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Moses Mendelssohn (Jewish Lives)

Shmuel Feiner, Anthony Berris



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The "German Socrates," Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) was the most influential Jewish thinker of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A Berlin celebrity and a major figure in the Enlightenment, revered by Immanuel Kant, Mendelssohn suffered the indignities common to Jews of his time while formulating the philosophical foundations of a modern Judaism suited for a new age. His most influential books included the groundbreaking *Jerusalem* and a translation of the Bible into German that paved the way for generations of Jews to master the language of the larger culture.

Feiner's book is the first that offers a full, human portrait of this fascinating man—uncommonly modest, acutely aware of his task as an intellectual pioneer, shrewd, traditionally Jewish, yet thoroughly conversant with the world around him—providing a vivid sense of Mendelssohn's daily life as well as of his philosophical endeavors. Feiner, a leading scholar of Jewish intellectual history, examines Mendelssohn as father and husband, as a friend (Mendelssohn's long-standing friendship with the German dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was seen as a model for Jews and non-Jews worldwide), as a tireless advocate for his people, and as an equally indefatigable spokesman for the paramount importance of intellectual independence.

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