

Centrum judaistických studií Kurta a Ursuly Schubertových
Posudek magisterské diplomové práce

Název práce: *Eliezer Eilburg: Criticism of Miracles*

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The thesis offers an analysis of a sixteenth-century Hebrew philosophical text, which has not been edited, and thus the author had to transcribe it from a manuscript and had to solve a number of philological problems without the advantage of a critical edition. The author has succeeded in transcribing the text, identifying most of the sources quoted or paraphrased, outlining the historical and intellectual context of the text, and producing a translation. For these achievements Ms Jánošíková's work would be accepted as an MA thesis in Jewish Studies at any university in the world.

Nevertheless, there are some weak points that have to be pointed out. The English of Ms Jánošíková's thesis is not idiomatic and thus it often hides the points the author intends to make rather than revealing them. It would have been more fortunate if the author submitted her work in her mother tongue as she obviously never learned academic writing in English.

Moreover, there is some slothfulness in using technical terms. For example, on page 6 Ms Jánošíková speaks about "the epistemological testimony of miracles" by which she presumably means that miracles can be taken as a source of knowledge. However, employing the adjective "epistemological" is hardly justifiable here, since the context is not epistemology, but a halakhic debate in which a rabbi attempted to prove his opinion by making miracles. Things that can be said simply should be said simply; technical terms such as "epistemological" should not be employed unless there is good reason to do so.

On the other hand, Ms Jánošíková's thesis has a number of virtues which counterbalance these shortcomings. The work has a very clear and efficient structure: after a short introduction on miracles in biblical and rabbinic literature the author identifies Eliezer Eilburg's criticism of miracles as her main topic. Then she provides an overview of the most important medieval Jewish theories of miracles as an introduction to Eilburg's contribution to the topic. This chapter concludes with a brief analysis of Spinoza's criticism of biblical miracles which, as Ms Jánošíková convincingly argues, undermines the fundamental assumptions on which the previous Jewish philosophical discourse relied.

After that Ms Jánošíková proceeds to introduce the main hero of her thesis, Eliezer Eilburg, a very interesting personality of early modern Jewish intellectual history, who, nevertheless, has not received much attention from modern historians yet. Building on Joseph Davis' groundbreaking study and her own researches into manuscripts written by Eilburg and early prints that were presumably available to him Ms Jánošíková has succeeded to provide an original and inspiring perspective on Eilburg's works: she has shown that Eilburg used both printed and manuscript Hebrew texts in his philosophical studies and, more importantly, that during Eilburg's time Ashkenazi Jews were more exposed to the influence of non-Ashkenazi Hebrew literature than before. From this new perspective it is easier to understand why an

Ashkenazi Jewish thinker in the sixteenth century could produce such a radical philosophical argumentation which was unprecedented in Ashkenazi Jewish culture. These considerations are totally absent from previous studies on Eilburg.

Finally, Ms Jánošíková scrutinizes Eilburg's arguments against miracles in the first part of his *Ten Questions*. Again I must emphasize that nobody has written such a thorough analysis of any aspect of Eilburg's thought before. Ms Jánošíková convincingly argues that Eilburg's arguments follow earlier medieval patterns in many respects, but, at the same time, some elements are based on post-medieval experiences – such as the Protestant criticism of Roman Catholic cult of saints – and point to the direction of Spinoza's criticism of miracles in the *Theological-Political Tractate* written a century after Eliezer Eilburg. In that part of her thesis Ms Jánošíková convincingly argues that Eilburg's place in Jewish intellectual history is somewhere between the medieval Maimonidean tradition and Spinoza: building on the medieval heritage of what Aviezer Ravitzky calls "radical Maimonideanism" Eilburg criticized fundamental religious beliefs foreshadowing Spinoza's rationalism.

In sum, Ms Jánošíková's MA thesis is a very relevant and original contribution to an important but neglected topic of early modern Jewish intellectual history. I recommend accepting Magdaléna Jánošíková's MA thesis "Eliezer Eilburg: Criticism of Miracles" with the best possible grade (A, 1,0).

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