

TEL-AVIV UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

The Chaim Rosenberg School
of Jewish Studies



אוניברסיטת תל-אביב

הפקולטה למדעי הרוח

בית-הספר למדעי היהדות

ע"ש חיים רוזנברג

July 13, 1981

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Sportouch
24 Avenue Pasteur
94250 Gentilly
France

Dear Mr. Sportouch,

Your letter has been brought recently to my attention. As I don't understand French, I am writing in English with the hope that as I found someone to translate your letter - you will find someone to translate mine...

The information I know about the name Sasportas is connected to a very important Jewish personality in the 17th century: Rabbi Jacob Sasportas (1610-1698).

He was born in Oran (Algeria) to a family related to Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman, a famous Rabbi in the 13th century). At the age of 24 he was appointed as head of the Rabbinical Court at Telemecen. During this period he had some unknown dispute with the authorities, he was also arrested and tortured.

In 1651 he left Telemecen and came to Amsterdam, and there he met Menashe Ben Israel, Rabbi and leader of the Jewish community. In 1657 he joined him with a special delegation to meet Oliver Cromwell in London.

In 1664 he was appointed as a Rabbi in London. During the plague he left London for Hamburg. At the age of 83 he returned to Amsterdam.

Jacob Sasportas is very known in our history mainly because his extreme opposition to the false Messiah, Shabtai Zvi he fought this man with very sharp and extreme declarations, letters and communicates which he sent to various Jewish communities, and wrote a book condemning the man and his movement which eventually caused a great damage to the Jewish people. The name of this book is "Zizat Novel Zvi" and it was published in Hebrew.

As for the name "Sasportas" it is true that one of the forms it could be used is Six Gates: "Sas" in Hebrew is identical to the number "Shes"=6. Portas is gates and another version could be, ports.

I searched in our library and I found grounds to this version: A book written by Solomon Sasportas and its name is "Six Gates" (the book deals with the 613 basic Jewish deeds (הרי"ג מצוות)). The book was printed in Amsterdam in 1727, and I am sending you a photocopy of the front pages in Hebrew and Spanish. Solomon Sasportas (the author of this book was head of the Jewish Court and Rabbi in Nice). Sasportas is described by historians as a very extreme and strong personality and as one who is ready to fight for his ideas.

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I assume that everything I wrote is probably known to you mainly because he played an important role in our history during the tragic period of Shabtai Zvi. I am sure that you can find more material on Sasportas in the "Biblioteque National" in Paris and even more details or books at the "Etz Haim" Library in Amsterdam.

In any event, you can take pride with your relation to Jacob Sasportas and with the fact of the "unbroken chain" of your family.

I will be pleased to have you as my guest at Tel Aviv University and to show you some more books of your relative from the 17th century.

Best wishes,

Sincerely yours

Gideon Spiegel
Secretary
School of Jewish Studies