



Eliezer Eilburg

The Ten Questions and Memoir of a Renaissance Jew

by Joseph Davis

DESCRIPTION:

Before the Enlightenment, before Spinoza had rejected traditional beliefs about the Bible, came the humanistic skeptics of the Renaissance. Alongside oft-cited Christian thinkers, Eliezer Eilburg now takes his rightful place. Comparable in view to Christopher Marlowe or Noël Jourmet, Eilburg perhaps uniquely represents the possibilities of Jewish skepticism in his day.

Eliezer Eilburg: The Ten Questions and Memoir of a Renaissance Jew makes available for the first time a bilingual edition of two key works by the Jewish rationalist skeptic, kabbalist, and memoirist, Eliezer Eilburg. The Ten Questions—addressed to the Maharal of Prague and two of his colleagues—is one of the most radical statements of Jewish skepticism authored during the sixteenth century. Published here in its entirety, this text is especially remarkable for its critical approach to the Bible, foreshadowing later intellectual trends. Although many of his opinions were considered heretical by Jewish authorities, Eilburg argued that his doubts were innocent, and that there was room within Judaism for his skepticism. He presented himself as a penitent whose eyes had been opened through the study of medicine and philosophy and who had merited angelic visions and kabbalistic dreams.

The second text, Eilburg's experimental memoir, is one of the very first modern Jewish efforts at autobiography. Put together from many smaller pieces, this patchwork of brag and bile is a unique document of sixteenth-century Jewish life. It is a testimony, if not to the "emergence of the individual" in this period, then at least to the emergence of new Jewish ways of imagining and writing about the self.

Eilburg was an enigmatic man, a unique and as yet mostly unstudied Jewish thinker. Though his works are directed to audiences of Jews, and argue for the improvement of Judaism, this volume will appeal to historians and scholars of intellectual traditions both in and outside of Jewish studies.

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