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THE JEWISH SPY:
BEING A PHILOSOPHICAL, HISTORICAL,
AND CRITICAL CORRESPONDENCE,
B Y L E T T E R S,
WHICH LATELY PASSED BETWEEN
CERTAIN JEWS IN
TURKY, ITALY, FRANCE, &c.
Translated from the ORIGINALS into FRENCH,
By the MARQUIS D'ARGENS;
And now done into ENGLISH.
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(P. 181)

LETTER CXLIV.

ISAAC ONIS, *Caraites*, formerly a Rabbi at Constantinople, to AARON MONCECA.

I HAVE within these few Days, my dear *Monceca*, contracted an Acquaintance with a *Samaritan Jew*. He has set me right as to abundance of Things, of which till now I had but very confused Ideas. I looked upon the *Samaritans* in general as Hereticks plunged in an Abyss of Errors. I believed that none of their Ceremonies did at all resemble those of the ancient *Israelites*; nay; I would scarce admit that their former Worship had any thing (p. 182) thing in common with that of the *Jews*. These Prejudices of mine are entirely dissipated, and I am thoroughly satisfied that I have been in an Error.

Of all the *Jewish* Sects, the *Samaritans* differ least in their Customs from those of our Ancestors. Most of these People live at *Gaza*, *Damascus*, *Cairo*, but principally at *Sichem*, now called *Neapolis*. They offer Sacrifices upon *Mount Gerizim*, affirming positively that this is the chosen Place of the Lord. They not only cite, in Defence of this their Opinion, a Passage of their *Pentateuch*¹, which they charge our Ancestors with corrupting, by putting. *Mount Hebal*, whence the Curses were to be pronounced, for *Mount Gerizim*, whence the Blessings were to be derived. But they insist also on Prescription, on the uninterrupted Succession of their High-Priests, on Tradition, on History, and ² on the tacit Confession of the Author of the Christian Law, who did not dispute or deny the Truth of what the *Samaritan* Woman alledged, that their Fathers worshipped on *Mount Gerizim*³. This Reproach of Corruption, which our Ancestors threw by wholesale on this poor People, has been adopted by certain learned Men among the *Nazarenes*, without reflecting that the establishing this Proposition as a Truth, would be equally prejudicial

¹ Deuteron. xxvii. 4.

² Joseph. Antiq. lib. iv, cap. ult. & lib. xiii. cap. 6.

³ 1 John iv. 21, 22.

to them and to us. As I am fully persuaded of this, I should be glad, after reading my Letter, if you would give me your Thoughts upon the Matter.

The *Samaritan* from whom I learned all these Particulars, assured me, that their Priests are to this Day of the Race as *Aaron*; and that they never (p. 183) intermarry out of that Family, that they may not sully the Honour of their Descent. He tells us likewise, that the Altar on which they sacrificed, is the very fame which was built by the *Israelites* immediately after their Passage over *Jordan*. I must own to you, dear *Monceca*, that I can scarce give Credit to the Antiquity and Authenticity of these Stories; but rather think it a Tale fit to be inserted among the fabulous Collections of the Rabbies. If indeed any thing could give it Weight, it must be that wonderful Care and Industry with which the *Samaritans* have always preserved the Customs of their Ancestors, and whatever came down to them with the venerable Stamp of Antiquity. They yet keep up and make use of the ancient *Hebrew* Characters, which differ much from those that are in Use with us, and which were the Invention of *Esdras*, after the Return from the *Babylonish* Captivity.

You will easily apprehend, my dear *Monceca*, that People so much attached as the *Samaritans* are to the Customs of our earliest Ancestors, are far enough from admitting as Rules of Faith, all the Reveries of the *Talmud*. Far from adopting the Sentiments of the Rabbies, they go yet farther than the *Caraites*, and acknowledge no Scriptures but the first Books of *Moses*, looking on the rest of the sacred Code, as written by pious Men under the immediate Direction of Heaven, but yet of no decisive Authority with respect to Matters of Faith. It is easy to perceive that the *Samaritans* run into a gross Error in this respect: For since they admit that these Books were really written by the Persons, whose Names they bear, and that their Authors were pious Men, influenced by the Spirit of God, why should they hesitate at admitting the Authority (p. 184) of the Books themselves? If it could once be made out to the *Caraites*, that those who composed the *Talmud* were Persons of Wisdom and Learning, they would receive it without Delay; much more if it could be made appear, that the Rabbies by whom it was composed were enlightened by the Spirit of God.

It is necessary, dear *Monceca*, when one would avoid giving a blind Obedience to whatsoever is contained in a Book, to alledge that its Author was a mere Man and uninspired. For when once it is admitted, that a Book was written by Inspiration, absolute Submission is due thereto. It is ridiculous to attempt to range in different Classes, such Pieces as have fallen from the Pens of inspired Men. For we cannot believe that Men are more or less inspired, or that whatever they receive by Inspiration ought to be received with any different Degree of Credit.

A famous *German* Divine went very near asserting this erroneous Opinion⁴. In the Heat of a Dispute, he advanced a Proposition with which his Adversaries for ever after reproached him. He affirmed, that a certain Work, written by an ancient Divine, whom the *Nazarenes* suppose to be one of their Apostles, was low, poor, and little better than Chaff, in comparison of the Writings of other Doctors⁵. His Enemies did not fail to attack him vigorously on his maintaining so evident a Falsehood. In the end, he was obliged to acknowledge his Error and at this Day the most zealous of his Disciples readily admit that he committed a very great Fault, in endeavouring to establish a Senti- (p. 185) ment, so directly opposite to Reason⁶. This Divine, in order, to

⁴ *Luther*.

⁵ The Epistle general of St. *James*

⁶ *Cam autem Mud legijscm, non rem diijpmula'ui, fed fatebar in responfione mea ad Gregorium Martinum. In ilia quidern Prafatione scribit Luthcrum, S. Jacobi EpiJlolam non fpjji dignale certare cum Epistolis S. S. Pelri & Pauli, fed Epijlolam JIramineam, fe cum aliis compartur. Quam ejtis fententlam non probo, atque in re- centioribus*

deliver himself from some Difficulties, durst not deny the Credit of the Book which made against him; but then he diminished it as much as he could, and made it much inferior to another Book which appeared to favour his own Sentiments.

Strange is the Effect of that blind Prejudice into which even the greatest Men are apt to fall, through an over-hasty Desire of supporting whatever they advance! Is it possible to find out a greater Absurdity than this of distinguishing Degrees of Wisdom in the Spirit of God? Or can there be any thing more opposite to Common Sense than this Notion, of giving more or less Credit to divinely inspired Writings, as they agree more or less with our own Opinions?

I know, my dear *Monceca*, that the Rabbins and the *Caraites*, far from imitating the impious Boldness of certain *Nazarenes*, or the ill-founded Scruples of the *Samaritans*, preserve equally for the Books of the sacred Code, an infinite Respect, without pretending to judge by the light of their Reason of the Worth of any of the inspired Writings. But in avoiding this Error they have run into another, which is common to them and to the *Nazarene* Doctors; that is to say, they tear and torture cer- (p. 186) tain Passages, in order to bring them to favour their Sentiments, and by this means they vouch all the Vapours of their heated Imaginations by these forced Applications of the Holy Writings, insomuch that there is nothing so absurd, not only with regard to Rites and Ceremonies, but also with respect to the Doctrines of Religion, which they do not attempt to prove in this Manner.

Is it, for example, possible to find out any thing more wild and extravagant than the Rabbinical Interpretation of this Verse in the Psalms ? *Behold, I was shapen in Wickedness, and in Sin hath my Mother conceived me.* Instead of going into the Opinion of the *Nazarene* Doctors, who have fully proved, that the Prophet speaks here of that original Blemish derived to all Men. from their first Parents, they will needs have it, that *Jesse* the Father of *David* begat him in Adultery, though on his own Wife, whom he took to have been one of her Maid-Servants, upon whose Chastity he had attempted. Is not this, dear *Monceca*, a fine Explication of so clear and easy a Text? And what Opinion may we not expect to see supported by Scripture Proofs, alledged by the Rabbins, when out of the plainest Things, they can forge such romantick Adventures, and gravely deliver so extraordinary a Story as this of the pretended Adultery of *David's* Father, though there be not a Word of it in the holy Books?

An *Italian Jew* not only adopted this fabulous Tale, in a Work which he published, but even attempted to carry it further than any of his Brethren had done, by making a pretty long Dissertation to prove, forsooth, that *Jesse* had done perfectly well, in endeavouring to go to Bed to his Maid, because his Wife was grown pretty far in Years, and as he (p. 187) apprehended past Child-bearing⁷. This Sentiment, my Friend, contains an excellent Moral, and if these wise and honest Rabbins would but effectually establish it, it would in all human probability contribute pretty much to the raising Servants Wages, in consideration of the Likelihood of their finding more Employment than at present.

Confess then, dear *Monceca*, that we *Caraites* have some Reason to reject these Rabbinical Comments; though as yet you are attached to their Sect, it is impossible you should not see their Errors. That Uneasiness and Embarrassment which naturally attends a Man's changing his Religion, keeps you as yet in the wrong Track; but as I earnestly wish, so I sincerely hope, that

Edilionibus cum omiffa fint ilia frerba, opinor ip/um pojiea Lutherum hant Juam sententiam improbaffi. Whitakeri Respons. ad Rainoldi Refutationem, p. 103.

⁷ *Il Penftero d' I/ai era buono, perche ejjtndo la Patrona 'uecchia, e la Majsera gicvane, have i. a Defiderit di haver altri Figliuoli.* Percetti da esser imparati dalle Donne Ebreë, p. 69,

the God of our Fathers will afford you his victorious Grace, which he vouchsafes to such as he leads to the Knowledge of the Truth; and that thereby breaking the Chains which for the present bind you to the Rabbins, you shall come and range yourself under the Banner of the *Caraites*, who are not only the true *yews*, but almost the sole People in the World who submit their Judgments to the Divine Writings, without attempting to abuse these, in order to establish their own Opinions.

Many of the *Nazarene* Doctors, as also of the Cadies and Mufties among the Musselmen, run into the same Fault with the Rabbies. They do not submit their Opinions to those contained in the Writings which they believe inspired, but explain all these Works in a manner conformable to their own (p. 188) Notions, insomuch that ten Divines, each of a different Opinion, shall equally pretend to support his own Doctrines by Authority of Scripture; and it is this Conduct, so inconsistent with publick Peace and publick Safety, that hath occasioned so many religious Wars, and such Broils and Disturbances in States.

The *Nazarenes* would be happy, my dear *Monceca*, if they did but observe the same Laws with us *Caraites*, who never venture to write any Commentaries on the Sacred Scriptures. It is held with us a Profanation, to mingle human Opinions with Divine Laws. The *Caraites* believe implicitly whatsoever they find in the Scriptures, without pretending to penetrate their Obscurities, but submitting their Understandings, when they meet with Passages which transcend them. But for this wife and easy Maxim, they would at this Day be as full of Trouble and Confusion as other Sects. They would have a Train of Doctors differing in Opinions, and darkening by their Discourses the Points they pretended to illustrate, till by degrees so many and such arduous Doubts would be brought into People's Heads, as in the end would lead them either into Scepticism, or Irreligion.

In order to prove the Inutility of Commentaries on the Sacred Writings, there is nothing more requisite than to shew, that they are calculated to do more Hurt than Good. Now there is nothing easier, than to produce the strongest Evidence in favour of this Proposition. It must, in the first place, be laid down as a Principle, that since God has been pleased to give certain Laws and Rules to Mankind, he has likewise been pleased to explain himself in a Manner clear and intelligible: For it would be absurd to say, that God had revealed his Will to Man in such a Manner, as that it was impossible it should (p. 189) be comprehended. Nor is it less unreasonable to say, that God commanded Men to obey him, but however did not desire they should obey him. If therefore we are bound to acknowledge, that God hath revealed his Will to Men in Terms perfectly intelligible, why should we attempt to explain them more clearly? A *Divine*, a *Rabbi*, a *Mufti*, or a *Bronze*, do they understand the Extent of Men's Capacities better than he who made them? If he had intended to teach Men the Mysteries which these sort of People propagate, he would without question have taught them plainly.

But it may be said, that many of the Sacred Books are written evidently in a very obscure Stile, and in which there are many Things not to be understood. These, without question, were given by God to Men for some Use or other; and how shall this Use be made of them, if they are not understood? It is necessary therefore to enquire into their hidden Sense.

This Manner of Reasoning, dear *Monceca*, is however false and captious. If there are in the Scripture certain Passages which we do not understand, we ought to conclude that they are not necessary to our Salvation, because we cannot perform what we are not informed of, and it is in vain for us to endeavour to penetrate those Secrets which Providence hath but half revealed. Heaven knows that it is for our Good that we should not have clear Ideas of some Things, and when Men would penetrate into these, this Crime of theirs is punished by their feeling

themselves bewildered. The *Nazarene* Doctors who have employed their Pens in writing Commentaries on the *Revelations*, a very obscure Piece, which they believe sacred, afford a clear Proof of the Truth of what I say. (p. 190) The Protestants make this Book the Basis of all their Invectives against the Papists, and the Papists again make use of the same Book, in order to point out their Adversaries in the most odious Colours⁸. Is it possible to make a worse, or a more unwarrantable use of such Works as are supposed to be dictated by the Deity himself?

Farewell, dear *Monceca*, live content and happy, and beware of indulging a rash Spirit of Curiosity. *Cairo*.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

This reference is not known at this time to be located in *A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated*, by Alan David Crown and Reinhard Pummer, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005

From a little more research I have found that the Book, *The Jewish Spy*, is an unusual piece of work. I have found that the work in fact, written by [Jean-Baptiste de Boyer Argens \(marquis d'\)](#) (1704 – 1771) created the characters (Karaites Isaac Onis).

'1609 Three portraits on one sheet, Jacob Brito, Isaac Onis and Aaron Monceca, *fictitious characters* mentioned in Voltaire's *Lettres Juives* from a copy of which this engraving is probably taken.' [A Jewish iconography](#) by Alfred Rubens – 1954

It is doubtful that the people mentioned in the letter were real persons and if they did exist, then their names were used for some means.

M. d'Argens did in fact live for a year in Constantinople at the age of 20, in 1724/5. The French book [Lettres juives, ou Correspondance philosophique, historique et ...: Volume 2 - Page 258](#) The book was published in 1736, eleven years after his stay in Constantinople. M. d'Argens came from a Christian Family. Being in Constantinople, he may have heard about the Samaritans from someone that had been there, most likely a Jew. It is doubtful that he never met any Samaritans. If the author really met a Samaritan, he would have written the questions and answers like all the other writers had. He would have known from the Samaritan about their religion. Further more, there are too many Christian references used (Spirit, Devine, New Testament quotes, etc.) A Karaite or Jew would not have used so many, or would not have used them at all.

See [Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, Marquis d'Argens - Wikipedia, the free ...](#)

After reviewing the article over and over, I have decided to keep it in the archives of theSamaritanUpdate.com. The reason being that it demonstrates 1. that at this time there was very little knowledge of the Samaritans of the Samaritans in Europe at the time. 2. The book demonstrates attacks on the Jewish Rabbis using the Samaritans, in which the Rabbis would have had to defend and attack back at the accusations. 3. Most importantly that future Authors and readers may view this article of work in its true perspective.

⁸ The *Revelations* hath been in all times one of the principal Books whence the Divines have drawn abundantly injurious Expressions, in order to pelt those against whom they had a Spite. What is still more singular, is, that the Rabbies also have profited of these Obscurities in the *Revelations*. They pretend that this Book was written by one of their Brethren, in order to deceive the primitive Christians. See in respect to this Subject the Letter CLX. Vol. V. as also the 4th Letter of *the Secret Memoirs of the Republick of Letters*. In which Letters this remarkable Point of History is fully discussed, and the original Passages from the Rabbins also are there produced at large.