

## **Œuvres de 1768 (III)**

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**VolumeEditors:**

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Voltaire

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Even by the hyperactive standards of Voltaire, 1768 was to prove a remarkable year and this volume is distinguished by a multiplicity of works. His interest in eastern Europe manifested itself in the *Discours aux confédérés catholiques*, he was anxious to smooth over matters concerning the alleged thefts of manuscripts by La Harpe through the *Déclaration*, and was delighted when a ship was named after him, publicising the event by composing the *Epître à mon vaisseau*. His playful practice of attributing his works to pseudonymous authors was joyously continued (*Instruction du gardien des capucins de Raguse*, *Lettre de l'archevêque de Cantorbéry*), and revenge was enacted on the author of the *Compère Matthieu*, a work attributed to Voltaire in 1766. The reverberations of the *Bélisaire* affair of 1767 are reflected in a number of texts: the *Déclaration*, the *Lettre de l'archevêque de Cantorbéry*, *La Prophétie de la Sorbonne*, *Les Trois empereurs en Sorbonne*, *Le Sermon prêché à Bâle* and the *Epître écrite de Constantinople*. Personal scores are settled with La Bletterie and with a new target in *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire*, Chiniac de la Bastide; the basis of the authority of Rome and the Scriptures is characteristically undermined in *Les Droits des hommes*, the *Epître écrite de Constantinople* and the *Instruction du gardien des capucins de Raguse*; and the doctrines of Christianity are likewise ridiculed in the scathing dialogue of the *Relation du bannissement des Jésuites de la Chine*. In some respects, however, 1768 can be regarded as a year of relative optimism, with Voltaire's belief, perhaps, that the philosophic cause was gaining ground.

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Voltaire is still suspect to many as a historian, yet his comments in *Le Pyrrhonisme*, although occasionally quirky, show a very sane and reasonable preoccupation with achieving a happy medium between scepticism and credulity. [...] Anyone interested in Voltaire as a historian should read and meditate on this text.

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