die Humanisten*, B. Hamm, T. Kaufmann (Hg.), Wiesbaden 2016, pp. 223–246. Indeed, Reuchlin was a loyal lay theologian remaining in the Catholic Church.



Fig. 1. Luther Memorial in Worms; Reuchlin in the far-left background.



Fig. 2. Johann Reuchlin (far left side) at the Martin Luther Monument in Worms.

The statue of Reuchlin was placed, oddly enough, on one of the four corner pedestals in the company of two secular, influential men in Protestant Church

history, including Elector Frederick the Wise (1463–1525) and Philipp, Landgrave of Hesse (1504–1567), being presented in front. Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) and Johann Reuchlin are elevated in the back of the monument. Reuchlin was not a ruler or politician and thus does not belong into any political “context.”

The memorial was unveiled on 25 June 1868. If the monument could talk, what thoughts would it reveal (“what does the monument think”)?² It is anybody’s guess! At the time of the conceptualization and the erection of the monument in the 19th century (which is dubbed the ‘historical century’) the assumed proper view was (and, occasionally, still is) that Martin Luther and the Reformation in Germany were highly indebted to Johann Reuchlin. This view is correct insofar as Luther respected and learned from Reuchlin, the expert on the Hebrew language.³ Therefore, in this limited regard, Reuchlin deserves to be shown among the reformers of the Luther Monument. Yet, there is more to Reuchlin than this. The 19th century perspective remains lopsided.

Reuchlin Fenced in for Centuries as an Enemy of “the Monks” by Philip Melanchthon’s Distorted View

The general, German, Protestant view of Reuchlin was deeply impacted for centuries, to various degrees, by the spell of Philip Melanchthon. Very strangely, in Melanchthon’s “memoirs,” which were published in 1546 as his *Preface* to the Second Volume of the Latin edition of Luther’s works (which Melanchthon edited after Luther’s death), no mention is found at all of any impact by Reuchlin on Luther, nor anything about Reuchlin’s great interest in the Jewish Cabala.⁴

Six years later, in 1552, Melanchthon gave a commemorative speech about Reuchlin’s life and career.⁵ Melanchthon rightly hinted at Reuchlin and his

² This imaginative question is recently being asked: *Was denkt das Denkmal? Eine Anthologie zur Denkmalkultur*, T. Schult, J. Lange (Hg.), Göttingen 2021.

³ Cf. H. Junghans, *Der junge Luther und die Humanisten*, Weimar 1984, Göttingen 1985; S. Raeder, *Das Hebräische bei Luther untersucht bis zum Ende der ersten Psalmenvorlesung*, Tübingen 1961; *Die Benutzung des masoretischen Textes bei Luther in der Zeit zwischen der ersten und zweiten Psalmenvorlesung (1515–1518)*, Tübingen 1977; *Grammatica theologica. Studien zu Luthers Operationes in Psalmos*, Tübingen 1977.

⁴ My translation is found in F. Posset, *Melanchthon’s Memoirs: The Preface to the Second Volume of Luther’s Works (1546)*, [in:] F. Posset, *The Real Luther: A Friar at Erfurt and Wittenberg. Exploring Luther’s Life with Melanchthon as Guide*, Saint Louis 2011, pp. 149–169.

⁵ Cf. P. Melanchthon, *De Capnione Phorcensi. Oratio continens historiam Ioannis Capnionis, Phorcensis, recitata a Mart. Simone Brandeburgensi*, [in:] P. Melanchthon, *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 11, Halle 1834 (hereafter: CR), <https://www.google.com/books/edition/>

Hebrew teachers, the Jewish physicians Jacob Iehiel Loans (died 1505?) and Abdias (1470–1550; Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno),⁶ and also at Reuchlin's work on the Hebrew Psalms (1512) and at the controversy over the books of the Jews. Not quite justifiably, Melanchthon polemicized against the "tyranny of the monks." Producing the idiosyncratic stereotype "the monks," Melanchthon viewed contemplative monks and mendicant friars indiscriminately as if all of religious Orders were Reuchlin's adversaries, nor did he mention the name of Reuchlin's chief opponent, Johann Pfefferkorn (1469–1521), a Catholic layman of Jewish descent.⁷ Melanchthon also reported on Reuchlin's expert opinion concerning the Jewish books expressed for the emperor (1510), and the heresy trial in Speyer against Reuchlin (1514) which ended with Reuchlin's acquittal. Yet, this particular fact of being acquitted of heresy was ignored by Ernst Rietschel (1804–1861), the creator of the Luther Monument.

Melanchthon, however, correctly remembered Reuchlin's important defender in Rome, Petrus Galatinus (1460–1530),⁸ who in 1515 published his defense of Reuchlin.⁹ Melanchthon, being prejudiced against "the monks," ignored the fact that Galatinus was a member of a monastic order (the Franciscans). This fact would have contradicted his stereotypical, fixed view of all "the monks" being adversaries of Reuchlin.

At the end of Melanchthon's speech, one may actually find a note on the Cabala. However, he mentioned only the one of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), saying that Pico was knowledgeable about the Hebrew language and had thoroughly examined the "left-overs" (*reliquiae*) of the Cabala, characterizing it as "this old doctrine."¹⁰ Whether or not there was a derogatory

Corpus_reformatorum/-BARAAAIAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=%22corpus+reformatorum%22&pg=RA1-PA1&printsec=frontcover#PRA1-PA1,M1 [access: 18 June 2022], columns 999–1010 (no. 127).

⁶ Cf. CR 1005; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522): A Theological Biography*, Berlin–Boston 2015, pp. 189.

⁷ Cf. CR 1006–1007.

⁸ Also known as Pietro Galatino, cf. CR 1008. Reuchlin corresponded with him: *Johannes Reuchlin Briefwechsel*, Stuttgart 1999–2013 (hereafter: RBW), vol. 4, no. 269–270, 355. Space does not allow elaborating on the correspondence of Reuchlin and Friar Galatino.

⁹ *In defensionem praestantissimi viri Johannis Capnionis*; cf. S. Campanini, *Quasi post vindemias racemos colligens. Pietro Galatino und seine Verteidigung der christlichen Kabbala*, [in:] *Reuchlins Freunde und Gegner. Kommunikative Konstellationen eines frühneuzeitlichen Medienereignisses*, W. Kühlmann (Hg.), Serie: *Pforzbeimer Reuchlinschriften* 12, Ostfildern 2010, pp. 69–88; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 562–568.

¹⁰ *Picus Mirandulanus quia Ebream linguam norat, multa ab eo sciscitatus est de reliquiis veteris doctrinae, quam Cabalam nominant*; cf. CR 1010.

undertone in this remark, I leave up to the reader. Melanchthon suppressed the fact that the historical Reuchlin was the author of two important Cabalistic books, *The Wonder-Working Word* (1494) and *The Art of the Cabala* (1517).¹¹ This deliberate neglect concurs with Luther's distaste for anything that smacks of Jewish Cabala and of "cabalizing."¹² And, besides that, Reuchlin's *The Art of the Cabala* was actually dedicated to the humanist Pope Leo X.¹³

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Melanchthonian view of Reuchlin

The most famous German literate, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), closely following Melanchthon's attacks against "the tyranny of the monks," unjustifiably depicted a distinct anticlerical Reuchlin. Melanchthon's stereotypical talk about "the monks" was echoed by Goethe.¹⁴ Goethe made no mention of the symbolic, biblical meaning of Reuchlin's coat of arms. Yet and rightly so, Goethe admired the incomparable Reuchlin as a miracle (*Wunderzeichen*) of his time. For all that he distorted the image of Reuchlin as if Reuchlin was struggling with all the contemporaneous, evil, dumb and absurd priests, monks, friars, whom Goethe labelled with the German term *Pfaffen* (the term was originally neutral, but since about the time of the Reformation it is used in a derogatory way). Supposedly, Reuchlin spoke up against those in "the obscure cowls" (*gegen die obskuren Kutten*) which stands for the members of religious Orders. Such abusive generalization with respect to "the monks" is uncalled for when one knows about the ecclesiastical and monastic-humanist network in which Reuchlin lived and operated.

¹¹ On various other aspects of Melanchthon's problematic commemorative speech of 1552, see: F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 15–19.

¹² Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 772–776.

¹³ Cf. RBW vol. 3, no. 309.

¹⁴ "Reuchlin! Wer will sich ihm vergleichen, / Zu seiner Zeit ein Wunderzeichen! / Das Fürsten- und das Städtewesen / Durchschlängelte sein Lebenslauf, / Die heiligen Bücher schloss er auf. / Doch Pfaffen wussten sich zu rühren, / Die alles breit ins Schlechte führen, / Sie finden alles da und hie / So dumm und so absurd wie sie. / Dergleichen will mir auch begegnen, / Bin unter Dache, lass es regnen: / Denn gegen die obskuren Kutten, / Die mir zu schaden sich verquälen, / Auch mir kann es an Ulrich Hutten, / An Franz von Sickingen nicht fehlen." As quoted by Ludwig Geiger, *Johann Reuchlin. Sein Leben und seine Werke*, Leipzig 1871, p. 475 with reference to Goethe's *Zahme Xenien*.

Reuchlin within the Network of Catholic Church Men

Reuchlin's foundational, biblical spirituality is pictorially displayed on his coat of arms, which he received on 24 October 1492, on the occasion of Emperor Frederik III raising him to the ranks of the nobility. The diploma specified that the new nobleman's emblem has to show a golden altar with smoking coals and the inscription *ara Capnionis* (Capnion's Altar) against a blue shield. The helmet is to be girded with grey-blue and golden, priestly bands (*t[a]enia*).¹⁵ The design is inspired by the description in the Hebrew Bible and thus demonstrates Reuchlin's biblical spirituality. The general, biblical backdrop for his emblem is Exodus 28:33, 30:1–10, and 39:25 about the altar of incense and the gold bells of the vestments of the Jewish high priest¹⁶ (see: Figs 3 and 4).

Reuchlin and his Relations to the Hierarchy

Reuchlin's coat of arms can be seen multiple times; for example, together with his hand-written dedication to Melanchthon and on the title page of *De rudimentis hebraicis* (1506). Most remarkably, the coat of arms appears also on his books: *De arte Cabalistica* (1517) (Fig. 3) is dedicated to Pope Leo X (pope 1513–1521)¹⁷ and his *De accentibus* (1518) – to Cardinal Adriano Castellesi (Fig. 4).¹⁸

Reuchlin's book dedications to a pope and a cardinal

“This book is dedicated to His Holiness, Pontifex Maximus Leo X, with the humble commendation of Johannes Reuchlin.” The dedication to a pope stemming from the Medici family in Florence is significant insofar as Reuchlin connects himself with it to Florentine humanist thinking. It is thus probably not accidental that in 1520 Reuchlin receives great praise from the contemporaneous Florentine observer, Bartolomeo Cerretani (1475–1524), who reported about his encounter with Reuchlin in Frankfurt where he and his travel companions met him, probably on the occasion of a Frankfurt Book Fair. Cerretani spoke of

¹⁵ Cf. RBW vol. 1, no. 433, lines 145–150 (Appendix III, *Ernennungsurkunde zum Hofpfalzgrafen*).

¹⁶ F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 109.

¹⁷ Cf. RBW vol. 3, no. 309.

¹⁸ Cf. RBW vol. 4, no. 325.

Reuchlin as “the unique philosopher and theologian of our time who showed us his dialogue on the art of the Cabala.”¹⁹



Fig. 3. *De arte Cabalística* (1517), dedicated to Pope Leo X.



Fig. 4. *De accentibus et orthographia* (1518), dedicated to Cardinal Adriano [Castellesi].

Apparently, Reuchlin showed them his book *De arte cabalística*, a book *Melanchthon*, as said above, did not find worthy of mention in his biographical sketch of Reuchlin.

In order to come closer to the real Reuchlin, it is not enough to strip him of his briefly delineated life in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* in Protestant Germany; one has to focus on him as the Catholic scholar and as the Philo-Semite that he actually was.²⁰ Reuchlin cannot be placed, in terms of spirituality, within German Lutheranism; he is properly contextualized by civic and monastic

¹⁹ Cf.: [...] a Francaforte, dove parlo e stemo alquanti di con Joanni Reuchlino, unico et filosofo et teologo dell'eta nostra e mostrocci un composto per modo di Dialogo, el quale gli ha fatto dell'Arte Cabalística, [in:] B. Cerretani, *Storia in dialogo della mutazione di Firenze* (1520), J. Schnitzer (ed.), Munich 1904, pp. 83–105, here 85.

²⁰ Cf. F. Posset, *Katholischer Philosemit. Zum 500. Todestag von Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522)*, “Stimmen der Zeit” (January 2022), pp. 55–64.

humanism and international, Catholic ecclesiastical circles. Most remarkably, Reuchlin always made a conscientious effort to dedicate his books to the men of the Church as he explicitly pointed out in his Preface to *De accentibus et orthographia*.²¹ Here are additional examples of his dedications to Catholic clerics, in chronological order: *The Wonder-Working Word* (1494) to Bishop Johannes von Dalberg of Worms;²² *The Art of Preaching* (1503) to Probst Petrus Wolf at the monastery in Denkendorf near Stuttgart; *De Rudimentis Hebraicis* (1506) to his brother Dionysius, a priest; *Frogs and Mice at War* (Poem, written 1495, printed 1510) to Friar Erhart von Pappenheim OP;²³ *Book of Saint Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria, about various questions* (1519) to Archbishop Albrecht of Brandenburg.

Reuchlin's special connection to the local bishop, Johannes von Dalberg

From among the “humanist bishops,”²⁴ Reuchlin had one very close bishop-friend, namely Johannes von Dalberg (1455–1503) of Worms/Heidelberg. Both were born in 1455, but the bishop died earlier. Their correspondence started in 1489 comprises five letters.²⁵ Dalberg was the center of the humanist circle in Heidelberg, known as the Literary Sodality of Germany,²⁶ or, *Sodalitas Literaria Rhenana* or Heidelberg Sodality. Membership included Reuchlin, Cistercian monk Leontorius,²⁷ Benedictine Abbot Trithemius, and Premonstratensian Canon Jacob Dracontius (Drach, or Trach; ca. 1480 – prior to 1512), at the monastery Allerheiligen near Oberkirch in the Rench Valley (Northern Black

²¹ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 325, lines 114–128.

²² Cf. RBW, vol. 1, no. 64.

²³ Cf. *Batrachomiomachia Homeri Ioanne Capnione Phorcensi metaphraste*, Vienna 1510; RBW, vol. 2, Addendum to vol. 1, no. 73a; dedicated to the tri-lingual Friar Erhard von Pappenheim (died 1497). He was the father confessor of the Dominican sisters at Altenhohenau on the Inn River in Bavaria. See also: D. Stern, *Erhard von Pappenheim: A Portrait of a Hitherto Unstudied Early Christian Hebraist*, [in:] *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, R.S. Boustán, K. Herrmann, R. Leicht, A.Y. Reed, G. Veltri (eds.), collab. A. Ramos, vol. 2, Tübingen 2013, pp.1261–1284; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 85.

²⁴ The German expression *Humanistenbischöfe* was coined by A. Schmid, *Humanistenbischöfe. Untersuchungen zum vortridentinischen Episkopat in Deutschland*, “Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte” 87 (1992), pp. 159–192.

²⁵ Cf. RBW vol. 1, nos. 33, 34, 50, 64, 78; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 88–91.

²⁶ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 169–175.

²⁷ Cf. F. Posset, *Renaissance Monks: A Group Portrait of Monastic Humanism*, [in:] F. Posset, *Collected Works*, Eugene 2022.

Forest). Dracontius was Reuchlin's student and Dalberg's *protégé*. He wrote a Latin poem in 1499 which was addressed to Reuchlin and his other friends.²⁸

Dalberg offered Reuchlin refuge if it ever became necessary in those unstable times,²⁹ and it did. From 1496 to 1499, Reuchlin actually was the director of Dalberg's library that was located at Ladenburg, north of Heidelberg.³⁰ Reuchlin sent him his little book *Quotidiana Colloquia Graeca* (*Daily conversations in Greek*).³¹ In 1494 Reuchlin received from Dalberg the highly controversial book-manuscript *Nizahon* (Victory [of Judaism over Christianity], written in 1399) which the authorities confiscated during a raid of Jewish homes in Mainz in 1478.³² In 1495, Dalberg gave Reuchlin another gift he cherished, namely the rare, medieval Hebrew manuscript *Ginat Egoz* (*The Nut Garden*) by the Spanish Cabalist Gikatilla (1248–ca. 1305), which was written in 1274. The book is an introduction to the symbolism of the Hebrew alphabet and the names of God. The eminent Hebraist, Augustinian Friar Caspar Amman (ca. 1450–1524) of the friary of Lauingen on the Danube, had wanted it, too.³³ In 1499 Reuchlin received from Bishop Dalberg a precious gift of an early print of the Hebrew Pentateuch with the commentary by the probably best known medieval Jewish scholar Rashi (1040–1105) and a second gift, the *Targum Onkelos*, which is the oldest complete Jewish Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch (both texts were printed in 1482).³⁴

Multiple cardinals in Rome supportive of Reuchlin

Reuchlin was always eager to be in contact with Rome. As the man of the Renaissance, a polyglot and humanist, he had numerous acquaintances and friends in low and high places of the Church (and State). In October 1514, Reuchlin was the subject of the emperor's letter to the pope.³⁵ There were also several cardinals in Rome who were favorably inclined toward Reuchlin, whose controversial *Eye Glasses* were on trial in Rome. Reuchlin did not have to appear in person at the trial. In 1518, Reuchlin contacted the members of

²⁸ Cf. RBW, vol. I, no. 94; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 171–172, 183.

²⁹ Cf. RBW, vol. I, no. 50.

³⁰ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 172–173.

³¹ Cf. RBW, vol. I, no. 34.

³² Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 173.

³³ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 119–120, 173, 242.

³⁴ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 197.

³⁵ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, Appendix II.

the commission who were to evaluate and judge his *Eye Glasses*. Here are the cardinals with whom Reuchlin had contacts in this regard (except Peraudi, 1502).

Cardinal Raimundus Peraudi (French Perault, 1435–1505), to whom Reuchlin wrote on 27 June, 1502.³⁶ The letter completed the collection of *Letters of Famous Men*.

Cardinal Adriano Castellesi (ca. 1461–1521) was honored by Reuchlin in dedicating to him his latest book *De accentibus et orthographia* (see above). Reuchlin shared some autobiographical insights about his studies in Greek and Hebrew, also writing that he was motivated to study “the Hebrew mysteries,” i.e., the theology and spirituality of the Jews. As far as it was proper for a Christian to approach Jews for learning from them in order to benefit the Church. He explained further that he was driven by “his natural disposition and love of piety” (the Christian faith). For the proper understanding of the Scripture, the expertise in the biblical languages is essential. The leaders of the Church must be made aware of this and for that very reason he as a layman dedicated almost all his works to ordained men of the Church.³⁷

Cardinal Achille de’ Grassi (1463–1523), to whom Reuchlin complained in 1518 about his adversaries, i. e. the theologians in Cologne. The cardinal was appointed by Leo X as a judge in the trial over his *Eye Glasses*.³⁸

Cardinal Domenico Giacobazzi (1444–1527), who, too, was a judge in the trial over *Eye Glasses*. Reuchlin offered documentation in his own defense for the trial.³⁹

Cardinal Pietro Accolti (1455–1532; Petrus Anconitanus, also referred to as “Eusebius”), to whom Reuchlin expressed his relief that he was a judge at the trial.⁴⁰

Cardinal Lorenzo Pucci (Puccius, 1458–1531), who had summoned Friar Galatinus to write *De arcanis catholicae veritatis*. Reuchlin hoped that Pucci would come to his defense.⁴¹

A special relationship existed between Reuchlin and Cardinal Aegidius de Viterbo (1465–1532; Giles, Egidio). The significance of the Augustinian Prior General in Rome, ten years Reuchlin’s junior, perhaps needs to be explained in greater detail. The following letters of Aegidius are known: to Reuchlin’s family of October 1516,⁴² to Reuchlin himself,⁴³ and another to his family of 24 May

³⁶ Cf. RBW, vol. 1, no. 115; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 227, 731.

³⁷ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 325; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 7.

³⁸ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 344.

³⁹ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 347.

⁴⁰ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 348.

⁴¹ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 349.

⁴² Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 297.

⁴³ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 300.

1517.⁴⁴ Under his leadership the Augustinian Order was one of the greatest producers of monastic humanists early in the 16th century. On 15 December 1513, Aegidius wanted to know from his German fellow friar, Provincial Caspar Amman, everything concerning the Hebraica matters that was in Reuchlin's library. Aegidius knew that Friar Caspar was Reuchlin's disciple and therefore asked him for the favor of providing him right away with the inventory list (*index*) of the books in Reuchlin's library.⁴⁵ In Aegidius's view, Reuchlin was serving the Church well with his defense of the Hebrew books including the Talmud.⁴⁶ Aegidius in Rome hired private tutors of Hebrew, namely the fellow friar of Jewish descent, Felix de Prato (Felix Pratensis, Felice da Prato; died 1539 in Rome) and in 1509 also the Jewish scholar Elia(s) Levita (ca. 1460–1549), also known as Elia Bahur, son of Asher the German, i.e., of Ipsheim near Nuremberg). Aegidius wrote to Amman on 15 December 1513: "You would give us the greatest treasures, riches, and kingdoms, if you would procure codices for us. We will be eternally grateful for them."⁴⁷ On 25 October 1516, Aegidius wrote to Reuchlin that he very much regretted that he had not been able to meet Reuchlin on the occasion of his visit to Germany, when Pope Leo X had sent him to Emperor Maximilian I (1455–1519).⁴⁸ As a cardinal, Aegidius supported the edition of the Babylonian Talmud in the original language,⁴⁹ an undertaking to which Leo X granted the privilege of printing to Daniel Bomberg in Venice. Aegidius was very interested in the Cabala and, in his view, Reuchlin was one of the Christian discoverers of the Cabala.⁵⁰ Reuchlin's book *On the Art of the Cabala* was given an imperial privilege on 21 April 1516 and was published by Thomas Anshelm in the Alsatian imperial city of Hagenau in March 1517. Reuchlin sent Aegidius a copy and received the latter's thankfulness for it on 24 May 1517.⁵¹ Reuchlin also sent two copies to Erasmus on 27 March 1517. Erasmus was to forward a copy to Bishop John Fisher of Rochester (1469–1535).⁵²

⁴⁴ RBW, vol. 3, no. 312.

⁴⁵ [...] *Gratissimam nobis rem feceris, si ad no squam primum mittas indicem librorum omnium, quos ille idem praeceptor habet tuus...*; the Latin excerpt is found in L. Geiger, *Johann Reuchlins Briefwechsel*, Tübingen 1875, p. 260, note 2.

⁴⁶ Cf. D.W. Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy*, Philadelphia 1909; reprint: London 1963, pp. 167, 239.

⁴⁷ Mention of it is made in by F.X. Martin, *Friar, Reformer, and Renaissance Scholar: Life and Work of Giles of Viterbo 1469-1532*, Villanova 1992, p. 163.

⁴⁸ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 300.

⁴⁹ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 398, note 6; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 856.

⁵⁰ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 4.

⁵¹ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 312.

⁵² Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 310.

Among Reuchlin's correspondents were numerous humanist canons, priests, friars and monks.⁵³ Only a few of them can be selected and briefly covered here.⁵⁴

Reuchlin and his Life-Long, Positive Relationships with "the Monks"

The common opinion in Protestant Germany through the centuries did not pivot on Reuchlin's unshaken and life-long commitment to the Catholic faith under papal leadership and his good relations with the monastic humanists (German *Klosterhumanisten*) of his time.⁵⁵ The concept of monastic humanism simply draws attention to the fact that around the year 1500 certain scholars who were Renaissance humanists lived, indeed, in monasteries. Or, from another perspective, monastic and civic humanists were actually engaged in extensive correspondence and dialogue.⁵⁶ As contemplative monks they did not hold university positions, but were "independent scholars."⁵⁷ Melancthon's outrageous prejudice toward "the monks" whom he projected as enemies of Reuchlin simply does not hold when examining the facts.

Cistercian Monk Conradus Leontorius

Already in his 1489 letter, Cistercian monk Conrad Leontorius (ca. 1460–1511) of Maulbronn admired Reuchlin for his knowledge of the Latin and Greek

⁵³ Cf. M. Dall'Asta, *Reuchlin im Gefüge des Renaissance Humanismus*, [in:] *Johannes Reuchlin und der 'Judenbücherstreit'*, D. Mertens, S. Lorenz (Hg.), Serie: *Tübinger Bausteine zur Landesgeschichte* 22, Ostfildern 2013, pp. 119–146, here 132.

⁵⁴ Others have to be left aside, such as for example: Canon Bernhard Adelman, RBW, vol. 1, nos. 11, 38; Cathedral Preacher Johannes Geiler von Kaysersberg, RBW, vol. 1, no. 63; Canon Johann von Lamberg, RBW, vol. 1, no. 87; Cardinal Raimund Peraudi, RBW, vol. 1, no. 115; Canon Mutianus, RBW, vol. 1, no. 127; RBW, vol. 2, nos. 151, 224; RBW, vol. 3, no. 293; RBW, vol. 4, no. 335; Archbishop Uriel von Gemmingen, RBW, vol. 2, nos. 170, 171; Bishop Matthaues Lang, RBW, vol. 2, no. 178; Bishop John Fisher, RBW, vol. 3, no. 295; Canon Kilian Leib, RBW, vol. 4, no. 372.

⁵⁵ On monastic humanists (German: *Klosterhumanisten*), see: F. Machilek, *Klosterhumanismus in Nürnberg um 1500*, [in:] *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg*, Bd. 64, Nürnberg 1977, pp. 10–45.

⁵⁶ Cf. H. Müller's *Habilitationsschrift*, with the title *Habit und Habitus. Mönche und Humanisten im Dialog*, Tübingen 2006.

⁵⁷ Cf. A. Beriger, *Der Typus des Monastischen Privatgelehrten*, [in:] *Gelehrte im Reich.: Zur Sozial- und Wirkungsgeschichte akademischer Eliten des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*, Serie: *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung. Beihefte* 18, R.C. Schwinges (Hg.), Berlin 1996, pp. 375–410.

languages.⁵⁸ The praise of him as a polyglot continued when Leontorius's letter of 30 March 1495 was utilized by the printer as a letter of introduction in Reuchlin's book, *The Wonder-Working Word*: "In praise of Johann Reuchlin of Pforzheim, the most eloquent man, most skilled in the three main languages, and [in praise] of his book *De verbo mirifico* which is now edited with a letter of recommendation by Conradus Leontorius of Maulbronn."⁵⁹ On 25 June 1510 [the assumed year] Reuchlin sent the Cistercian monk a poem which he had composed years earlier, as an *Ersatz* because at the moment he had no time to write him a letter.⁶⁰

Benedictine Abbot Johannes Trithemius

The most famous monastic humanist, Benedictine Abbot Johannes Trithemius (i.e., from Tritheim, 1462–1516) informed the public in his biographical-bibliographical lexicon of church-related authors of his time, issued in 1494, that Reuchlin was an expert not only on the entire ancient philosophy and literature, and well-versed in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French, but also on biblical studies.⁶¹ Trithemius listed Reuchlin's works up to 1494 including, for example, *The Wonder-Working Word*. In 1494 Reuchlin travelled to his abbey in order to tutor him in Greek.⁶² In his abbey one may still find a trilingual inscription of a psalm on an arch over a door.⁶³ There are, however, no letters known between the two.

Benedictine Abbot Leonhard Widenmann

Leonhard Widenmann (died 1546), the abbot of Ottobeuren near Memmingen in southern Germany, initiated the correspondence with Reuchlin on 8 October 1508. Widenmann indicated his familiarity with Reuchlin's *On the Wonderworking Word* and the *Rudiments of Hebrew*. The abbot and his monastic community in particular liked the *Rudiments*. The monks were eager to learn Hebrew and expected their abbot to hire a Hebrew teacher for the monastery.

⁵⁸ Cf. RBW, vol. 1, no. 31; F. Posset, *Renaissance Monks...*, op. cit., Chapter 1.

⁵⁹ RBW, vol. 1, no. 68; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 156–157.

⁶⁰ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 166.

⁶¹ Cf. *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, Basel 1494, folio 134r., http://www.mgh-bibliothek.de/etc/digilib/trithemius/trith_278.gif [access: 18 June 2022].

⁶² Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 154.

⁶³ Cf. F. Posset, *Polyglot Humanism in Germany, circa 1520 as Luther's Milieu and Matrix: The Evidence of the 'Rectorate Page' of Crotus Rubeanus*, "Renaissance and Reformation" 28 (2003), pp. 5–33, here 8 with note 33.

The monks really wanted to pray the psalms in the Hebrew original. If Reuchlin knew a Jewish convert able to teach Hebrew, he should let the abbot know.⁶⁴ Mail delivery went rather fast, since Reuchlin responded already on 11 October praising the abbot for being a rare bird with his great regard for the “pure and original theology.” Hebrew is the holy language and the *mediatrix* in which God communicated with human beings.⁶⁵ Scholars need to return to the purity of the fonts and embrace Hebrew for the Old Testament, and Greek for the New Testament.

In the years to come, the correspondence between Reuchlin and the abbey of Ottobeuren went through Nicholas Ellenbog (see below). On 1 August 1513, Abbot Widenmann took up the direct correspondence with Reuchlin since his monk, Ellenbog, kept urging him to purchase or borrow a Greek Bible for the purpose of copying it.⁶⁶ Four days later, Reuchlin responded that he did not have one. Reuchlin took the opportunity to update his friends in Ottobeuren about the controversy with Pfefferkorn, namely that the emperor ordered both sides to keep permanent silence. For their information Reuchlin sent the abbot the imperial *mandatum silentii*.⁶⁷ Ellenbog in his letter of 13 August 1513 confirmed the arrival of that mandate and simultaneously forwarded the abbot’s invitation for Reuchlin to come to their monastery.⁶⁸ A visit was still expected which Ellenbog mentioned again in his letter of 25 February 1515. Furthermore, Ellenbog expressed his gratitude that Reuchlin arranged the inclusion of their correspondence in the *Letters of Famous Men* of 1514.⁶⁹ This fact should have alerted Melanchthon to be more careful and differentiating when polemizing against “the monks” as the enemies of Reuchlin.

Benedictine Monk Nicolaus Ellenbog

Nicolaus Ellenbog of the abbey of Ottobeuren was a life-long admirer of Reuchlin.⁷⁰ Their correspondence began with Ellenbog’s letter of 24 April 1509 to Reuchlin. Ellenbog had questions to be clarified about Hebrew matters and the Cabala which he encountered during the study of Reuchlin’s books *De*

⁶⁴ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 147.

⁶⁵ [...] *puram et originariam theologiam...*, cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 148.

⁶⁶ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 217.

⁶⁷ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 218.

⁶⁸ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 221.

⁶⁹ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 263.

⁷⁰ Cf. F. Posset, *Renaissance Monks...*, op. cit., Chapter 6.

Rudimentis hebraicis and *De verbo mirifico*.⁷¹ Reuchlin responded right away saying that he had not published anything yet on the Cabala. He also explained the spelling of the *Tetragrammaton* and the differences between Hebrew and Aramaic which Jesus and the apostles spoke.⁷² On 23 July 1509 Ellenbog asked Reuchlin to proof-read some of the Greek in one of his manuscripts,⁷³ which Reuchlin had to decline because of his illness, but replied that consulting a Greek dictionary should help him in this regard.⁷⁴ On 21 January 1510 Ellenbog promised to pray for Reuchlin's health and recommended that Reuchlin turn away from worldly works and spend his time exclusively on the study of the Sacred Scriptures for the benefit of the entire Church.⁷⁵ Ellenbog stood by Reuchlin during the difficult times of the controversy over Jewish books.⁷⁶ He continued with his studies of Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* and wanted to enter more deeply into it. The true salvation comes from the Hebrews, he wrote in paraphrasing John 4:22 ("salvation comes from the Jews").⁷⁷ On 19 November 1518 he wished to receive Cabalistic books from Reuchlin to copy them so that he himself could taste the "Cabalistic sweetness."⁷⁸ This was the last letter Ellenbog wrote. Reuchlin had not reacted to any of the last three letters from Ellenbog since 1516.

In 1521/1522 Ellenbog was in contact with a former student of Reuchlin at Tübingen, Jacob Gruerius (Gruber or Grauer, no dates known), who was kind enough to lend Ellenbog his lecture notes from which he would make copies. In his letter to Gruerius of 6 August 1526 (about four years after Reuchlin's death), Ellenbog reminisced of his correspondence with Reuchlin, who was the most learned preceptor, whom he, however, was never granted to meet in person:

It is astounding how the culinary specialties from Reuchlin's kitchen are pleasing to my stomach. This *humanissimus* [highly educated] man liked me while he was among the humans. And although we were unable to meet in person, he was in frequent contact with me through letters (which were stolen from

⁷¹ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 152.

⁷² Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 153.

⁷³ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 157.

⁷⁴ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 160.

⁷⁵ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 161.

⁷⁶ F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 507–510.

⁷⁷ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 315; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 509.

⁷⁸ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 350.

me during the Peasants' Revolt). I had kept them with me like Croesus' riches and kept kissing them.⁷⁹

Apparently, Reuchlin never managed to visit the Abbey of Ottobeuren and its congenial, monastic humanists. The turmoil from the Peasants' War heavily impacted the abbey. The attackers not only robbed Ellenbog's first collection of letters which included the copies of the correspondence with Reuchlin, but also his beloved Hebrew Bible.⁸⁰

Carthusian Prior Jean Quonus

Good relations existed between Reuchlin and several Carthusian monks.⁸¹ The first contact with them was established through Jakob Lauber (ca. 1440–1513). Two early letters came down to us from 1488.⁸²

In summer 1514, the French Carthusian, Joannes [Jean] Quonus (no exact dates known, active between 1514 and 1518), eulogized Reuchlin. Quonus was the prior of the monastery Longuenesse in the valley of Saint Aldegonde near Saint-Omer, south of Calais. He wrote to the French humanist, Faber Stapulensis (1455–1536) that Reuchlin is a “man of admirable *ingenium*” whom he (Quonus) suspected to be somewhat “higher than a human being.”⁸³ Just like the Benedictine Ellenbog, Quonus would like to hear from Reuchlin about that sublime knowledge of the Cabala (*illa sublimis cabalae scientiae*), which Quonus also called *scientia cabalistarum*. He knew of Reuchlin's *Rudimenta*, with which he probably tried to learn Hebrew on his own, as Erasmus told Reuchlin about his (Erasmus's) visit with Quonus. On that occasion Erasmus showed him a letter written by Reuchlin. The Carthusian was so excited that he begged Erasmus to let him have this precious letter of Reuchlin whom he revered so fervently. When Erasmus gave it to him, Quonus kissed it repeatedly

⁷⁹ *Ellenbog Briefwechsel* 4, 213–214 (no. 48), as quoted by H. Zäh, *Reuchlin und das Kloster Ottobeuren – Sein Briefwechsel mit Nikolaus Ellenbog und Leonhard Widenmann*, [in:] *Reuchlins Freunde und Gegner...*, op. cit., p. 277; cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 865.

⁸⁰ Cf. H. Zäh, *Reuchlin und das Kloster Ottobeuren...*, op. cit., p. 276.

⁸¹ In my book *Renaissance Monks...* (op. cit., first edition 2005), I did not cover the monastic humanists in the Carthusian Order, something which is to be made up for here, to a small degree. I covered Jacob Lauber, however, in F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit.

⁸² Cf. RBW, vol. 1, nos. 25–26.

⁸³ [...] *quem aliquid supra hominem esse suspicor*, RBW, vol. 2, no. 367 (no. 296; 24 July 1514), note 15 provides the Latin letter (pp. 367–368); F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 622.

and refused to give it back.⁸⁴ Kissing a document was obviously a gesture common among monastic humanists since the same is reported of the Benedictine humanist Nicolaus Ellenbog (see above). One may debate whether Quonus was a full-fledged humanist. However, being a contemplative monk who was visited by the prince of humanists, Erasmus, and being a letter-writer to another humanist, Faber Stapulensis, cannot be very far from humanism. It is, therefore, justified to situate Quonus at least within the broader spectrum of monastic humanism.

Carthusian Prior Gregor Reisch

Gregor Reisch (Reysch, Ruschius, ca. 1467–1525) was almost a generation younger than Reuchlin. Reisch was the prior of the Carthusian monastery St. Johannisberg near Freiburg in the Black Forest. As a monastic humanist he was sympathetic to Reuchlin's linguistic efforts. Reisch's *Aepitoma omnis philosophiae, Alias Margarita Philosophica* (Philosophical Pearl), was first published in Freiburg in 1503, then reprinted twice in 1504, by Michael Further in Basel and by Johann Grüninger in Strasbourg. Remarkably, one of the first pages of *Margarita* features a woodcut showing the Hebrew alphabet. In the revised *Margarita* edition of 1508/1509, now called *Margarita philosophica nova*, Reisch included an entire passage from Reuchlin's quotation from the Talmud. It had been presented in Hebrew letters in Reuchlin's *De rudimentis*, at the end of the third book. Since this concluding part is still addressed to Reuchlin's younger priest-brother Dionysius, it is included in the new critical edition of RBW.⁸⁵ However, in Reisch's work only the Latin translation is provided and given the title *Admonitio* for the study of Hebrew. This admonition includes the passage from the Talmud about withholding the divine Hebrew words from any other nation, for which Psalm verse 147,19–20 is given as proof-text: "The Lord also proclaims his word to Jacob, decrees and laws to Israel. God has not done this for other nations" (The New American Bible). Reuchlin disagrees and in opposition he inserts the verse from the Gospel of Matthew in his admonition: "Shout from the roof what you have heard" (Mt 10,27).⁸⁶ Reuchlin's early work was thus widely disseminated by Reisch's *Margarita Philosophica* as it was an encyclopaedia of knowledge intended as a textbook for youthful students. The twelve "books" (sections) contain Latin grammar, dialectics, rhetoric, arithmetic,

⁸⁴ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 296; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 512.

⁸⁵ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 138, showing the Hebrew words on lines 296–298.

⁸⁶ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 277, see also: p. 263.

music, geometry, astronomy, physics, natural history, physiology, psychology, and moral philosophy. Reisch and Reuchlin appeared to be one heart and soul.

Meanwhile, in October 1510, Reuchlin submitted to the emperor his Expert Opinion (*Ratschlag*) whether to confiscate, destroy and burn all books of the Jews. He advised the emperor not to allow the indiscriminate burning.⁸⁷ The emperor put Archbishop Uriel von Gemmingen (1468–1514) in charge of evaluating all the expert opinions that he had ordered and that were submitted. The actual work of evaluating was carried out by the Freiburg Commission which Gregor Reisch had put together by summoning two other experts. The commission agreed with the majority of the opinions, including those of the universities of Paris, Cologne, Louvain, Erfurt und Mainz, and completely neglected Reuchlin's opinion, who remained the lone dissenter. His opinion was not even mentioned in the commission's report. Reisch had somewhat been surprised by Reuchlin's positive opinion about respecting the books of the Jews. Reisch guessed that the Jews had bribed Reuchlin who was upset by this insinuation. Reuchlin, therefore, defended himself and wrote in his *Augenspiegel* (*Eye Glasses*; August 1511) that whoever maintains such an accusation is lying, even if it were a pious person like a Carthusian monk. He meant, of course, Reisch.⁸⁸ Reuchlin's good relationship with Reisch deteriorated, even more so and especially since Reuchlin's adversary, Johann Pfefferkorn, will publish Reisch's report in 1516. Pfefferkorn even incorporated a woodcut image of Reisch with the comment that Reisch had been the first who condemned Reuchlin's *Augenspiegel*.⁸⁹ Whether or not Reisch agreed or even knew of having been usurped by Reuchlin's enemies into their camp, is impossible to decide. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1514 both, Reisch and Reuchlin, and still other humanists, civic and monastic, assisted Erasmus in editing Jerome's works at the Amerbach Press in Basel.⁹⁰

Otto Brunfels

Otto Brunfels (1488–1534) was a humanist at the Carthusian monastery near Strasbourg. He is mostly known as the "father of botany." He was a keen observer as he wrote in a letter to Beatus Rhenanus (1485–1547) that "scholars have scooped everything from Reuchlin, they attached themselves to his dictionary

⁸⁷ Available in English translation by P. Wortsman, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and Burn All Jewish Books: A Classic treatise against Anti-Semitism*, New York 2000.

⁸⁸ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 371–374, 835.

⁸⁹ Pfefferkorn's *Beschyrmung* and its Latin version, called *Defensio*; cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 834–835.

⁹⁰ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 365.

in a way that they could not do without it anymore.”⁹¹ Brunfels liked Reuchlin’s “piety and faith” very much,⁹² and he disliked the Inquisitor Jacob von Hogstraeten (ca. 1460–1527) like the “pest.”⁹³ After spending about a decade in the Carthusian Order, Brunfels joined the reformational movement in 1521 with the help of Knight Ulrich von Hutten (1488–1523) and of the printer in Strasbourg, Johann Schott (1477–ca. 1550),⁹⁴ who was an acquaintance of Reuchlin. Schott published Brunfels’s social-critical pamphlet on ecclesiastical tithing, *Von dem Pfaffenzehent* (Strasbourg: Johann Schott, 1524).⁹⁵ Friar Caspar Amman owned Brunfels’s pamphlet. It is to Amman that we turn our attention now.

Reuchlin and Augustinian Friar and Provincial Caspar Amman

Caspar Amman (ca. 1450–1524) was a reform-minded friar as, among other issues, his social concerns show. He was interested in Brunfels’s booklet on tithing. Furthermore, Amman left behind a huge manuscript on how to prepare to die, not known until most recently.⁹⁶ Most of all, however, Amman’s thought was in line with Luther’s many theological and spiritual reforms.⁹⁷ As recent archival research by Reinhard H. Seitz shows, the elder Amman, shortly before his death in 1524, was in possession of about 20 pamphlets which were printed between the years 1521 and 1524, mostly in German, and included authors with views like those of Luther. Reuchlin is not represented among them. Amman primarily focused on Hebraica in the same way as Reuchlin did. Amman consulted Reuchlin’s *Rudimenta* for his own study on the meaning of Matthew 16:18⁹⁸ and for writing his own grammar book (see: Fig. 5).

⁹¹ Cf. *Briefwechsel des Beatus Rhenanus*, A. Horawith, K. Hartfelder (Hg.), Hildesheim 1966, reprint of Leipzig 1886, pp. 252–253 (no. 182); F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 265.

⁹² Cf. *Briefwechsel des Beatus Rhenanus*, op. cit., pp. 213–214 (no. 158).

⁹³ Cf. *Briefwechsel des Beatus Rhenanus*, op. cit., p. 224 (no. 165).

⁹⁴ Cf. S.S. Hequet, *Brunfels, Otto*, [in:] *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, vol. 1, Louisville–London 1972, pp. 105–106.

⁹⁵ Cf. S. Weigelt, *Otto Brunfels: Seine Wirksamkeit in der frühbürgerlichen Revolution unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Flugschrift “Vom Pfaffenzehnten”*, Stuttgart 1986.

⁹⁶ The manuscript is called *Sermones de mortis praeparatione* which comprises 244 folios; accessible online (BSB Clm 28233): <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/search?query=all%3A%28Sermones+de+mortis+praeparatione+%29> [access: 18 June 2022].

⁹⁷ Cf. F. Posset, *Unser Martin: Martin Luther aus der Sicht katholischer Sympathisanten*, Münster 2015, Chapter 2.

⁹⁸ Cf. F. Posset, ‘Rock’ and ‘Recognition’: *Martin Luther’s Catholic Interpretation of ‘You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church’ (Matthew 16:18) and the Friendly Criticism*

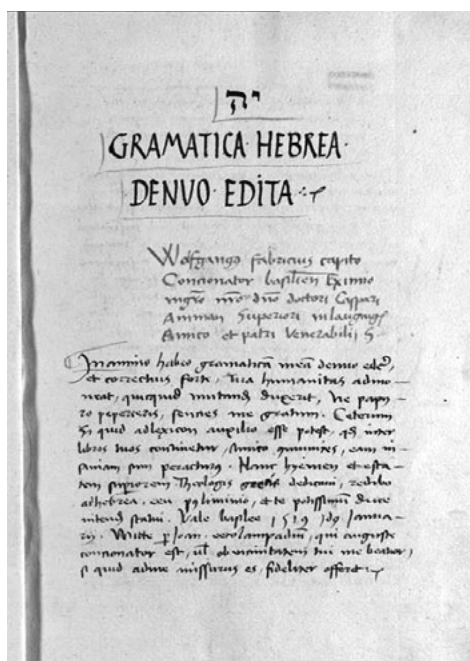


Fig. 5. Codex *Grammatica Hebraea denuo edita*; Amman's Hebrew Grammar. In the red text Wolfgang Fabritius (Capito) and Doctor Caspar Amman Superior in Lauingen are mentioned. <http://katalog.burgerbib.ch/detail.aspx?ID=129281> [access: 18 June 2022].

Whereas Reuchlin had translated the Seven Penitential Psalms from Hebrew into Latin in 1512,⁹⁹ Amman was the first to translate the entire psalter directly from the original Hebrew into German in 1523, titled *Psalter of the Royal Prophet David, rendered in German according to the true text of the Hebrew tongue*.¹⁰⁰ Amman dedicated his book to his former teacher of Hebrew, Johann Boeschentain (Boschenstein, 1472–1540),¹⁰¹ who introduced him to Reuchlin.

from the Point of View of the 'Hebrew Truth' by his Confrère, Caspar Amman, 'Doctor of the Sacred Page', [in:] *Ad fontes Lutheri: Toward the Recovery of the Real Luther: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Hagen's Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, T. Maschke, F. Posset, J. Skocir (eds.), Milwaukee 2001, p. 250.

⁹⁹ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 434–446 with Fig. 26 showing Reuchlin's title page.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. C. Amman, *Psalter des küniglichen Propheten dauids getteuscht nach warhafftigem text der hebraische[n] zunge[n]*, Augsburg 1523; F. Posset, *Unser Martin...*, op. cit., pp. 69–89 with illustrations 7–10.

¹⁰¹ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 449.

Amman contacted Reuchlin on 22 September 1515 with a letter entirely written in Hebrew. He was delighted about Reuchlin's victory over his enemies, just like the biblical Daniel in the lion's den.¹⁰² Amman referred here to Reuchlin's chief opponents, i.e., some Dominicans in Paris and some in Cologne with Johann Pfefferkorn as their leader, including the Inquisitor Jacob von Hoogstraeten. In Amman's Hebrew letter, one finds the derogatory label for Pfefferkorn as an "unkosher butcher," for the first time within Reuchlin's correspondence.¹⁰³ In reality, Pfefferkorn actually held the respectable position of a municipal hospital administrator in Cologne.¹⁰⁴ Amman called Pfefferkorn a liar full of hubris, and a sort of narcissist. He applied to Pfefferkorn the word of the Lord as found in the Babylonian Talmud: "I [the Lord] and he [Pfefferkorn] cannot live together in one world."¹⁰⁵ In contrast, Reuchlin and the Lord can live together because the truth of God is with Reuchlin, who is a trilingual scholar, and Reuchlin's honor is known in the scholarly world. Amman continued telling Reuchlin not to be afraid of his enemies because the truth of the Lord is lasting in eternity.¹⁰⁶ We do not know of any response from Reuchlin to Amman's Hebrew letter. Even if Reuchlin responded, the letter is lost. This is the case also with Amman's second Hebrew letter.

Five years later, Amman contacted Reuchlin again with a letter in Hebrew, dated 25 September 1520. He had heard that he was teaching Hebrew now at the University of Ingolstadt and that Reuchlin used the Hebrew grammar of the medieval Hebraist Moses Kimhi. Amman also had learned that Reuchlin lectured on the Seven Penitential Psalms and that he attracted many students.¹⁰⁷ Although Reuchlin did not respond, as far as we know, they were, indeed, like-minded as the following document demonstrates. Probably in December 1521 Reuchlin, Amman and others wrote a letter of recommen-

¹⁰² The letter was not known to Ludwig Geiger. It was first edited by Eric Zimmer with an English translation in 1982, see: E. Zimmer, *Hebrew Letters of Two Sixteenth-Century German Humanists*, "Revue des études juives" 141 (1982), pp. 379–386. The Hebrew letter is now included in the new critical edition of Reuchlin's correspondence in RBW, vol. 3: no. 277. For the historical context, see: F. Posset, *Unser Martin...*, op. cit., pp. 58–60.

¹⁰³ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 277; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 587.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 587.

¹⁰⁵ RBW, vol. 3, no. 277, with note 9.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. F. Posset, *Unser Martin...*, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, no. 391. The Hebrew edition is accompanied by a translation into German by Saverio Campanini. NB: The two Hebrew letters by Amman were not known to the Reuchlin-biographer Geiger (19th century). They are taken into consideration in my 2015 Reuchlin biography. An English translation is now available in N. Ron, *Erasmus: Intellectual of the 16th Century*, New York 2021, p. 89.

dation in support of Johann Boeschensstain’s candidacy for the teaching position of Hebrew at the University of Heidelberg.¹⁰⁸ Shortly afterwards, Amman was persecuted by the local authorities under the suspicion of being a sympathizer of Luther, while Reuchlin was persecuted by the inquisitor for being all too friendly with the Jews. The inquisitor being a Dominican friar in Cologne and thus in Melanchthon’s parlance being one of “the monks,” was an important enemy of Reuchlin. In this regard Melanchthon was correct.

Reuchlin and Crotus Rubeanus in Erfurt



Fig. 6. Detail of Rectorate Page, showing Reuchlin’s Emblem, *ARA CAP* and below the handwritten note: Io[hann] Reuch[lin].

The so-called Rectorate Page is a fancy ‘snapshot’ of a delusion which Crotus Rubeanus (1480–ca. 1540)¹⁰⁹ may have designed for his own glorification placing his own emblem at the center of the Page. Rubeanus probably wished

¹⁰⁸ Cf. RBW, vol. 4, nos. 421–423 (Appendix III).

¹⁰⁹ The complete, colored reproduction of better quality is shown in the reprint, F. Posset, *Renaissance Monks...*, op. cit., (forthcoming). On Rubeanus, see: P. Walter, *Crotus Rubeanus*, [in:] *Lexikon der Reformationszeit*, K. Ganzer, B. Steimer (Hg.), Freiburg 2002, pp. 182–183.

the Page to be a real mirror of an ideal sodality of like-minded humanists which, however, never existed. His wishful thinking is revealing more of his own outlook than representing historical reality.

Rubeanus had approached Reuchlin for the first time with a letter of 26 January 1514, which became part of the *Letters of Famous Men* in 1519.¹¹⁰ A few years later, around 1520/1521 Rubeanus recognized and honored Reuchlin who never visited Erfurt. The two may never have met. Rubeanus claimed the famous, now elderly, Reuchlin as a congenial intellectual and spiritual factor for the circle of humanists at Erfurt. Rubeanus assigned to Reuchlin one of the four cornerstone positions (lower left corner) on his famous Rectorate Page which is assumed to have come into existence during Rubeanus's time as rector of the University of Erfurt for the short period from 1520 to 1521. Reuchlin's emblem is properly marked with the Latin letters ARA CAP[nionis], i.e., "Capnion's altar." The Greek *Kapnion* (Capnion) is his humanistic name, which means "Little Smoke," which simultaneously is a hint at the meaning of his family name: "Reuchlin" in Early New High German, or "Räuchlein" in contemporary German.

The Page as such includes writing original letters in Greek and Hebrew. A total of sixteen emblems of humanists is shown. Reuchlin, who is a quarter of a century older than the rector, is included as if he is one of the Erfurt humanists. Evidently, Reuchlin was perceived to be familiar with the civic and monastic humanists in Rubeanus's circle. Rubeanus apparently was trying to forge an academic alliance of reform-minded scholars. In the fall of 1515, Rubeanus had joined in the battle over Jewish books on Reuchlin's side against Pfefferkorn by publishing the satirical, anonymous Letters of Unknown Men (also known in German as Briefe unbekannter Männer or Dunkelmännerbriefe; republished in 1517). The Letters were published in Hagenau, Alsace, by the same press where Reuchlin's books appeared.

It looks like the Erfurt Humanists around Rubeanus disagreed with the previous decision of the theological faculty of the University of Erfurt against Reuchlin. Upon his return in 1520 from studies in Italy (1517–1529), Rubeanus visited his *alma mater*, Erfurt, and to his surprise was elected to the office of rector, starting 18 October 1520. Rubeanus had received his degree of doctor of theology in Bologna. On 6 April 1521 he, as rector of the University of Erfurt, held a reception for Luther during his stopover on the way to the Diet of Worms, which was in session from 6 January to 25 May 1521. Luther's emblem

¹¹⁰ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 233.

(the Luther Rose) found a place of honor in the upper left corner of Rubeanus's Rectorate Page.¹¹¹

As for the two former college friends, Rubeanus and Luther, one needs to know that their friendship came to an end when Rubeanus remained in the Catholic flock, which Luther never forgave him. Luther bad-mouthed him, belittling him as the "Doctor Toad" ("Dr. Kröte," which in German sounds close to "Crotus"). Yet, around 1520/1521 Rubeanus with his bombastic, colorful Page was able to project a typical humanist sodality¹¹² which included Luther and Reuchlin and other famous and less known scholars. Such an artificial grouping was, however, Rubeanus's fabrication.

Rubeanus did not stay in Erfurt but returned to Fulda where he was the principal of the monastic school. From 1524 to 1530 he was employed at the court of Albrecht of Prussia (Albrecht of von Brandenburg-Ansbach, 1490–1568) who leaned toward Lutheranism and was a vassal of King Sigmund I of Poland in Königsberg. Prussia became the first Lutheran duchy. However, after distancing himself from the Lutheran movement, Rubeanus served after 1531 at the court of Cardinal Archbishop and Elector Albrecht von Brandenburg (1490–1545) of Mainz. Rubeanus defended the cardinal against Lutheran attacks. The cardinal endowed Rubeanus with a canonry at Neues Stift in Halle.¹¹³

At the time of the assumed coming into existence of this Page (1520/1521) Reuchlin was appointed – not to any position at Erfurt – but as the professor of Greek and Hebrew in Ingolstadt (29 February 1520). At Ingolstadt, Reuchlin dissuaded the fanatics from burning Luther's books, while simultaneously at Wittenberg, on 10 December 1520, Melanchthon instigated the burning of the law books of the Church including *Decretum Gratiani*, papal decretals, and *Sextus Clementinae Extravagantes*.¹¹⁴

Both Erasmus and Mutianus, who had been honored to hold cornerstone positions on the Rectorate Page, eventually distanced themselves from the Lutheran movement. As said, Rubeanus did the same. There is one emblem that deserves mention, though. It is the one that is positioned at the center of the bottom row, belonging to Cistercian monk Henricus Urbanus (died

¹¹¹ Luther described it to Lazarus Spengler in 1530, in: *Weimarer Ausgabe Briefe* vol. 5: 445 (no. 1628). One may wonder how Crotus knew of it already almost a decade earlier.

¹¹² Cf. E. Bernstein, *Der Erfurter Humanistenkreis am Schnittpunkt von Humanismus und Reformation: das Rektorsblatt des Crotus Rubianus*, "Pirckheimer-Jahrbuch für Renaissance- und Humanismusforschung" 12 (1997), pp. 137–165, here 150.

¹¹³ Cf. P. Walter, *Crotus Rubeanus*, op. cit., p. 183.

¹¹⁴ Cf. E.G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective*, Saint Louis 1950, p. 490.

1538).¹¹⁵ The relationship between him and Reuchlin is documented by their correspondence since the summer of 1513. Urbanus was delighted that Reuchlin was able to defend himself against the theologians of Cologne and to elevate the *prisca theologia* while standing up for his “Hebrew clients,” the Jews.¹¹⁶ Reuchlin praised Urbanus for his careful reading of Reuchlin’s *Defensio*. Reuchlin included with his letter a copy of the imperial *mandatum silentii* for both sides, which Urbanus was expected to propagate.¹¹⁷ Reuchlin had sent the mandate also to the monks in Ottobeuren (see above). In the fall of 1513, Urbanus assured Reuchlin on behalf of Mutianus of the support for him which would include the younger generation.¹¹⁸ The incorporation of the Cistercian monk’s emblem demonstrates once more that Melanchthon’s prejudice against “the monks” as the archenemies of Reuchlin is untenable. Melanchthon’s distorted view of his relative, i.e., Reuchlin, is simultaneously real and impactful, nevertheless it is fake news and so is the message which the Luther Monument at Worms delivers.

In conclusion: Saint Reuchlin

Reuchlin was glorified by Christians and Jews.¹¹⁹ After Erasmus had learned of Reuchlin’s death, he paid generous tribute to him in his eulogy called *Apotheosis Capnionis* (Reuchlin’s Ascension into Heaven),¹²⁰ dated 22 December 1522, i.e., half a year after Reuchlin’s death. In his *Apotheosis* of the “incomparable hero,” Erasmus described the dream vision of a pious Franciscan Hebraist at Tübingen about Reuchlin entering heaven. The devout Franciscan humanist is likely modelled after Conrad Pellican (1478–1556) of the friary at Tübingen, being a friend of Reuchlin.¹²¹ As the Franciscan waited by a little bridge over

¹¹⁵ Cf. F. Posset, *Renaissance Monks...*, op. cit., Chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ Cf. RBW, vol. 2, no. 223; F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., p. 514.

¹¹⁷ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 225.

¹¹⁸ Cf. RBW, vol. 3, no. 230.

¹¹⁹ F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 851–867.

¹²⁰ Cf. Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Apotheosis Capnionis: De incomparabili heroe Joanne Reuchlin in divorum numerum relato*, [in:] *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, L.-E. Halkin, F. Bierlaire, R. Hoven (eds.), vol. 3: *Colloquia*, Amsterdam 1972, pp. 267–273; T. Dunkelgrün, *The Christian Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, [in:] *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 7: *The Early Modern World, 1500–1815*, J. Karp, A. Sutcliffe (eds.), Cambridge 2017, pp. 316–317; F. Posset, ‘Hasenjagd’ auf einen ‘Heiligen’, paper presentation at 9. Internationaler Reuchlin-Kongress Der Stadt Pforzheim 29. Juni – 01. Juli 2022, Pforzheim 2022.

¹²¹ Cf. F. Posset, *Johann Reuchlin...*, op. cit., pp. 227–335.

a creek, a radiant Reuchlin arrived, saluting him with the peace greeting in Hebrew. Then a beaming Saint Jerome appeared, telling Reuchlin that he, Jerome, was appointed to receive him and take him to the heavenly fellowship that is awarded to him. Jerome (the patron saint of the humanists) was wearing a bright robe embroidered with colored letters of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin alphabets. The story concludes with a prayer giving thanks to God for the gift of languages through the Holy Spirit and for God's having renewed to the world the gift of languages through his Servant Johann Reuchlin with the honor of God's Son Jesus Christ being proclaimed in every language.

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