

The Hakhamim #1

Ya'akov Sasportas - London's First Rabbi

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The Diary of Samuel Pepys, Wednesday 14 October 1663

Thence home and after dinner my wife and I, by Mr. Rawlinson's conduct, to the Jewish Synagogue: where the men and boys in their vayles, and the women behind a lattice out of sight; and some things stand up, which I believe is their Law, in a press to which all coming in do bow; and at the putting on their vayles do say something, to which others that hear him do cry Amen, and the party do kiss his vayle. Their service all in a singing way, and in Hebrew. And anon their Laws that they take out of the press are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that every one desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing. And in the end they had a prayer for the King, which they pronounced his name in Portugall; but the prayer, like the rest, in Hebrew. But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.

Sasportas, Ohel Ya'akob 69 (Translation by Matt Goldish)

And now, hear my voice and I will advise you. Since this generation is licentious and its impudence is turned even toward heaven, treat [the conversos] as you would a trusted and beloved comrade who performs bad actions. Love him, but reprove him according to his evil traits. Be happy with a slight understanding of his purposes and strive to avert the eyes of your discernment from seeing any evil [intent] in his actions. Rather, draw him by the rope of love and with soft words spoken gently... This is the proper thing to do with those new people recently arrived, because if you bind them with cords and reprove them hand and foot, you will cause them to become disconnected. They will throw off the rope [of love], to shirk the yoke of Torah and commandments, since the way is close and it is easy to go back [to Christianity].

Afterwards, crushingly break his bones one by one. In his certainty of your love he will believe that the breaking of bones is [done in order] to cement them [back] together better than they were.

Sasportas (Translation by Matt Goldish)

After six months passed during which I spoke to them respectfully, and my chastisements accomplished nothing, I treated them with disgrace and announced their sins in public as desecrators of the heavenly Name.

Sasportas Letter to Haham Josiah Pardo, 1665? (Translation by Matt Goldish)

I tread on their arrogance in assuming authority [over the community], stepping on the heads of those appointed over the community. I spoke out sharply against them, treating them as if they were spies walking here. I did not concern myself with the meagre salary that they pay me every month - they may do with it as they will... I remonstrated with some of those who insult the angels of God [the rabbis], the words of the Scribes and the Oral Torah. The entire reason for my coming here was for them, and all my rebuke was directed against them. I pointed a finger at each one of them to warn him of the judgment of God, our Light...[The Mahamad] tried to propagate a baseless falsehood by coercing [others] to side against me.

Sasportas, Ohel Ya'akob (1671) (My Translation)

QUESTION: On the subject of the form of the city and the drawing which I saw it appears that the city is enclosed by a wall on three sides and the river which passes it fills the entire fourth side, and there does not remain any opening more than ten [amot] save for a space between the wall and the fortress. However, there are poles fixed into the ground between which there are spaces of more than three tefahim, upon which is a beam which sits across all of them. You are unsure if this constitutes the form of an opening to permit this opening.

ANSWER: First and foremost, I already considered all of this when I was stationed in London, and I sought to permit carrying from domain to domain but did not find [permission]. I therefore warned all whom G-d is in their heart to not carry any object four amot in the public domain. It now appears again to others to seek permission through this rendering which they sent, however it does not help anything because it does not assist to permit or prohibit because it depicts the original enclosed construction but over time until today it is possible that breaches of more than ten [amot] have occurred which are impossible to depict in this print.

In 1666 the Great Fire of London

