



NASSI

Beset by pogroms, the seventeenth-century Jewish world was captivated by Shabbetai Tzvi's claim to be the messiah, come to redeem them. Thousands upon thousands of Jews followed Shabbetai Tzvi, some even after his conversion to Islam. Today, several thousand Turkish crypto-Jews, known as Dönme, con-

tinue to believe in Shabbetai Tzvi and to pray for his return. In "Shabbetai Tzvi Lives" (p. 42), Gad Nassi takes us back to that turbulent time and provides a look at the dwindling community of his followers.

The founder of MORIT, an association for the preservation of Turkish Jewry's heritage, Dr. Gad Nassi is an Israeli psychiatrist and author. He currently leads a research team investigating Middle Eastern dimensions of the Jewish mystical heritage.



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# SECRET MUSLIM JEWS AWAIT THEIR MESSIAH



# SHABBETAI TZVI

The word "Lives" is written in a large, stylized, cursive script that overlaps the bottom of the main title. The letters are thick and textured, with a grainy appearance.

**GAD NASSI**

**A**t daybreak an octogenarian cautiously approaches the shore of the Bosphorus. He stays only a short time, bending toward the sea, murmuring, then rubbing his face and glancing at the sky for the first light of day. He leaves furtively; no one really knows why he has come.

The language he uses is incomprehensible to almost all the nine million people who live in Istanbul; not even his grandchildren understand it. His deepest secret is the meaning of his utterance: *Sabetay Sevi, asperamos a ti* (Shabbetai Tzvi, we wait for you).

He is, in fact, one of the last to practice the 300-year-old tradition of a crypto-community of Jewish ancestry. His prayer in Ladino\* expresses the messianic longing for a redeemer of the House of Israel.

Jewish messianic fervor is not a relic from past centuries: Witness the happenings this spring around the 90th birthday of the Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who, according to some of his followers, will soon reveal himself as the messiah. One week before the

birthday, 800 sympathizers from the intellectual, political and religious community of Washington, D.C., gathered for dinner to praise and honor the man who is known simply as the Rebbe. On the day itself—April 14 (11 Nisan)—10,000 followers filled Yad Eliyahu Stadium in Tel Aviv; in Crown Heights, where the revered sage lives surrounded by 15,000 followers, emotional pandemonium swept through the community as children took to the streets and sang—"We want Moshiach now!"

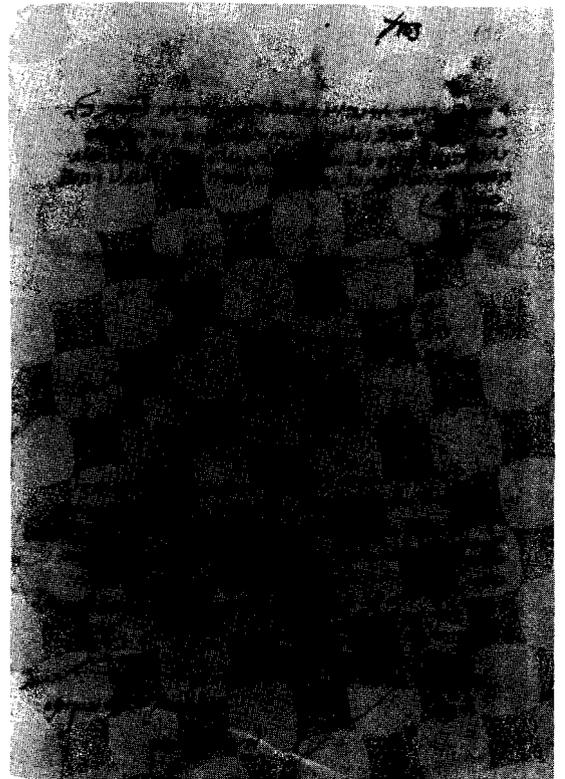
In Turkey, a small, secretive remnant of several thousand people survives from another time of messianic anticipation—followers of Shabbetai Tzvi, the seventeenth-century Jewish mystic who declared himself the messiah and ended up converting to Islam. To some Jews he became the false messiah; to others, called *Dönme* (apostates) by Turks and *ma'aminim* (true believers) by themselves, Shabbetai Tzvi lives on, the unrecognized messiah who will one day return.

The messianic movement initiated by Shabbetai Tzvi swept across the world from England to Persia, from the Netherlands to Morocco and from Germany to Yemen. Staid Jewish businessmen sold their homes and possessions and prepared for the journey to Jerusalem redeemed. It was the most

\*Ladino is the liturgical language used in Spain and elsewhere by Sephardic Jews. The everyday language spoken by Sephardim is called Judeo-Spanish.



**THE FACE OF the messiah?** Believed to be his only known real-life portrait, this engraving appeared in Thomas Coenen's *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden getoont in der Persoon van Sabethai Zevi* [Vain Expectation of the Jews as Shown in the Person of Shabbetai Tzvi] (Amsterdam, 1669), a book of the period that points out the disillusionment experienced in the Jewish community after Shabbetai Tzvi's conversion to Islam.



**A TOMBSTONE** in Salonica marking the grave of a follower of Shabbetai Tzvi. The pillar standing on one corner of the tombstone commemorates the death in 1737 of another member of the Dönme community.

About 200 Shabbateans converted to Islam in 1666 with Shabbetai Tzvi. In 1683—seven years after Shabbetai Tzvi's death—the community moved its center of activities to Salonica, where about 300 Jewish families, who still believed that he was the messiah, converted to Islam. Professing and practicing Islam in public, they secretly remained Jews. It was these later converts who were the first to be called Dönme. Their descendants thrived in Salonica until they were deported to Turkey in 1924 during an exchange of population following the Turko-Greek War.



**SHABBETAI TZVI'S last letter.** Written in Hebrew in August 1676, this letter asks friends in Berat, Albania, to send him a High Holiday prayer book. Exiled by the grand vizier of Turkey in 1673 to Albania, Shabbetai Tzvi wrote letters in his last years that indicate his continuing belief that he was the messiah. On Yom Kippur, six weeks after sending this note, Shabbetai Tzvi died at age 50.

widespread messianic movement in Jewish history. So deep was its mark and so striking its consequences that centuries could not erase them.

Shabbetai Tzvi was born in Smyrna (Izmir), Turkey, in 1626, probably on the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av, Tisha b'Av, the day in 586 B.C.E. the Babylonians destroyed the Solomonic Temple, the day in 70 C.E. the Romans destroyed the Second Temple. According to a midrash, the messiah would be born on that day.

Versed in the *kabbalah*, the esoteric and mystical teachings of Judaism, Shabbetai Tzvi led a life of seclusion and piety in his early adolescence. During this period came the first manifestations of a severe psychic disturbance. Shabbetai Tzvi was agitated by sexual temptations. He began to suffer from alternating episodes of depression and exaltation. Nevertheless, handsome and endowed with a musical voice, he attracted many admirers. An eyewitness reported that he acquired the reputation of an inspired man. At the age of 18, Shabbetai Tzvi was ordained a *chacham*, a title designating him as a rabbi. Young scholars his age collected around him, studying Talmudic and mystical lore. Like him, they took ritual baths in the sea and they accompanied him in the fields outside the city, where they devoted themselves to the mysteries of the Torah.<sup>1</sup>

Between ages 20 and 24, Shabbetai Tzvi was twice married. Neither marriage was consummated; both ended in divorce. When, in 1648, news reached Turkey of the massacre of more than 100,000 Jews in the Ukraine led by the Cossack Bogdan Chmielnitzki, a belief grew in Shabbetai Tzvi's heart that he was chosen to be the savior of his afflicted people. During periods of exaltation he would behave extravagantly, doing things that were prohibited by rabbinical law or custom. Boldly non-conformist, he even pronounced the ineffable name of God, Yahweh, the name Jews utter only in prayer and even then only as Adonai, never as the Lord's personal name that was pronounced only once a year on the Day of Atonement by the high priest in the Holy of Holies. Considered by many a lunatic, Shabbetai Tzvi initially evoked a

certain compassion in the rabbis of Smyrna, but later they banished him from his native town.

For several years Shabbetai Tzvi wandered, reaching Salonica in Greece and then Constantinople (Istanbul). In both places he gained sympathizers but was eventually expelled from these cities as well. In Salonica, he celebrated a nuptial ceremony with the Torah under the canopy. In Constantinople, in a frenzy of piety, he celebrated in one week the festivals of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot to atone for all sins ever committed by Israel during festival times. Throughout his career, Shabbetai Tzvi exhibited a predilection for shifting dates, changing fixed times and moving Sabbaths and holy days.

After returning to Smyrna for a while, Shabbetai Tzvi decided to visit the Holy Land, reaching Jerusalem via Rhodes and Cairo. He visited holy graves, prayed near the tombs of the patriarchs in Hebron and devoted himself to ascetic practices. Members of the Jewish community, although astounded by his strange character, nevertheless flocked to him. He gained their esteem after successfully raising financial aid on a visit to Cairo for the impoverished Jewish community of the Holy Land.

In 1664, during a second visit to Cairo lasting two years, Shabbetai Tzvi married Sarah, a Polish-born orphan in her 20s. Sarah's parents had perished in the Chmielnitzki massacres. Reputedly promiscuous, she wandered through Europe, arriving at the port of Leghorn, Italy, where she claimed she was destined to marry the messiah. When Shabbetai Tzvi heard this, he sent messengers to Leghorn to bring her to Cairo. The wedding ceremony was held with great pomp. His marriage was interpreted as an emulation of the prophet Hosea, who had married a whore under divine inspiration. Whore or not, Shabbetai Tzvi's union with Sarah coincided with a relatively stable period in his psychic life, a time when he realized his madness and searched for a cure.

A meeting between Shabbetai Tzvi and Nathan of Gaza was a turning point in Shabbetai Tzvi's mission. Nathan, a young but renowned kabbalist, engaged in mysti-

COURTESY GAE VASSI

אנאיי אלהינו הצמיה  
 תקון  
 קראח לכל לילה ויום  
 למנו כל יום מנהי ונתו נדך יש  
 וישב אל י וירחמו  
 לראות עו וכבוד  
 סנה נסין נסין  
 כביתוכמעות דור  
 די קאשטרו תארהמיו  
 פה  
 אמשטרדם  
 ואלו סגולו אלגוהו

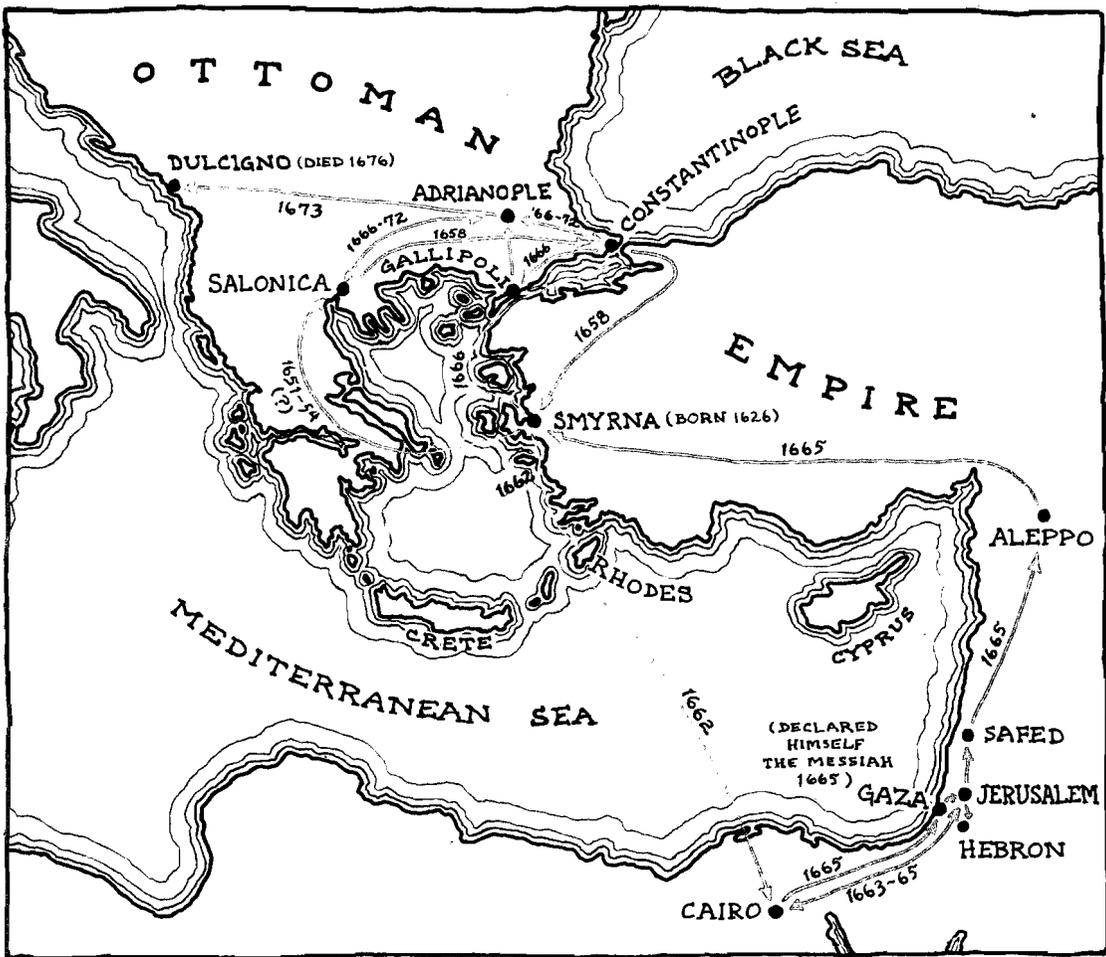
**THE FRONTISPIECE** of a Shabbatean prayer book entitled *Tikun*. These daily morning and evening readings—composed of liturgies written by Shabbetai Tzvi's great promoter, Nathan of Gaza—was printed in Amsterdam in 1666. Nathan's liturgies were widely circulated in Europe and elsewhere together with announcements that the messiah had come.

MS. F. 65. 289. ZURICH ZENTRALBIBLIOTHEK/P. SCHEIDEgger



**THE MOUNTED messiah.** This German engraving, widely accepted as Shabbetai Tzvi, was cut one year after he declared himself the messiah in Gaza on May 31, 1665. He is depicted on horseback, soon after his declaration, when he rode up to Jerusalem and circled the walls seven times. Shabbetai Tzvi won over some of

Jerusalem's rabbis to his nascent movement, but the majority banished him from the city. Rumors soon reached Europe about the reappearance of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, who were said to be marching under the command of a prophetic and saintly man about whom all sorts of miraculous stories were told.



SHABBETAI TZVI'S travels.

SHARRE HARRIS WOLFGANG/SOURCE: ENCYCLOPAEDIA JUDAICA

## GOOD AND EVIL AND THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH

### HOW SHABBETAÏ TZVI FIT INTO SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY JEWISH EXPECTATIONS

The prevailing Jewish mystical view of creation and the world in the mid-seventeenth century was that divine light originally filled all things; the light dwindled and shrank into particles covered by shells (*klipot*) corresponding to evil powers; these sparks of divine light had to be released and reunited by means of repair (*tikun*), a process by which the divine order is restored.

The idea of repair was introduced by Isaac Luria (1534-1572). Born in Jerusalem, he was the most famous kabbalist after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Luria's theoretical kabbalah presented bold innovations in theosophical doctrine and in the concept of creation. He introduced a messianic element into his doctrine of *tikun*, repair of the world, paving the way for later messianic ferment.

Repair, as understood by Isaac Luria, was the task of human beings who must work to perfect their individual spark of goodness by advancing in stages. These stages are not necessarily gathered in one life; repair may only be realized in the course of numerous lives and transmigrations. This task of *tikun* was assigned to Jews dedicated to asceticism, contemplation and meditation. The justification for the Diaspora was to disperse the righteous to the realm of the evil shells to bring the holy sparks together again. According to Luria's beliefs, the completion of the repair of the world would bring the messiah: The exiles would be gathered, the Kingdom of God would be established with Jerusalem as its capital and the messiah would be king.

Lurianic kabbalah proclaimed that the history of the world was essentially the drama of God seeking to perfect the divine image. It was the duty of men and women to achieve God's aim by means of good works. This philosophical system explained the origin of the world, its fall and its redemption and gave meaning to the existence of the Jew.

Messianism, in the middle of the seventeenth century—the time of Shabbetaï Tzvi—was not an abstract hope for a distant future but a dynamic force in Jewish history. Followers of Lurianic kabbalah proclaimed that repair of the world was almost completed and that the final redemption was just around the corner.

cal practices and ascetic disciplines. As a devoted kabbalist, he was on the lookout for the messiah, whose imminent coming was then a prevailing belief. He knew of Shabbetaï Tzvi's pretensions. Shabbetaï Tzvi, for his part, had heard of Nathan as a man of God, able to disclose the hidden parts of people's souls. And so it came about that Shabbetaï Tzvi, searching for a healer for himself, arrived in Gaza to visit Nathan, the physician of souls.

Shortly before Shabbetaï Tzvi's arrival, Nathan experienced an ecstatic vision that revealed to him that Shabbetaï Tzvi was the expected messiah. So when Shabbetaï Tzvi came to Nathan seeking a cure, Nathan told him that his agonies were not symptoms of a diseased soul but the signs of his soul's high rank, which did not need

any *tikun* [repair]. While they were celebrating on the eve of Shavuot, Nathan fell into a trance and announced that Shabbetaï Tzvi was the messiah. Nathan even produced an apocryphal text in which Shabbetaï Tzvi's appearance as the redeemer of his nation was supposedly prophesied.

On the 17th of Sivan (May 31, 1665) in Gaza, Shabbetaï Tzvi proclaimed himself messiah. He appointed 12 "apostles" to represent the 12 tribes. Riding around on horseback in majestic state, Shabbetaï Tzvi came to Jerusalem where he circled the walls seven times.

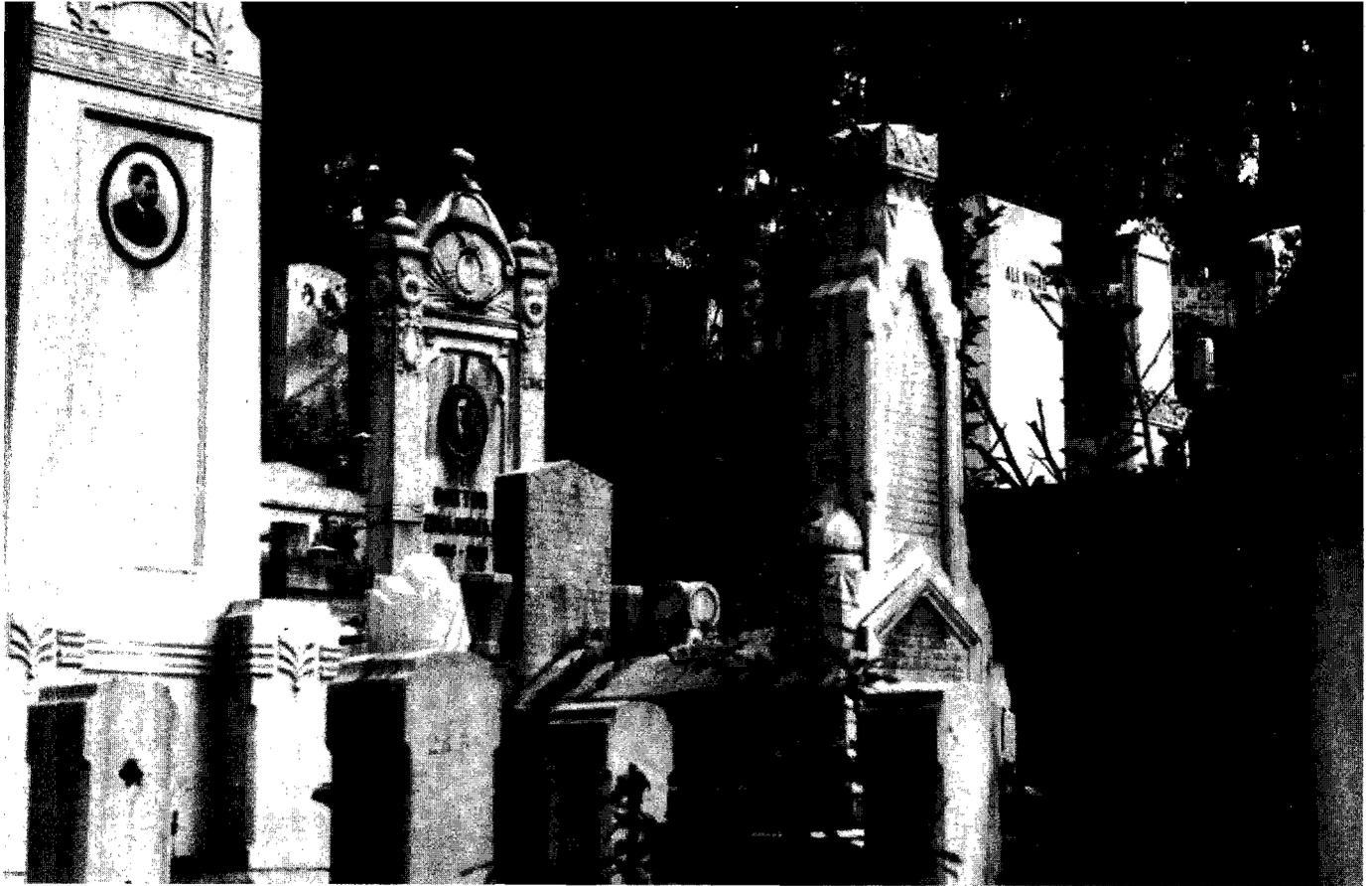
Nathan proclaimed the need for mass repentance to hasten the coming of Redemption. Letters went out to communities in North Africa, Asia and Europe. In one of these letters Nathan wrote:

"The time of redemption has come... Shabbetaï Tzvi has the power to justify the great sinner, even Jesus\*...he will take the crown of the Turkish king, without war, and will make the sultan his servant...he will proceed to the river Sambatyon to bring back the lost tribes."

Rumors reached Europe about the appearance of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, said to be marching under the command of a prophetic and saintly man about whom all sorts of miraculous stories were told.

In Palestine, messianic news traveled like wildfire, encountering strong opposition from outstanding rabbis of Jerusalem, who banished Shabbetaï Tzvi from the city. Heading north, Shabbetaï Tzvi traveled through Safed in the Galilee and Aleppo in Syria to Smyrna, where Jews had long forgotten the ban placed on him for his earlier bizarre behavior and, his fame having preceded him, welcomed him to his birthplace as the king-messiah. Hundreds of people accompanied him wherever he went, causing a tumult among the people of Smyrna. On December 12, 1665, he smashed the locked doors of the synagogue that was the headquarters of his opponents and, once inside, called men and

\* Shabbetaï Tzvi and Nathan felt an empathy for Jesus. According to Shabbatean belief, the soul of the messiah had been reincarnated 18 times from Adam onward, including, probably, Jesus. Reportedly Shabbetaï Tzvi once exclaimed: "What has Jesus done that you ill-treated him thus? I shall see to it that he will be counted among the prophets."<sup>2</sup>



COURTESY GAD NASSI

**THE DÖNME** cemetery in Istanbul on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. The Dönme attach pictures of the deceased to their tombstones. Muslim fanatics destroyed some pictures. Although Dönme do not worship in mosques, their funeral processions to this cemetery begin at a mosque popularly known as the "Jewish mosque." A Muslim ceremony at this mosque is followed by a Dönme ritual in the cemetery chapel.



**SHEMSI EFENDI**, a prominent Dönme in Salonica. Shemsi Efendi taught mathematics to Kemal Atatürk, founder of modern Turkey. Known as an educational reformer, Shemsi Efendi is shown here with one of his pupils in Salonica at the beginning of this century.



**GOLD MEDALLIONS** belonging to Dönme families, revealed publicly for the first time. The medallions were probably presented to girls when they came of age. The inscription in Latin and Hebrew (above) means: "Just is the God of Jews." Shabbetai Tzvi holds a scepter and a cross (left). Few in number and secretive, today's Dönme practice customs little known outside their community. Only on their wedding day do Dönme youth learn the secrets about their faith in Shabbetai Tzvi.

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## Shabbetai Tzvi Lives

*continued from previous page*

women alike to read the Torah and distributed kingdoms of the earth among his supporters, forcing them to pronounce the forbidden name of God. Then Shabbetai Tzvi went up to the ark, took out a scroll and, after singing "Meliselda," an old Castilian erotic love song, proclaimed himself the messiah of Israel, fixing the date of the redemption for June 18th, 1666. He announced that in a short time he would seize the crown of the Ottoman sultan and reestablish the Kingdom of Israel.

On December 30, 1665, Shabbetai Tzvi left Smyrna by ship for Istanbul with a group of followers. Considering Shabbetai Tzvi in open rebellion against the sultan, Turkish authorities arrested and imprisoned him when the ship arrived at the Dardanelles. Tension mounted among Jews as well as among Muslims. An eye witness in Constantinople reported:

Seven to eight hundred women were prophesying for several months in the Galata quarter of Constantinople, acting as if possessed and imitating the enthusiastic behavior of such as have received the spirit. Several women had to be bound and beaten in order to drive out the spirit of folly that had turned their brains and caused them to rave and indulge in disorderly behavior.

The enthusiastic messianic anticipation among communities in Europe, Asia and North Africa was not very different. Almost all these communities had suffered humiliation and oppression within recent times. The grievous memory of the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497 was still alive; *marranos*, or secret Jews, fleeing the atrocities of the Inquisition, wandered through Europe, hoping to return freely to Judaism. In Poland and Russia Jews were subject to mass slaughters. During these times of distress and helplessness, mystical beliefs imbued almost all existing Jewish communities. Faith in messianic redemption became a way to survive. Jewish communities from all over sent delegations to Turkey to meet Shabbetai Tzvi.

On September 16, 1666, summoned before the Imperial Court in Adrianople (now Edirne), Shabbetai Tzvi was ordered to choose death or conversion

to Islam. A former Jew, Mustapha Hayatzade, physician to Sultan Mehmed IV, convinced Shabbetai Tzvi to accept Islam. Shabbetai Tzvi adopted the name Aziz Mehmed Efendi.

To cope with the cruel reality of Shabbetai Tzvi's apostasy, his believers had to choose between forsaking their faith that he was the messiah or finding some way to justify his conduct. Most abandoned him. For the faithful, however, a new, mystical theosophical interpretation emerged to legitimate Shabbetai Tzvi's apostasy. Shabbetai Tzvi's task as a Muslim was to gather the "holy sparks" that were dispersed among the gentiles—a necessary step toward redemption. Only the explanation went, and to do so he must hide his identity and act within the heart of the enemy. This explanation appeared plausible to those who still believed in the messianic mission of Shabbetai Tzvi because it fit into the prevalent Lurianic view of kabbalah. (See box, p. 46.)

After converting to Islam, Shabbetai Tzvi lived in Adrianople in Turkey and sometimes in Constantinople. Leading a double life, he outwardly performed the duties of Islam while continuing secretly to observe Jewish rituals. After denunciation by some Jews and Muslims of his two-faced behavior and of his libertine sexual practices, Shabbetai Tzvi was exiled in 1673 to Dulcigno (Ulcini) at the southern end of the Dalmatian coast, in Albania, where he died, in his fifties, on the Day of Atonement, September 17, 1676. A letter in his own handwriting (see photo, p. 43), written toward the end of his life, asks friends from the nearby community of Berat to send him a prayer book for the New Year and the Day of Atonement.

From the time of his conversion until Shabbetai Tzvi was expelled to Albania, 200 families followed in his footsteps and ostensibly embraced Islam. Shabbatean beliefs continued to spread within the Jewish world; a second mass conversion to Islam by followers of Shabbetai Tzvi took place after his death in 1683 in Salonica, earlier proclaimed by Shabbetai Tzvi as a holy city.

Faith in Shabbetai Tzvi as messiah, his apostasy and the mass conversions that followed opened a breach in the Jewish world; the first steps were taken toward formation of a crypto-community. The Turks began to call these ostensible converts to Islam *Dönme*, a

popular Turkish term for apostate, meaning literally "the one who has turned." Implying renegade, variable and even unreliable, it is a confusing and deprecatory term. Traditional Jews used the epithet *minim* (heretics) to castigate the Shabbateans. The Shabbateans, in turn, called themselves "believers," *ma'aminim* in Hebrew. They never adopted *Dönme* to refer to themselves. With the years, *ma'aminim* went out of use and the secret Shabbateans simply referred to themselves as "us" or "we." (*Dönme* is the name most widely known.)

The *Dönme* found many overt, disguised or secret supporters outside the Shabbatean sect itself, so that *Dönme* beliefs pervaded Jewish communities, penetrated religious life and influenced spiritual inclinations and attitudes. Gershom Scholem, the great scholar of Jewish mysticism, reports that "there is full proof that a fair number of men of great Talmudic learning and even officiating rabbis joined Shabbatean groups and found it possible to live in a state of high tension between outward orthodox and inward antinomianism."<sup>3</sup>

Salonica became the spiritual center of the *Dönme* community. The *Dönme* community knew flourishing days, experienced deep communal dissensions and created its own legacy. Despite the vicissitudes of history, it continued to

exist for more than three centuries and remnants of it survive today.

The *Dönme* are voluntary converts, a phenomenon without precedent in Jewish history. They practice Islam publicly but adhere to a heretical Jewish theosophy: Shabbetai Tzvi replaced the Ten Commandments with a new religious order based on 18 precepts, *Las Incommendensas*, as the *Dönme* call them. *Las Incommendensas* include the Ten Commandments but the formulation of the prohibition of adultery is ambiguous, resembling a suggestion of prudence. Other commandments regulate relations between the believers in Shabbetai Tzvi and Turks and Jews.

Secretly carrying out their rituals in hidden synagogues, the *Dönme* married only among themselves. Today, only the *Karakash*, one small group of three to four thousand *Dönme*, continues in the traditional ways and does not marry out. The remaining 40,000 to 60,000 *Dönme* who retain some memory of their heritage have ceased all observance and restrictions on marriage.

One of the *Dönme*'s distinctive rituals was the Festival of the Lamb, celebrated in spring on the night between the 21st and 22nd of Adar. It is unlikely that even the *Karakash* continue to practice this festival. As practiced in former times, at least two married

## MY FASCINATION WITH THE DÖNME

Born and educated in Istanbul, I became aware early on of a mysterious people who appeared to be Turks with Jewish affinities. Their elders spoke Judeo-Spanish at home and sometimes exchanged a few words in this language with my parents. Once a classmate, hearing my mother speaking Judeo-Spanish, told me, "We also belong to you; at home we speak the same language." I was surprised to hear this from someone who was supposedly a Muslim. These people never visited mosques. I heard rumors that the approach of Jewish holy days made these "other Jews" tense and that they were secretly celebrating them with their own customs. Besides these sporadic manifestations, they never talked about their Jewish ties, and mutual discretion made the subject almost an unconscious taboo. Although particularly eager to find out the real meaning of their Jewishness, I never had the opportunity in those

times to learn more about them.

Much later, while preparing a psychobiography of Shabbetai Tzvi, I again became interested in the *Dönme*. As a psychiatrist, I thought my interest was professional. Yet as I explored the sociological and cultural roots of Shabbetai Tzvi, memories were aroused. My study of the Shabbatean heritage, presented to an international congress,\* brought me into close communication with some members of the *Dönme* community. Though discreet and hesitant, they became open with me because they were aware that soon there would be almost nothing left of the Shabbatean heritage. From these *Dönme* I learned about beliefs and practices unknown to those outside the community.—G.N.

\* "Sabbateanism and the Ottoman Mystical Tradition," presented at the First International Congress on Turkish Jewry, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Herzlia, October 1989.

## RELOCATING?

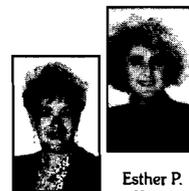
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## Shabbetai Tzvi Lives

*continued from previous page*

couples and often many more participated in the ceremony. The meat of that spring's newly born lambs was eaten for the first time that year. After the meal, the lights were extinguished and couples made love without distinguishing between their partners. Children born from this encounter were considered sacred. This kind of festival celebrates the new year and also is linked to the creation of the universe. It has its roots in pagan beliefs and orgiastic rituals known from other ancient cultures of the Middle East, such as the Iranian Noruz and the Roman Saturnalia. Spring festivals were the expression of the rebirth of nature after winter, the spring equinox being interpreted as the wedding of the sky with the earth. The analogy between this practice and messianic rebirth after the days of the apocalypse is clear: The existing order will be abolished and instinctive needs can be freely enjoyed.

Although the Dönme maintain their traditions, they have not made a complete break with Judaism. For more than 200 years, they have not brought their disputes to Turkish courts. As knowledge of Talmud decreased among them, they consulted rabbis to settle controversial cases. As long as the Dönme lived in Salonica, preservation of their Jewish character was feasible because of their proximity and steady contact with its large, bustling Jewish population. Many members of the Dönme community in Salonica were among Turkey's reform leaders—the Young Turks—and members of an influential reform organization known as the Committee for Progress and Union. In 1909, the revolution of the Young Turks overthrew the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II. The first administration that then came to power, laying the foundation of the future Turkish republic, included three Dönme ministers—Nuzhet Faik, Mustafa Arif and Mehmet Javid.

At the time of the revolution, few Dönme lived in Turkey; the center of community—about 16,000 strong—was in Salonica. There they remained until after the Turko-Greek war, when a treaty in 1924 provided for an exchange of populations. During the period of amnesty before exchange, members of the sect, wishing to avoid their transfer to Turkey, asked the rab-

bis of Salonica to permit them to return to Judaism. Their application was rejected by the rabbis because children who were the fruit of the Festival of the Lamb were *mamzerim*, conceived from an adulterous relationship, according to *halachah* [Jewish religious law]. The Dönme left for Turkey.

The rabbis' ruling saved the Dönme from extermination during the Holocaust. From March 14, 1943, until August 7 of the same year, the Nazis filled 19 railroad convoys with the Jews of Salonica, shipping them off to death camps in Poland. By the end of August, 43,850 Jews—95 percent of the Jewish population of Greece—had been exterminated at Auschwitz and Birkenau.

When the Dönme community departed for Turkey in 1924 they found their new home less hospitable than Salonica. Their Jewish links and their peculiar lifestyle made them vulnerable prey for Turkish fundamentalists and extremists, who accused the Dönme of hypocrisy and perfidy. Not being officially defined as a community, the Dönme were unequipped to defend themselves. Becoming more and more inhibited, they had to choose between remaining a secret, self-contained community or total assimilation and disappearance.

During World War II, the Dönme community was recognized as a separate entity by the Turkish government. As the government struggled to meet the country's financial needs, it issued a wealth tax, known as *varlık vergisi*. While Muslim citizens were taxed at 5 percent of their income or capital, non-Muslim citizens were forced to pay much higher assessments. The Dönme were given their own category; they had to pay 10 percent of income and the capital letter *D* was marked by their names.

Throughout this century, as Dönme have entered Turkish society—often at the highest levels—they still struggled with ambiguity about their Jewish, Shabbatean and Turkish allegiances. A child in the Dönme community does not receive any clear guidance about the community or its Jewish connections. The child only learns at puberty that he or she belongs to a separate community. Only on the wedding day has the Dönme son or daughter the right to know all the community's secrets about their faith in their messiah, Shabbetai Tzvi, and to become fully

acquainted with their rituals.

To this day the few thousand Karakash—orthodox Shabbateans—live mostly in their own neighborhood in Istanbul with their own synagogue, steadfastly maintaining their faith. No outsider can enter their homes. Inbreeding has taken its physical toll, producing distinctive deformities such as disproportionately large heads and puny bodies. A Dönme cemetery is located on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus (see photo, page 47); the mosque in Istanbul from which funerals leave for this cemetery is popularly known as the “Jewish mosque.” Rumors say that the Dönme possess a library and some personal relics from Shabbetai Tzvi—his ring, his caftan and his slippers.

These Karakash Dönme are the last Shabbateans, the surviving descendants of those children of Israel who once found themselves swept up in one of the strange, dramatic events of Jewish history. It is only a few who will remember the ancient promise, “Shabbetai Tzvi, we wait for you,” still intoned as morning light first brightens the sky on the shore of the Bosphorus. ❀

The author is grateful to Walter Pluznik, from Dor Gil Laboratory, Herzlia, for his technical assistance in preparing photographs for publication.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden* (Amsterdam: 1669), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Coenen, 35-36.

<sup>3</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: Dutton, 1978), 282.

## The Permeable Boundaries Of Being Jewish in America

*continued from page 33*

brew and Aramaic. The boundaries of what was Jewish and who was a Jew had not yet been firmly fixed by rabbinical doctrine.

A new social paradigm is emerging as American Jewry and world Jewry come to terms with the reassertion of Jewish national independence along with the end of exile and the concentration of Jews in Israel and North America. The United States, the world's first new society, has never been exile for Jews in the same manner that Poland, Germany, Yemen or Morocco were exile. There is currently no majority religious organizational group or host society for the Jews of America to readily assimilate into en bloc. Numerous symbolic ethnicities and hundreds

of religious denominations crowd the marketplace of contemporary American culture. Our data indicate that the majority of the baby boom generation has obviously voted to reject traditional rabbinic Judaism. Less than one percent of the population are *ba'alei teshuvah* (newly Orthodox Jews) and only 12 percent of Core Jews agree with the traditional Orthodox statement that “the Torah is the actual word of God.” However, most Jews still cling to their Jewish identity. They are not alienated from their past, just largely ignorant of it or apathetic toward it.

More than 70 percent of all types of Jews said being Jewish was important in their lives. This is obviously a major finding. How to actualize this sentiment is the challenge we now face as American Jews. Our foremost task is to learn how to compete for the time, hearts and minds of a free people with a strong belief in individual autonomy. The prize is some of America's most sophisticated citizens and one of its most attractive consumer markets. There must be a *yiddisher kup* [clever person] somewhere up to this task. ❀

## The New Exodus

*continued from page 37*

conduct mezuzah-affixing ceremonies. In this connection, the committee invites the family to synagogue activities. A leading Conservative congregation in Rockville, Maryland, sponsors holiday dinners for new Russian Jewish immigrants with study sessions prior to each holiday. Welcome baskets are delivered to the homes of newly arrived Russian families and a job bank for their possible employment is advertised in the synagogue bulletin. Summing these and other programs listed in this booklet yields several hundred participants. Even if we imagine that tens of thousands of unaffiliated are drawn into programs of Conservative synagogues throughout the country, the total number would only be 1 percent or less of the 3.5 million unaffiliated Jews drifting away from us.

The leading association of Orthodox Jewish congregations, the Orthodox Union, in a letter from its executive director, brought me the promising news that

Probably 70 percent of the program budget of the Orthodox Union is devoted to outreach work, particularly through our National

Conference of Synagogue Youth.

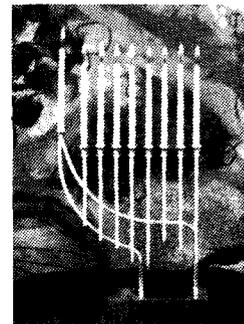
However, a look at the literature that reports these activities made it clear that, to the Orthodox Union, outreach means primarily organizing chapters of Orthodox synagogue youth in their affiliated congregations, supplemental Jewish education centers for public school children and teen travel programs to Israel. Hardly any of the participants are drawn from the 3.5 million unaffiliated Jews.

The parent body of the 200 activist orthodox Young Israel congregations, the National Council of Young Israel, limits its outreach to creating kosher dining clubs on college campuses and such other youth-centered activities as “a basketball league that attracts many young men and women on the fringes.” These laudable programs have no affect on the masses of unaffiliated Jews.

The Lubavitcher World Center never answered.

Considering the enormity of the challenge, the response of the organized Jewish community, including the synagogues and their national religious movements, remains trifling, uncoordinated, without a long-range plan and woefully underfunded. Neither

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