

CHAPTER 2

Reuchlin and the Scholastic Theologians

So far we have followed Pfefferkorn's polemic against Reuchlin, which was partly motivated by personal rancour against a man who had portrayed him as insincere and ignorant, but also fought over the issue of orthodoxy. The controversy did not remain a personal feud for long. It soon attracted widespread public attention. The theologians of Cologne and their colleagues, especially at the universities of Mainz, Louvain, and Paris, supported Pfefferkorn's original quest and condemned Reuchlin's *Eye Mirror*. Humanists, however, came to Reuchlin's defence. While orthodoxy remained the issue in court, the involvement of humanists on Reuchlin's behalf changed the character of the public debate, shifting it to the realm of education and cultural preferences.

Johann Reuchlin was a widely respected scholar. He had studied in Freiburg, Paris, and Basel, graduating BA (1474) and MA (1477). While in Basel, he became a member of the humanistic circle at the Amerbach Press, produced a number of study aids, and composed two comedies for school use. He then returned to France, where he was tutored in Greek by the émigré Georgius Hermonymus and studied law at Orléans and Poitiers. In 1481 he matriculated at the University of Tübingen, where he continued his legal studies while teaching Greek. He obtained his doctorate in imperial law in 1484–5. By this time he had entered the service of Count Eberhard of Württemberg as a court judge. The count also employed him on diplomatic missions that took him to Italy and to the imperial court. In recognition of his merits, the emperor raised him to the rank of hereditary nobility. When Count Eberhard died in 1496 and was succeeded by his nephew Eberhard