

Asarj dei Rossi and his
position in the development of

• Judaism •

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Thesis

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In order to form a correct estimation of the significance of an author, we must judge him by the time, environments, country and beliefs he lived in. Every man is the product of his time.

Were we to judge Asaria dei Rossi's importance from a philosophical point of view, he would surely sink into insignificance. His views have long since become antiquated, his doubts are doubts no longer, his questions long since answered. If he deserve our attention at all it is from an historical point of view. From such a standpoint however, he is the more interesting, because he is one of those that mark a new epoch in the development of Jewish thought and belief. He may justly be designated as the fore-runner. 2

of the Jewish renaissance. And in this respect he might well be compared to Petrarch. Like the latter he had assimilated all that antiquity had to offer, and united it with a clear and thorough knowledge of the most recent discoveries, ideas and opinions of his time. He too kept tenaciously to the past and endeavored to reconcile it with the present.

By saying that he had assimilated all that antiquity had to offer we hardly say too much. Indeed his scholarship must have been immense. To judge by his quotations there must hardly have existed a book he had not read. He knew Latin as much as Hebrew, studied the Talmud and the Zohar and with equal zeal he read Plato and Aristotle, buried himself into the writings of Philo and Josephus and at the same and with equal application perused

the writings of the Church-Fathers. Hence
the conflict, hence the wavering.

1) Asarja dei Rossi was born about
1514 (255385) at Mantua and died
in 1578. He descended from the
family Ha-Adomim (dei Rossi) of the
tribe of Juda. As a boy already he
manifested a great love for books,
later he literally buried himself
among his books, slept little and
utterly neglected his bodily well-being.

Thus his strength soon declined,
his skin became shrivelled. But in
the sickly body dwelled a most active
and healthy mind.

For a time he had no permanent
dwelling place, but lived now in this
city, now in that; finally he settled
in Ferrara. In the year 1570, a
terrible earthquake visited Ferrara.

Our author safely escaped and found
refuge in a neighboring village.
There he became intimately acquainted
with a learned Christian, who was busily
pursuing the Aristarchus letters. Finding
some difficulties in his Latin
text he requested A. d. R. to compare
it with the Hebrew version of it. And
upon hearing that there existed no
Hebrew version he strongly persuaded
him to translate these letters into
Hebrew. Asarja completed the trans-
lation in about 20. days. He called
the booklet *שפ'ס 1137*. This was
the first fruit of his pen. He was
then about 58. years of age.

Of course, he never doubted the authentic-
ity of the Aristarchus-letter and with it,
that of the Septuagint.

The whole Tradition concerning
the first translation of the Bible into Greek
rests mainly upon the narration of
Aristeas, (*Ἀριστᾶριος*) an officer of King
Ptolemaeus Philadelphus.

הַתַּלְמוּדִים וְאַחֵר כֵּן הָיוּ מִכֻּלֵּי הַסְּפָרִים יוֹצֵאִים.

The translation was then read, we are told before a large assembly of the Jews of Alexandria and found so much favor that the least change therein was forbidden by a ban.

With many gifts the translators then returned to their country. So far the narration.

Modern Criticism denies the authenticity of the report. The marked predilection for everything Jewish as well as the apologetic character of the letter betray its Jewish origin. It is considered now by all authorities as the product of an Alexandrian Jew.¹⁾

As to the origin of the Septuagint, it is believed now that the whole is the compiled work of various translators differing widely in knowledge, spirit and sentiment as also separated by years. The first attempts were probably made at the time of

¹⁾ See Herzog's Real Encycl. Alexandrinische - Bibel-Üebersetzung.

Ptol. Philadelph. and the whole was perhaps completed about 150 B.C. The Pentateuch was translated first and then the prophets. The translation was mostly done in Alexandria, for the Jews living there must soon have felt the necessity of such a translation.

As. dei Rossi remains true to his task, viz. he merely translates the Aris. letter and does not enter upon any discussion whether it be true or not. There is however very little doubt that he believed it to be true. On the title page we read:

ספר הדברי קבלים, כי יוסף מלך היהודים היהודים 191

אשר נאמר בו כי יוסף מלך היהודים היהודים 191

We can only say with Jung: ספר הדברי קבלים

הוא ספר אגפטיקה הלא ספר אגפטיקה

At about the same time

Asarja dei Rossi wrote his Kal Elohim, a very unimportant little book. In this the author describes ^{the earthquake} which visited Ferrara in the year 5331. The purpose of the writing is, as he tells us:

אשר נאמר בו כי יוסף מלך היהודים היהודים 191

He pictures at great length the event. This, of course, is of little interest to us. More interesting in this connection are his attempts at exegesis. He tries to explain the verses in Amos Chap II. 13. הנה אנוכי מציב ומחטובים and further Amos. 6. 11. באלה ואלה העלה האלהים את עמור. II. 11. כי הנה יה' מטה והכה הציון רסוסים והבית תלול as referring to an earthquake. קניזוס

Eben Ezra, Kimchi, Abarbanel explain the verses as referring to defeat in war, as is evident from the following verses 14. and 15. Chap. II. Amos. ואני מניס עמך ומחנך את ישראל כחור וחרור לא יחלץ עמך ומחלץ העלם את ישראל וצמח ויך דגליו לא יחלץ ויכרס הסוסים Our author, however, is almost כלל certain that they refer to an earthquake, and consequently Amos prophesied its coming two years in advance, as is said in the beginning: 1723

This again הנה אנוכי מציב ומחטובים — — shall prove that all such events are sent by God as a punishment.

In the first instance, and so to say, by mere instinct, he ascribes it to the will of God. This, however, does not

fully satisfy him. Evidently he finds himself
in a dilemma. On the one hand he has before
his eyes the saying of Rab Akiba:

יהי כן
היהל תעלה? גלגל שרעם וסמל ומוסר ביום שיש אלוהים
בלוה וקטל. כפיכא הוא מקטל וכו'.

On the other hand he is well acquainted
with the views of the Greeks & Romans,
and tried to explain these phenomena
naturally. Both views he holds as ir-
refragable. Therefore the contradiction
here we find his first endeavor to
reconcile the Talmud with Greek
philosophy. In brevity is the goal:

(י) אולפחור נסור מלחמי הקדושה אל האמצע וקאמר כי הן אחר
הקדושה ולחמא כאומם אכינו ורעלה אהלערה הפלאיה פואי לבושה מחברות
וירי הזמנים אשר בין לוגים אחלה אנו פא חינוי הכדושה רעלעם וקאמר
לחמאמם רעל פא ה' וחני אסעו. כחלר גמ כן יתר האומות אם רוע
מחלוקת לא ירעה אסעו לילום החלוקת פניו דקמה פחמרו כחלוקת
סדום ועמורה כי רעה ופא עשה נ עמרה קדושה אכר, פא רעס
וחמאמם דמעה ופא, האמת כי יאמרו החוקות אהמורה פניו מחלה
לחמאמם אכעה קמלה חלל דין הוא לעומם סבוריהם לא אל החלוקת
חמא, ולא אל החלוקת חמא, אכר פאמם יבואו חמא דר ופא חמם פוא

הפעולות האלהיות מדרך הקרי, כי הנה הגלגלים והכוכבים והקרי
והאורות האלהיות על דרך החוקים האלה (האור) (אין)
ספר להם מדרך האור האלוף מולד הנה"י

Translation: Or at least we should not
go to the extreme in either direction, and
we should rather keep to the middle way.
I will therefore say, that it is indeed true,
that as long as the Jews, by their conduct,
deserve his special care and attention,
as in the days when they went out of Egypt,
or even more in later times, then all
the visitations, as earthquakes and the
like, come and go by his command.
The reverse is true with regard to
the Gentiles; viz. as long as their deeds
are not so evil as to cause his an-
ger, as was the case with Sodom and
Gomorrah, then all their plagues and
epidemics come by mere accident.
But when sins cause him to hide his
face from the former (Jews), or to turn
his anger against the latter (Gentiles)
then it is reasonable that we should
not always ascribe their causes

to God, nor always to nature. But some-
time they come from God, sometime
by mere accident."

We now come to speak of Asarja's main
work, viz. אמרי בינה. As the title already in-
dicates, "Wise sayings", it is a mere
conglomeration of ideas. In his introduction
the author says himself: קצתם מה יחסיים באופן זה
אל חלק הדברים הנקראים חכמה, וקצתם דבר אין להם עם בינות.
חלק מהם יבא ויבא, ואלו הם דברים אשר לא יבא ויבא, ואלו הם
"Some of the topics stand in some relation
to the foregoing Hadra'at Ge'he'nim, others
have no such relation, nor are they
even connected among themselves,
nevertheless I have combined them all
in one book, because a trifle passes
along unnoticed." The book is divided
into 25 chapters, treating of the most
heterogeneous subjects. To give an
outline of its content would be
an impossibility. Besides, it is not
within our scope to enter upon each
topic in detail; our main task

being to ascertain Asarja's importance
in the development of Judaism, we shall
only note those passages which have
a direct bearing upon our question.

The headings of the various chapters are: I "Whether it is better to have only one, or many teachers." The question he apparently wants to ask is, whether it is advisable to learn from other sources than the Talmud. But he does not dare to state his question expressly. His conclusion with regard to this question is: כי דברי

אבשרות מני, אמוז אינצד דער תורה זע אלס הייך אלס פארן אמוז דמאד
וואס, און נירעם אלס ווערן יאסו האנדל מילעק, וואסאל אלס ניד
זו כי צד טרעו יבויר אנציע לחכם ולומר כאלו לקח מכין וטרה
ליבי דהכ: "Knowing that it possibly may occur, that we may learn some wisdom even from one below us, therefore we should not turn aside with pride and conceit, but we should attach ourselves to him, and acquire learning from who ever source it may come. Still the man, whose character we know, naturally appears to us as wiser and

more deserving to be our teacher."

II "The necessity of bringing evidences from non-jewish sources" (הכרח הדין בקרב דברים שדורש אלו לא מענין)

And the conclusion he arrived at: ובראש נא

סליח וזהו ענין כי כל יום לאין לו כבוד לא אמרנו לעולם ולא

אמרנו לעולם לא דבר כי הוא דעת אלהים בן האדם

"And we will conclude with אמרנו האמור:

rule and lay it down as established that whenever it concerns no denial of the written or traditional law, then it is no wrong in my eyes, to learn from the gentiles what is hidden unto us."

And again in the same chapter

he says: לפרשנים ודבריהם לא נחזיק עולת הדבור:

לפנינו דאוסור ענין הספרים החזקים אינם כי בלתי נזכר

לא כל ערואי ועי, דאורן לענין אמין כי ילדן בספרים החזקים

החזקים דברו הדבור כי למעלה אין אהב דבר יע אלו וזה

אמרנו אמרנו לראי לאו אמרנו אפרוס הנני:

So it is apparently also plain from their

words in Midrash Kohelet, that their

intention in prohibiting us the reading

of profane books was only to avert

us from making them our main

study, but was not meant to

prohibit their reading by the bye and
accidentally, so that we find it just
to maintain, that if it be possible
for us to derive some moral or
intellectual lesson from profane books,
which otherwise are full of follies, then
the mere name of the book ought
not to hinder us from doing so.

III Concerning Philo and concerning the
Jewish sects at the time of the II Temple.

IV Philo and his merits.

V Philo and his shortcomings.

The faults that he finds with Philo
are: 1) That he takes his quotations
from the Septuagint and not from
the original text. As to the errors
occurring in the Septuagint, our
author says:
בזמן בית שני היו ייחודים ליהו
והיה דבר, היוו ספר תורה אחד דבר אלוקי ושלם העולם
בספרים הכתובים אלף ואלף. וספר אחר ואלף דבר אלף
לשם, ומתורגם אחריו, וזה הניחם האנשי המסורס וקצת לו לשם
באופן כי הכתיבה אלף ואלף אלף ואלף אלף ואלף אלף
אשר התורה אחת.

2) That he believes in the eternity

of matter. 3) That he considers certain passages in the Bible as legendary and poetical. The following words are rather unbecoming to such a man as Asarjoh:

אשר יזכיר (Philo) כיה פסחים מצאנו בחזקתו:
כאשר יזכיר ה' מלכותו אלוקי כל יצא הספור מזה אליו
חכה והלכנו לך, כאלו מורה ה' התיימה יהיה ליר מן הלוחים וכו'.

4) That he does not believe in the traditional law. Saying for instance:
ואשר לא ידעו זהו דבר אמו, שכלו חזק אלוה:
כל דבר קטן חזק באכילה הנכח וכלו, הוסיף כח אלוה כפשוטו
זהו דבר אמו דונא, מן החלוקה.

VI What might be said in justification of Philo.

VII The mention made in the Talmud concerning the Greek translation of the Bible compared with the reports of other authorities.

- The subject does not receive at his hand the treatment it deserves. Our author loses himself entirely in quotations. The following however is telling:

י כי הראשון אשר קרה מלכו בנצח בבואו והגדל הנקרא בקרביו
מיוחדים אדם הנהיה הענין כל אחד מהם כדבריו באור

הוא כדאי לעיון ונצל, להרי ארכיסטואה צור מאונות לא כתב
כצור מאונות:

ואם העניין נק החומל. ונכאיו לילא: *and again*
חוק ידיו בהכרח מאמרן ולסון העניין כי מן לפתר החומל המיוחס
ללעזים לא פתר ותר העניין, ילן לא כאלו כאלו וצדוק
המלך: למת אמת היה כדבריו ארכיסטואה והיוסטרון להלן
כאלו מאונות בעל ימים מין ספר כי אפילו אדם לא פתר

נחמיה מלה לקדה:
"Whence the deviations from
the original text occurring in the
Septuagint?"

His view here is indeed amusing!

וכאן יראה על הענין אינם מותר מן הסבור הראשון מל צדוק ולד
לכדו של היונים מלך היו אצל מלכי ארכיסטואה ותר לופר ארכיו
מלכים ומלוד מותר לאמר כי הם שלחו זה ידם לבאר מצד
למעלה לורל. או כי אכלה האל הלבנה את העניין הראשון
ואלו ויהי צדוקיני אצרו את כיה אכלות מן היונים ההם של
את ידם להענין מלך את מלכי העל. וכבר ידעתי כי אצדרי
המור האו בספר מסורת המסורת לא היו עלה ההיסטוריה ולדוק
למאונות, ילן כי לעצמם צדוק לא ימצאו, או למור ומור כפי
דעתנו כי מצד הענין רובו פסיהם היו על נקוד וסעם וסעם
הוא למלך כי נקלו ונקדו בעציות רבות מאין קראו בעצמם
(ל' עצמה וצא מיה בעלמם עם ל' אליהו האו על הנקודות. אישיון קע)
ספרו כרם מצד

IX "Another way of answering the same question,"

And this is, as already mentioned above, that there existed among the Hebrews a Caldaic translation of the Bible, and was probably translated again into Greek. Thus by the double translation discrepancies could not be avoided.

X "The legend of the ten questions of Alexander of Maced. as told by the Talmud compared with a similar report occurring in Plutarch."

The difficulty he has here to deal with is: In the Talmud [תנ"ך]

[פרק לא ה"ו כו פת"י] it is reported, Alexander Makkidon asked the Wise of the South (ג'ף ג'ף)

ten questions, viz. 1) Is the distance between east and west greater than that betw heaven and earth, or not?

and the answer was: The distance from East to West must be further, because when the sun stands in the east all can gaze at it, but when

the sun stands in the zenith, no one is able to gaze at it.

II) What was created first, heaven or earth? Answer: The heaven, because it is written, "In the beginning God created the heaven."

III) What was created first, light or darkness? Answer: Darkness, for it is written; "And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

IV) Who is to be called wise? etc.

From all this it is evident that the "Wise of the South" are meant to be Jews. Whereas in Plutarch the same story, with some slight changes, is narrated to have taken place betw. Alexander & the Wise of India (1317-1331). Now the contradiction here is indeed very insignificant. It might justly be argued, that both stories may be true, since the one does not exclude the other.

The very fact, that the ten questions given by Plutarch, are on the

Whole different from those given in the Talmud, would even be in support of such an argument. The questions as told by Plutarch are: 1) Who are more in number, the living or the dead? 2) What contains more creatures, the land or the sea? etc. It seems therefore, I think, that it is rather the inconsistency of the Talmudic narration in itself that induces our author to doubt its correctness, although he does not say so expressly. And the inconsistency, I think, is this that their answers taken from the Bible and the sayings of the Fathers, however telling and ponderous to them, could never have been convincing to Alexander. and therefore could not have received the praise and munificence as told.

Most significant in this connection are the following words:

כבוד חברי ועד העו"מ, יתחלו, עם הוצאת איש פנים, אצל, הוטב

והנשיין יושבים מקצת דבריהם אצלנו על עניני תורה ומצוות
 ופירושיהן. כי הנה אלו דברים הם כמו דבין המורה על פי מסורת
 מסיני ועל אלה פראאית אלה אלה דאודא דאלי דברור ומקני תורה
 על דרך. אלה בני חנני האדם והלשונות. והוא הורה המורה -
 סמך למצוות דומים לו דגללות דבמה. אלה מביאות עם כן
 אלה כי דבריהם הם אלו דבריהם ישיבן מאלה. יהי מה אלו נמלך
 אומם דעבודות מורה אהפצירם לשימורו הנכר אלו לא כאלו.
 כי זה יביא המורה אלו צד הנה. וקראם דמיונות כענין אלו אלה
 אלו דברו נכונה. וכבר הם עצמם דודיעונו כי חנני אלו ישימו
 אף:

translation: May our wise inherit
 honor for ever, although there are
 some men of wisdom and science in
 our days, who entertain views differing
 from theirs with regard to certain his-
 torical events and incidents. For they
 (our wise) spoke not of them (historical
 events) with the authority of Tradition, or
 with the certainty of inspiration, as it
 is the case with regard to matters of
 law, in which they surely deserve our
 implicit trust and submission;
 In historical events they thought and
 spoke in accordance with the

knowledge or conjecture prevalent among thinkers of those days, or of those regions. Aside that part or the whole of their words may possibly be true, but happen what it may, we should never twist their words so, as to make them say things, which we know they could never have meant.

XI "Concerning the Sphericity of the earth."

In this chapter our author betrays his lack of philosophical acumen. He tries to prove, that the idea of the sphericity of the earth was known to the Jews long since. Now, without any further arguments, everybody knows that this is not true. But the way, in which our author endeavors to prove his proposition, reflects great discredit on mental caliber. He says:

ואמר דבר נא לשכרני
כי גם דברי הכדוריות לארץ נמצא אצלנו חכמים. הלא הוא
דבור ויקרא בסוף אמר דבר שלמים, כי אמרנו ארצנו כדור
ויקראו ארץ על ארץ כדור, כדור וזה לשון. כדור
לדבר ארצנו ארץ וכלהו כדור דבר ארץ על ארץ (אמר)

והטעם ואולי, ולפיכך עלה מכלה. ויכלולם עליו יכל ויכלול.
והטעם ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול
והטעם ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול
יכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול ויכלול
transl. "For after saying that all the
seven heavens are one above the
other as the peels of an onion, the Zohar
writes; "In a similar manner are the
seven lands here below, and all are
inhabited, except the uppermost and
the very lowest, and Palestine is above
all, and Jerusalem above this. And
our friends dwelling in Rome saw in
the older books of Adam, that thus
are divided all the lands here
below in the same way as the
heavens above, the one above the
other, and another above this."

Now, a little insight should have
told him, that this belief is of a late
origin. "Our friends dwelling in Rome" who
else can it be, but Dante? and our
author is well familiar with Dante,
since he quotes him very frequently.

Or is it, that the Zohar knew it by inspiration?
If so, why does he need to quote it in
the name of "our friends dwelling in Rome?"

And how could Ararja be so shortsighted
as not to see, even from this very passage,
that the Zohar was a counterfeit and
of later date. Especially so from
the passage he further on quotes

וְאֶסְתֵּרִי בְּכֹחַ הַמַּלְאָכִים שֶׁבָּרָא שְׂרָפָה בְּיָמֵי
מִתְלָלָא בְּעֶלְמָא דְּבִדּוּר אֱלֹהִים לְמַלְכָּא אֲדִימָא. וְכֵן אֵין
בְּרִין אֱלֵינָן דְּחַזְוִיהוּ. כִּלְתִּין אֲדִימָא. כְּפֹק כֵּן אֲמַר וְאֲמַר.
וְכִיּוֹן דְּעִימִיהוּ כִּלְתִּין בְּנֵי נֶלְא. וְכֵן דִּם אֲמַר אֲמַר דִּלְתִּין
כִּד נְהִיר אֱלֹהִים חֲלִין אֱלֹהִים. אֱלֹהִים יִמְאָן וְלֹא יִלְוִין.
Does not this plainly show that the
Zohar is later even than Columbus?

(וְעַלְמָא מִיּוֹן אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרֵי דִּבְרֵי דְּבִדּוּר אֲדִימָא וְעַלְמָא דִּבְרֵי
לִיפְתּוֹן כִּיּוֹן דְּבִדּוּר אֲדִימָא)

One step, however, our author ad-
vances in this chapter, viz. he denies
here the authority of the Talmud also
in scientific matters. saying:

"בְּאֹפֶן שְׂכָלָא דֵּה יִלְלָה דִּידִין. מִכָּל הַהֶעֱרֹת הַאֲלֵה כִּי עִם
לְמַלְכָּא דְּבִדּוּר אֲדִימָא הַאֲמֹרֹת גְּלִמְתִּין וְכִסְלִיָּהֶם מִלְּמַלְכָּא
וְכִיּוֹן כֵּן כִּלְתִּין וְכֵן בְּבִדּוּר הַאֲמֹרֹת כִּי עִם

כיוצא בזה. ומהאזהרה עצמה איננו סתירה מדבריהם. והאזהרה
 אשר נחלתם אחריהם אף אם יחלף כי דבריו חכמי האמוראים הם
 מוסדיים ביותר ושאלו אחריו אחרים מוסדיים. אין זה חסרון
 במקרה. כי אין דבר יותר הדברות למסדן אנו. כי הנך בחזרה לא
 דברו במעלות. מן הנבואה נח ככל אשר למטה עיניו יספיק או
 למטה אונן יוכיח. וזהו גם כן אדם חכמי יותר אמוראים.

The following chapters are so
 unimportant that the mere readings
 will here suffice.

XIII. "Concerning the expulsion of
 the Jews from Alexandria and who
 expelled them"

XIII. Concerning the lost ten tribes
 and they returned in the time of Jashiyah.

XIV. The disagreement found
 in the Talmud concerning the
 interpretation of certain pas-
 sages of the Bible.

We here note the following:

ונראה כי הדבר הזה הוא כדבריהם נדבך אמוראים שונים לא
 על דעת שהן אמוראים כדבריהם אלא להדבר אמוראים ואחרים
 אדם זכרון עם מורא קיים לאדם יוצאים מדו פלוגה ודכן
 המעלה מן הפלג למדע יא ואחריהם המדע פלג דין אחרים אחרים

יה שלא צ"ל

XV "As to the nature of the Hagadah,
and in what light we shall consider it."

Here he says: נחלק קצת האדם גדולות אלני:
חלקים. האחד ידע שיהם כיצור ענין הפסוק וקצת ואחרת האמת הדליל
לשונם ולמשלם כמשל הדיונים המעובדים. והלני מדבר אמת
ויחלקם לשני חלקים להיות מדובר קצת לאין זה ענין הכתוב. ולא
היונה אחת משני הכתובים להם אז צד מלכות השור אלה המפורסם
דבר זה קצת הדיון.

XVI "Concerning the legend of the
gnat that entered the brain
of Titus".

XVII "Concerning the saying of our
wise, that in olden times men
generated at 8. years of age."

XVIII "Concerning their saying
Kores, Darius and Artashastha
is one + the same person" (כורש דוריש ארתשסתה)

XIX "Concerning the authenticity of
the Beraita called Seder Aleph."

XX "How many high priests offici-
ated during the II Temple."

XXI "The contradictions found

betw. our Wise and gentile writers con-
cerning some legends, and how many
kings there were by the name of Janai."

XXIII "Whether there existed more
than one man by the name
"Simon the Just,"

XXIII "To prove that our reckoning
from the world's creation is only of
Talmudic origin and that the world
is now older than 5653 years."

XXIV "In matters of right and
rite the Talmud deserves
our implicit compliance."

XXV "Justification of the
Talmud."

He says: אין לנו אלהים אלהים אלהים
לנצח ולנצח בלתי תכלית ואלו כולם הם רבוי
שיחור חולין ונתינת זכויות על מה שאמר אלהים יצא
מבית מלכותו אלו שלשה כל קצור הספור אלו שלשה
השיחור ההנה כי מלכותו דלא כחולין על דני האדם אין
בית אלהים אלהים כפי מה שקראו אלהים כן אלהים
והנה כל הדברים האלה הם עזות אלהים חזק באלו
עזרה כחן באלו מלכותו. ואלו יתנו באלו כחן באלו
לדבר אלהים בלתי חזק באלו חזק באלו חזק באלו

והריסה דאך דער מלך, אינעם יאר אלף דערהערט אלץ
אמען בעט צענדליק דעם וואס אנטווארט אלץ אמר
דערמאן אזע ווייט אנטווארט: - סוף הספר -

Resumé

From what has been said Asarja's position in the development of Jewish thought and belief may fairly be ascertained. Although we can not rank him among our best men, as Maimonides, Eben Ezra, Bachja, still he is not less important. He belongs to a class of men, less gifted, yet not less useful. He is preeminently a scholar and not a reasoner. The most striking feature in our author is his great and varied knowledge. He hardly moves one step without calling a dozen authors to ^{his} help. He is so given to quotations as to forget entirely the test of common sense. He lacks the most essential qualities of the reasoner, viz. strength of conviction and self-confidence. To his justification it may, however, be said, that he

wished to argue with those who were less accessible to common sense than to Talmudic sayings, or the like. Maybe, still the tone of his writings and arguments is rather that of the old Shaalet and Teshuvot than that of the reasoners. It seems just to maintain, that by accident, or not, he became acquainted with the most clashing literatures of his day, uniting in his mind a thorough knowledge of the Talmud and all its appendices with an equal knowledge of all the Latin & Greek Lit. of his time, he could not help seeing the contradictions in the two, and he had enough historical sense, to see that the Talmud was in the wrong, and moral courage enough to express his view.

As a scholar however he towers much above his contemporaries. Not that he was the first to read the Classic and Christian Lit. In this he had many predecessors, as for ins. Shabtaj Jemela —

Moshe Me Kohna, Jehuda Leon, Don Isaac Abarbanel? But he excelled all these in the diversity of his knowledge, secondly in this that he was the first who really profited by his reading. He was the first to apply the rod of criticism to the Talmud and thus paved the path for modern Judaism. Like all true seekers of truth, he doubted, investigated and examined. He did not rely on the infallibility of the Talmud. And in this we find his real significance and his real greatness. This was something quite new in Jewish as well as in Christian circles. The Jew believed everything contained in the Talmud and disbelieved everything that was not found therein. The Talmud was an authority, not only in rituals & liturgy, but also for history & science. The Christian believed, and had to believe, everything handed down by the Church Fathers. To doubt was heresy. Considering all this we must surely admit that

Aschena's undertaking is no trivial one, and we shall willingly pay him the honor and recognition due to him.

He first undertook it to separate history from myth, to distinguish between truth & legend. Whether and how he succeeded in doing so, is of little import. It is the daring, the enterprise, the pioneering that demands our admiration. Nor shall the fact, that his writings had but little influence upon his contemporaries, in the least detract from his merits. This was not his fault, his contemporaries were not ripe for reform.

Yes, a pioneer he was in the truest sense of the word. Elia Levita, when discussing the origin of the Hebrew vowel-signs, had said: "If someone will show me a statement in the Talmud to the contrary, I will recant." Our author goes farther, saying that the Talmud is no authority in historical and scientific questions. Only those who are acquainted with the ideas and beliefs of yore concerning

the transcendent nature of the Talmud, can fully appreciate the importance of this decisive step. From this to our modern point of view is but one step more, viz. the denial of the authority of the Talmud in every respect. The Talmud, once stripped of its nimbus and infallibility, soon lost its hold upon the minds of reasoning Jews. And this is what we understand by Jewish reformation, viz. a restating of creed, a returning to the Judaism of the prophets.

We may perhaps gain a better comprehension of the importance of his writings, if we consider the protest and censure they received at the hands of the most distinguished Jews of those days.

Joseph Caro ordered the burning of the *Meor Anajim*. The rabbinate of Mantua prohibited its reading unto young men.

Ph. D. Asila condemned it as heretical, and so did many others.

True, Asaria's writings did not bring about any practical results.

in Jewish beliefs and opinions, at least
 not directly. But this does not lessen
 his greatness. The time had not come
 as yet. Then ^{the} Jew as well as ^{the} Christian
 felt himself more attracted by mysti-
 cism than by cold reason. Keeping also
 in mind that such men as Isaac Luria,
 Chajim Vital, and Joseph Caro were then
 the leading men in Israel, we will
 be able to appreciate Asarja dei Rossi's
 greatness. Greatness is a relative
 expression; the idea of greatness is
 derived from comparison. Therefore
 great is he who is above his contem-
 poraries. Or in the words of the Talmud:

יְהִי כְּדוֹרָו כְּשִׁמּוֹנֵאל כְּדוֹרָו :

Finis