



62. DEVIATIONS OF QABBALAH

In 1666, the Amsterdam Stock Exchange was in a state of great turmoil: the Jewish brokers and speculators were beside themselves with enthusiasm, the bull and bear players forgot their financial transactions and indulged in ecstatic dances of jubilation: commercial correspondence from the Levant announced that the Messiah had appeared to the Jews of Izmir. The cautious shopkeepers in Amsterdam wrote again to their correspondents for more reliable news, to convince themselves that there was no mistake, that the one who had appeared in Izmir was really the Messiah awaited for thousands of years by all the people of Israel. The answer was: "Hu velo acher", "It is he and not others". The happy message spread with lightning speed across seas and countries, in every place where the Torah was venerated. In Paris, in Livorno, in Vienna, the same scenes were repeated everywhere: men abandoned their business, women left their children and their homes, and everyone danced in the intoxication of an unrestrained enthusiasm.

With these vivid and historically unexceptionable words, an author describes the incredible adventure of a false Messiah¹. Šabbetai Šewi (1626-1676), son of a wealthy poultry merchant from Izmir, had experienced psychic breaks in the form of uncontrolled visions from an early age. In an attempt to bring some order to these experiences, he devoted himself to the study of *Qabbalah* from his adolescence. The *Qabbalah* he followed was not the traditional initiatic one, almost disappeared at that time, but the mystical and apocalyptic one that drew its source from the teachings of Abulafia, a deviation from the ancient tradition². At the age of 15, he received his first mystical revelations, which convinced him that he was the earthly manifestation of the saturnine aspect of God³. Šabbetai indeed is the Hebrew term for the inauspicious planet of destruction. And, in fact, his behaviour was always characterized by that *melancholy* so typical also in all Christian Qabbalists and Renaissance Hermeticists of the time⁴.



1. Šabbetai Šewi

At the age of twenty-two he proclaimed himself Messiah to his circle of admirers in Smyrna: his concept of the Messiah differed considerably from that of the previous false Messiahs. He claimed that there was

¹ René Fülöp-Miller, *Capitani fanatici e ribelli*, Milano, Mondadori, 1936, p. 69.

² Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973.

³ Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, Milan, Adelphi, 2004, pp. 250-254. Scholem repeatedly emphasised that Šabbetai's melancholy, i.e. his mental instability and constantly contradictory behaviour, was a symptom of a manic depressive state or bipolar personality.

⁴ Cf. From Order to Chaos, no. 54. *The reformed pseudo religion and its pseudo esotericism.*



an essential identity between him being a Messiah and God himself¹ and that he had succeeded in pronouncing the tetragrammaton, the unpronounceable name of God, by rotating the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Punished of *herem* (rabbinical excommunication), Šewi began a wandering life between Byzantium, Thessaloniki, Jerusalem and Cairo. Through his preaching he attracted a small number of followers, who, however, wealthy and influential, protected him from the orthodox rabbinical and Talmudic circles and the Ottoman administration. In 1663 he met Nathan of Gaza, who quickly became his prophet and right-hand man. In 1666, year in which according to some ‘prophecies’ the Messianic era would have begun, started the great success of this false Messiah.



2. Allegory of the alleged apotheosis of the false Messiah

The illusion that the Messiah would quickly redeem the Jews from their marginalised status in Islamic and Christian countries raised a sudden enthusiasm in all the territories of the Diaspora². He returned with full honours to his native Smyrna, overthrew the chief rabbi who was hostile to him and began to reign as a ruler. He married several women, but his main wife had to appear in Smyrna with great pomp. The prostitute Sarah from Livorno, had claimed since childhood that her destiny was to become wife of the Messiah. Financed by bankers and merchants from Amsterdam and Livorno, accompanied by a procession of learned rabbis and Talmudic sages, Sara presented herself to the divine bridegroom³. After the sumptuous ‘Tōrāh’ wedding, Izmir, a marginal and miserable town in the Ottoman Empire, flourished again. From Europe, Egypt and the Maghreb, ships laden with precious goods disembarked their treasures in its port, while Dutch, English, Genoese and Catalan banks, exchange offices and financial agencies opened new branches there. According to the general belief, the misery of the Jewish people was about

¹ The concept of the divinity of the Messiah, elaborated by Šabbetai, strangely resembles the Christian concept of the God-Man. Idel raises the question of how a returning influence of Christian *Qabbalah* could have been exerted on Šewi. M. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, cit. pp. 265-267.

² John Freely, *The Lost Messiah*, New York, Overlook TP, 2004, pp. 49-58.

³ Fülöp-Miller, cit. pp. 70-72. It is well known that in traditional *Qabbalah* the relationship between God and the world, between Creator and creature, was strongly characterised by erotic symbols. In the heterodox current of Šabbetai Šewi, symbolism was transformed into praxis, with ‘orgiastic freedom’ permitted by the imminence of the end of times. Moshe Idel, *Eros and Qabbalah*, Milan, Adelphi, 2007, pp. 265-267; 304-309.





to be redeemed by the mere presence of the Messiah and his Prophet¹. The majority of rabbis, at the time, sided, or pretended to side, with Šabbetay, while only a small minority remained anchored to tradition. In particular, these latter looked with horror at the alterations of the rituals that were being adopted at the behest of the Messiah and Nathan of Gaza.



3. Nathan of Gaza

In the spring of that year, Šabbetay Šewi went to Istanbul in order to be recognised as the Messiah by the Ottoman Sultan and to be given the imperial crown. Reported by the Jewish community of the capital and immediately arrested, after two months of gilded imprisonment, the false Messiah asked to be admitted before Sultan Mehmet IV. There he publicly converted to Islam, taking the Islamic name of Aziz Mehmet Effendi as a new Muslim. All the Jewish communities in the diaspora were sorely disappointed². There were two types of reaction: on the one side the traditional rabbinical circles unreservedly condemned Šabbetay as an impostor and a fraud.



4. The *qelippot*

From that moment on, the rabbis definitely turned away from the ecstatic-mystical *Qabbalah*, and this hardening of opinion also struck what remained of the authentic medieval Qabbalistic esotericism. On

¹ All this took place before the fascinated and intrigued eyes of Protestants, who were always morbidly attracted towards Jewish or Hebrew prophecy about the last days, and who somehow participated emotionally in such jubilation. J.S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

² “The Jews of Europe, even those far away in Amsterdam and Hamburg, were seized by a wild frenzy; many sold their homes, packed up their possessions and set out to join the Messiah, only to learn the dreadful news of his conversion to Islam!”. Arthur Mandel, *Le Messie Militant ou La Fuite du Ghetto*, Milan, Archè, 1989, p. 17.



the other side, the most fanatical followers of the false Messiah tried to find a symbolic explanation for this shocking gesture, giving it the most disturbing and mysterious meanings. Nathan of Gaza himself circulated the rumour that the function of Messiah was to involve in the redemptive action also the *qelippot*¹. This justification, which only apparently resembles a descent into hell, draws a disturbing picture of the entire mission of Šabbetai as actively linked to infernal powers. But those who are clouded by fanaticism have no critical ability and are incapable of seeing the facts as they are; blinded by exaltation these weak minds look for any way possible to find sublime symbolic meanings and examples to follow².



5. Group photo of *dönme*. In the centre Mustafa Kemal Atatürk

In fact, the followers of the false Messiah emulated the example of their Lord and God, hypocritically converting to Islam in order to continue the work of redemption under cover. All in all, they revived the experience of their ancestors the *Marranos of Spain*; actually, the Thessalonian and Smyrna communities were mainly composed of *Sephardim*, Jews of Spanish origin³. Those false followers of Islam are called *dönme* in Turkish, literally ‘converts’, a word which in time has come to mean ‘apostates’⁴. Even after the death of their Messiah, the *dönme* continued to try to convince their sympathisers to leave their ghettos⁵. During the 17th and 18th centuries, also in Eastern Europe, this propaganda induced many to

¹ The ‘shells’ or larval remnants of evil powers that infest the lower worlds.

² “*The initial disappointment, far from marking the end of Sabbatai Zevi’s adventure, quickly changed into a renewed and stubborn faith. Hadn’t they spoken a thousand times about the sufferings of the Messiah, the afflictions of his birth? Of the strange things he would have to do to bring salvation? Of the necessity of descending into the abyss of sin and passing through the 49 gates of abomination? As scandal had become the symbol of salvation in the eyes of the disciples of Christ, the disciples of Sabbatai Zevi accepted the apostasy of their master as an additional proof of his truthfulness; and even his death, far from shaking their belief, turned their eyes with faith towards his second coming.*” A. Mandel, *cit.* pp. 17-18. Scholem specifies the origins of the phrase “redemption through sin” by asserting that he deduced it from the testimonies of former Sabbatarians, particularly from the community of Satanov [sic!], collected and published by the great Sabbatarian hunter Ya’aqov Emden in several of his works. “Da Giacobbe ai Giacobini”, *addendum* a G. Scholem, *Le tre vite, cit.*, p. 189.

³ A. Mandel, *cit.* p. 43. This author adds: “*The rites of the Doemne ended in orgiastic dances, singing the Song of Songs.*” *Ibid.*

⁴ Indeed, this closed community acted towards the Ottoman Empire like a caterpillar in an apple. It was on their initiative that the Young Turk movement was founded, which took power at the end of the 19th century, undermining the sultan’s authority. It was them who pushed for participation in the First World War, from which the Turkish Empire emerged broken. It was the government of the Young Turks that unleashed the genocide of the Armenians, causing an incurable wound between Muslims and Christians. It was also them who decreed the end of the Islamic Caliphate, and later supported the dictatorship of Kemal Atatürk. And even today they inspire Turkey’s dangerous Pan-Turanic policy. Despite the alternation of contingent political events, it is a fact that Turkey is the country with an Islamic majority that maintains the best diplomatic and geopolitical relations with Israel.

⁵ Marc David Baer, *The Dönmeö: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2010.



integrate into the Christian environment¹, whether they converted or not². Later, they enthusiastically assumed the anti-religious spirit that had spread during the Enlightenment³. This underground current adapted to the general situation, fitting in the new agnostic civilisation, and often taking the lead, while covertly maintaining a formal link with their religion and, above all, with their ethnic origin⁴. In contrast, the Orthodox Jews continued to profess their faith publicly, often incurring criticism, hostility and even denunciation by the crypto-followers of Šabbetay Šewi.



6. Jacob Franck

Jakub Lejbowicz (1726-1791) is better known as Jacob Franck⁵. His father, who belonged to the first generation of Šewi followers, was accused of heresy⁶ by the rabbis of the Orthodox Jewish tradition and

¹ This was facilitated by Cromwellian England, Holland and the Protestant countries in general. The path to integration, as seen in the previous chapter, was the great routes of trade, the expansion of the stock exchanges and the birth of national banks, often under the cover of hermetic-qabbalistic secret societies of Rosicrucian origin.

² Gershom. Scholem, “Die krypto-jüdische Sekte der Dönmeö (Sabbatianer) in der Türkei”, *Numen* 7.II, Leiden, Brill Ed., 1960, pp. 93-122.

³ “Allow me to return once again to the path to the abyss’ as Frank understood it. For him and his followers, this path has two aspects: a historical and a moral one. The historical aspect is expressed in the hope of a general overthrow of all human relations and, characteristically, in the vision of the collapse of the Catholic Church and its hierarchy to which, as we have seen, Frank had outwardly submitted. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Frankists, both those who remained faithful [formally] to Judaism and those who were baptised, developed a psychology very close to that of the enlightened revolutionaries in Germany and France. ...] What gave the Frankist dream its peculiar dynamism was not its positive content, which has never been precisely defined, but the visionary charge present in its idea of destruction and subversion. “Gershom Scholem, “La metamorfosi del messianismo eretico sabbatiano in nichilismo religioso nel XVIII secolo,” in *Le tre vite di Moses Dobrushka*, Milano, Adelphi, 2014, p. 152.

⁴ It is from this apparently agnostic or even atheistic environment that modern and contemporary Zionism originates. John Rose *The Myths of Zionism*, London, Pluto Press, 2004, pp. 54-55; Vicente Risco, *Historia de los Judíos desde la destrucción del Templo*, Valladolid, ed. Maxtor, 2005, pp. 384-397.

⁵ The ‘frank’, i.e. the European, as he was from a Jewish family of Polish origin. “In numerous studies I have analysed the metamorphosis of the heretical messianism professed by the followers of the cabbalistic messiah Shabbatay Zevi into a form of religious nihilism, developed within an underground movement, Frankism, named after its ‘prophet’ Jacob Frank, active mainly in Poland and Austria in the second half of the 18th century, on the eve of the French Revolution. From the very beginning of my research into the history of the Frankist movement, I was struck by the particular combination of the two elements that determined its nature, just before and just after the French Revolution; the inclination towards esoteric and cabbalistic doctrines on the one hand, and the appeal of the spirit of Enlightenment philosophy on the other. “G. Scholem, *The Three Lives*, cit., p. 13. Scholem’s astonishment is due to the fact that he does not realise the unique purpose of those two elements: the will to spread chaos.

⁶ Two Jewish heresies arose during the 18th century: “Hassidism and Frankism, the two movements that deeply troubled the Jews of Europe during the 18th century and beyond, which go back to the early Christians and Gnostics” “Be that as it may, whether it was the Russian Khlysti, the German “Hüpfer”, the English ‘Jumpers’ or the American ‘Shakers’, all show astonishing similarities to these wretched Jews from the godforsaken villages of eastern Galicia, in both the spiritual and formal



forced to take refuge in Ottoman Bucharest, where Jacob was born. He was wild and rebellious, and throughout his life Jacob harboured a deep resentment against the rabbis and regular Judaism because of how his father was treated. He did not follow a regular upbringing or abide by the rules of social coexistence, extolling his ignorance and unrestraint as a sign of divine election. In 1753 he arrived in Thessaloniki, the centre of the *dönmeh* from which his father had been expelled.



7. Secret rituals of the *dönmeh* of Thessaloniki

He immediately assumed the way of thinking and acting of the *dönmeh* and, feeling intimately related to Šabbetay Šewi, first he proclaimed himself to be his reincarnation and then-to be the Messiah. Šewi had been the Messiah of tribulation, whereas he would be the Messiah of power, the Messiah-King. He revealed that the age of the law was definitely over and with his reign his followers were freed from any requirements except total obedience to the Messiah's wishes. The community that gathered around him lived simulating him and indulged in all its appetites, especially, of course, in the sexual ones. Franck took libertinism, that had already appeared with Šewi, to its extreme limits. He was excommunicated and denounced by the followers of the rabbinical tradition, and after various events, he decided to emigrate with the crowd of his debauched followers to Poland. At that time, the Kingdom of Poland, worrying about the refractoriness of Jews to convert to Catholicism, promised those who got baptised the status of nobles and estates. Franck began negotiations with King Augustus III. Together with about thirty thousand of his disciples, he would embrace Catholicism. In addition to land and mass ennoblement, he demanded all properties to be gathered into a single fief, still vassal to the King of Poland, but where the only owners were to be Franckists. The King was flattered to make such a good impression before the papal throne; however, it remained the geopolitical problem of granting an entire region to people from the Ottoman Empire, with relatives and friends on the other side of the border. Understanding the Crown's hesitation on this last topic, the Polish rabbis denounced Frankism as heretical before the Holy Office. The confrontation between the rabbis and the Franckists took place in Lemberg Cathedral under the arbitration of Canon Mikulski. With great shamelessness, the Franckist speakers took up religious positions clearly based on the Christian faith¹ and thus easily got the better of the more educated and trained regular rabbis. Franck's true thinking, however, was as follows:

senses. "(A. Mandel, *cit.* p. 21; p. 23). This last observation of Mandel's is of great interest: it seems that during the first half of that century a new form of "possession" by subtle forces, evidently beyond any ritual control, had spread all over the West. The ignorance of the general modern culture about all things related to the domain of the sacred led to the belief that *Hassidim* should be considered 'ultra-Orthodox' Jews, rather than the heretics that they are. Even the wearing of antiquated and obsolete clothes, as it is also the case among the Protestant sects mentioned above, brings modern people to misunderstand 'orthodox' with those who are 'out of fashion'.

¹ They had the shrewdness to refer to the Messiah as the second person of the Trinity, to his death and resurrection, to his mission as Redeemer, without ever mentioning the name of Jesus Christ. With this ambiguity they made the Catholic clergy believe that they were dealing with the Messiah of the Christians, when in fact they intended to speak of Jakob Franck. In reality, the "*Kabbalistic heresy of the Sabbatarians had developed a theosophical trinity, undoubtedly very different from the Christian one. This trinity consisted of the "Hidden Old Man" (i.e. the deus absconditus), his emanation, called the "Holy King",*



Our Lord and King Sabbataï Zevi had convert to the faith of the Ismaelites [Muslims], but I, Jacob, more perfect, must convert to the faith of the Nazarenes because Jesus of Nazareth was the skin or peel of the fruit and that his coming was permitted only to open the way for the true Messiah. We must therefore accept this Nazarene religion pro forma, observe it meticulously so as to appear as good Christians as they are. However, we must not marry any of their whores or have fun with them or mix with other nations. Even if we profess Christianity and regularly follow their commandments, we must never forget in our hearts the three pillars of our faith, the Lords and King Sabbataï Zevi, Berakhya [his successor] and Jacob Frank, the most perfect of the three.¹



8. Eva Franck

The rituals taught by Franck, which had replaced the traditional ones now abrogated, are described as follows:

“The religious rites of the Frankists consisted of ecstatic songs accompanied by wild applause, with female participation ending in an orgiastic ritual. The ritual usually began as follows: Frank knelt, staring at two lit candles on a wooden bench, drove a nail into the wood and, brandishing a cross in all directions, exclaimed ‘Forsa damus para verti, seibul grandi asserventi!’ (in Ladino, the Spanish dialect of the Jews sephardim: “Give us the strength to see you, the privilege to serve you”). Then the lights were switched off and pandemonium ensued. Men and women would undress completely “to get at the naked truth” and copulate in the hodgepodge and only the leader would refrain in the midst of it all.”²

After his baptism, and once become lord of a large fiefdom vassal to the King of Poland, Franck decided to organise his own army. It was so well organised that many of the Franckists served a few decades later as officers in Napoleon’s army³.

identified with the God of revelation, and his female companion, the Shekhinah”. G. Scholem, *The Three Lives*, cit., p. 146. This clearly explains the origin of certain recent Catholic heresies about a Trinity formed by a female Holy Spirit (often identified with the Virgin).

¹ A. Mandel, cit. pp. 92-93.

² A. Mandel, cit. pp. 60-61. The lubricity of such practices had no limits. The false Messiah himself performed incestuous sexual rites with his own daughter! In those years Eva Franck was appointed by her father as the female Messiah and his heir to the mission. It would be interesting if someone investigated the origin of the psychoanalytical theory of the *libido* of Sigmund Freud, who was from a Frankish family.

³ A. Mandel, cit. pp. 105-107. “Frank is the first Jewish militarist known to us, and he is so without reservation. It is not possible for me here to go further into the relationship between this militarist ideology and Frank’s specifically Jewish hopes, which he maintained at the very heart of his dream of escape from the old borders. Frank’s thought is in no way marked by cosmopolitan



9. Jacob Franck on his deathbed with the honour guard of 'his army'.

Generously financed by Mayer Amschel, founder of the Rothschild Bank, Jacob Franck and his wives lived in the splendour of a royal court. But It was short-lived. His followers, now convinced that they were above the law, began to reveal the secret that he was, in fact, the Messiah. Franck was imprisoned and put on trial by the Inquisition. He tried, in vain, to promise the Czar that he and his people would collectively convert to the Orthodox Church, but all to no avail. In the meantime, while waiting for the papal verdict, the prisoner in the fortress of Czenstokhova lived a princely life: he had dropped the act and no longer performed Catholic rites. He lived cursing Poland and prophesying that it would be wiped off the map. And so it happened. Russia invaded Poland, which was divided among the other powers, and Franck found himself free again. He settled in Moravia, which had-become a province of the Austrian Empire. Jacob Franck had a cousin in Brünn, Salomon Dobruška, a wealthy tobacco merchant and financial speculator. His son Moses¹ played a mysterious destabilising role during the French Revolution; but that pertains to another historical moment.

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categories. Even in his most virulent anti-rabbinic outbursts, he always remained an ambassador for the Jews and thought only of their destiny. "G. Scholem, *Le tre vite*, cit., p. 154.

¹ "Moses Dobrushka received a Jewish and rabbinic education in his father's home; at the same time, he was initiated into what the sectarians called the Sabbatarian "secret of faith", and into the literature of the "faithful". This double education was customary in many families which, while continuing to practice a facade of orthodox Judaism, had secretly joined the sect. "(G. Scholem, *The Three Lives*, cit., p. 19). In the course of his eventful life, *Dobrushka* also took the names Franz Thomas Baron von Schönfeld, when he attended the Habsburg court, and Sigmund Gottlob Junius Frey when he participated in Jacobin activities in Paris. Diederichsen, his lawyer, right-hand man and lover of his younger brother, wrote that he saw in him "an authentic image of Satan "father of lies"". G. Scholem, *Le tre vite*, cit. p. 80.