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AN ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE  
SHABBETIAN MOVEMENT AND A TENTATIVE RECONSTRUCTION

by

Morton Kaplan

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
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## Thesis Digest

Beginning in the autumn of 1665, and continuing through until the late summer of 1666, the Shabbetian movement rose and fell; and in the process shook the entire Jewish world. Shabbetai Zevi proclaimed himself to be the long looked for Messiah of the Jews. He was taken at his word by untold thousands. The times were difficult and insecure over most of the Jewish world; and the era was ripe for a messianic movement.

The problem that this thesis deals with is why did this movement arise at the time it did? It had a Cabalistic base. But Cabalism had reached its height a century before in Safed when the giants of Cabalism, Isaac Luria and Hayyim Vital lived. The movement arose at this time, because of various social and economic insecurities among the masses, who because of these insecurities, were forced to look for something to fall back on and to look for something or someone who would rescue them from their seemingly insurmountable problems. As evidence that this type of reaction occurs, I have brought evidence from several medieval, non-Jewish messianic movements. These not only arose out of parallel insecurities, but they show striking parallels in their course of events and in the types of individuals who took part in the movements.

The central chapter of this thesis is an analysis of the three major historians of the Shabbetian movement. Gershom Scholem has done the most exhaustive amount of research into the movement and its participants. And the facts he has

gathered, are extremely useful to the historian. However, when it comes to the question of causation, Scholem's analysis is wanting. Scholem is out to rehabilitate Shabbetai Zevi. Scholem is critical when it comes to deciding on dates or the validity of sources, but he is not critical when it comes to Shabbetai Zevi and Nathan of Gaza. He approaches Shabbetai as if he was a Messiah and not from the point of view that Shabbetai was obviously not a Messiah. He is all too willing to accept Nathan as a prophet, who had visions that predicted the coming of Shabbetai. His analysis is literary, paying little attention to outside influences. For Scholem, the basic cause for the rise of the movement, was the new Cabala of sixteenth century Safed, which when combined with the catastrophe of 1492, formed a "messianic tension" wherever it spread that exploded as the Shabbetian movement. I find this kind of analysis unacceptable. It is reading into a mystical system, a force that it is difficult to believe actually was there.

Heinrich Graetz's approach to the Shabbetian movement is entirely negative. He does not at all pose the problem of causation. He sees Shabbetai as the instigator and mentions that there was some kind of deception at work. Though he is referring to the deception that is inherent in the Cabala as he saw it. He simply dislikes whatever is non-rational or what he sees as another encrustation on the pristine kernel of Judaism. Simon Dubnow approves of the Shabbetian movement because it contributed to Jewish unity. He invests

the movement with national and political overtones. Like Scholem, he reads into the movement concepts that did not exist for the participants. He lays more emphasis on the events of 1648 as a cause of the movement, especially as these events effected Shabbetai Zevi. However, this is only conjecture. We do not know to what extent Shabbetai Zevi was effected by the destruction of the Jews of Poland or if he actually ever met any Jewish refugees from Poland.

In the final chapter, I have attempted a tentative reconstruction. I have tried to tie the facts together as they have been gleaned from the sources, without investing them with profound concepts, be they mystical or national. My only assumptions are that Shabbetai Zevi was not the Messiah, that Nathan was not a prophet, and that the participants were, except for Shabbetai, rational men. My conclusions are that Shabbetai Zevi was being manipulated in his mental instability by certain men, and that the Cabalistic symbol system of the masses was being used to further other ends. I have been able to show certain connections between the participants in the movement, who worked in the shadow of Shabbetai Zevi. Their ultimate goal was the take over of the Turkish Empire, a goal not as farfetched as it sounds. This goal was in the program of the Shabbetian movement. Lest this kind of manipulation is thought impossible, I have again brought examples from the medieval period. The Jews of the West were interested in the achievement of this goal for

obvious economic reasons. They failed, because of Shabbetai's instability, because their program was probably beyond their capabilities and because of the shrewdness of the Turks who converted Shabbetai instead of killing him, and thus making him a martyr.

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## Chapter I

From the end of the year 1665 to September of 1666, the Jewish world was shaken by a great convulsion. From the great centers of Constantinople and Salonica to the Cabalists of Italy to the capitalists of Hamburg, Amsterdam, and London and the talmudists of Poland, Judaism received a shock that might well have proved fatal. The greatest of the false messiahs had come on the scene, raising hopes, disturbing sultans, living in the splendor of an oriental despot, receiving the adulation and worship of people; Jews, Moslems, even some Christians. It was an insecure period. It was a time of uncertainty. The Thirty Years War was only recently over. Europe had been devastated. The Jews of Poland in 1648 had been murdered in the hundreds of thousands by the Cossack Bogdan Chmielnicki. Their years of prosperity, security, and creativity were over, defunct with a defunct Poland. In Turkey, the Empire since the days of Suleiman, the magnificent, one hundred years before, had been on a steady decline. In the West, there was less persecution and fewer economic difficulties. However, with the expanding capitalistic economy came insecurities of an intellectual nature as evidenced by the first questionings of revelation by such men as Uriel da Costa and Benedict Spinoza. In the non-Jewish world were parallel difficulties. The times were ripe for messianism. The Jews were the first to be hit by it and most strongly.

Shabbetai Zevi was born on the ninth of Ab in the year

1626, in Izmir. According to his own testimony<sup>1</sup> his family was from Greece<sup>2</sup> or Spain.<sup>3</sup> Originally his father, Mordecai Zevi, was a chicken and egg dealer. During the war between Turkey and Venice, (1625-1650), over the control of the Mediterranean Sea, Izmir became a prosperous center. To escape dangerous conditions elsewhere in the Levant and Italy, merchants from Italy, Holland, France, and England came to Izmir. These merchants used Jews, who knew the languages of the east, as agents in their business dealings.<sup>4</sup> Mordecai Zevi became an agent for an English house and, according to Graetz, "executed its commissions with strict honesty, enjoyed the confidence of the principals, and became a wealthy man."<sup>5</sup> Elijah Zevi, Shabbetai's older brother also became one of these agents, becoming wealthy and honored.<sup>6</sup>

Mordecai Zevi attributed his new and growing wealth to the merit of his son, Shabbetai, who was delving deep into the mysteries of the Cabala.<sup>7</sup> Both Dubnow<sup>8</sup> and Scholem<sup>9</sup> agree that Shabbetai was proficient in Talmud and the traditional rabbinic disciplines. Although his opponents may have thought him crazy, they never denied his intellectual abilities. He was ordained at eighteen.<sup>10</sup> Early, perhaps while yet in his teens, he became involved in the mysteries of the Cabala. He desired to bring the "end" by fasting and purifying his soul. Early he saw himself as the Messiah.<sup>11</sup> He had no kind of rabbinical authority or position

but was economically independent since he was supported by his wealthy family. He had by this time turned to the life of solitude necessary for a life of Hasiduth. From 1644, when the Cabala of Safed became popular, Shabbetai Zevi devoted himself exclusively to the study of the Zohar and the Shulchan Aruch.<sup>12</sup> He soon gained a reputation as a man of inspiration in Izmir. A flock of disciples gathered around him. They would all immerse themselves in water and then discuss, in the fields, "secrets of the Torah." At twenty he married his first wife but avoided her completely, the result being that he soon gave her a bill of divorce. The second marriage, into an important family in Izmir, ended in the same fashion.<sup>13</sup>

At about this time, (1648), Shabbetai first proclaimed in private that he had a mission. There seems to have been no reaction to this in Izmir. Perhaps the authorities were used to hearing of strange doings on his part. His first public act was to pronounce the ineffable name of God, which also did not at the time raise any kind of furor. Contrary to Sasportas, he was not immediately exiled to Salonica. In 1650, he was still living and studying in Izmir.<sup>14</sup> However, at some point, the authorities began to persecute him. They seem to have forgotten his illness and peculiarities and drove him from the city. The sources give several versions of what happened. But all we know for certain, is that he left. Exactly when, is also questionable. The nearest

estimate, is that Shabbetai Zevi left Izmir between 1651 and 1654.<sup>15</sup>

From Izmir, he went to Salonica. None of his followers went with him. He was supported by his brothers on these journeys. In Salonica he mentioned God's name again, but not his mission. He married himself to the Torah and angered the rabbinical authorities who were not appeased by his mystical explanations. He was driven out of Salonica and wandered through Greece until 1656, when he appeared in Constantinople, the Turkish capital. Here he was flogged for his "strange deeds," revealing a radical antinomism, angering the authorities by such activities as celebrating the three festivals in one week. He said that a new Torah and new mitzvoths had been given him.<sup>16</sup> While in Constantinople, he met the Darshan Abraham Yachini, who showed him a document in which the messianship of Shabbetai was predicted. This had some influence on him, perhaps confirming his own opinion of himself as the messiah.<sup>17</sup>

He now returned unnoticed to Izmir, staying for some time until his brothers became embarrassed by his actions. They proposed that he go to Palestine. He passed Rhodes and Tripoli in 1662. In Cairo he became acquainted with Raphael Joseph Chelebi, who was treasurer, mintmaster, and banker to the ruler of Egypt. He was a religious man, inclined to Hasidism. Also, he was married for the third time to an Ashkenazic woman, who was considered a magician and a

prostitute. He finally arrived in Palestine in the summer of 1662, remaining in Jerusalem about two years.<sup>18</sup> In Jerusalem, he was sunk in self-flagellation, prayers, and visiting the graves of Zaddikim. He handed out sweets to children, and brought the masses over to him.<sup>19</sup>

By 1663, Jerusalem had fallen on hard times. The leaders were unable to collect the increased taxes. Many of the sages had had to flee. Shabbetai was chosen to go to Egypt to collect money to pay the taxes. He was selected because of his ties with Raphael Joseph, his brothers were well-known, he understood money, and had an inclination towards abstinence as did the rich in Egypt. He went to Gaza and thence to Egypt, in the first half of 1664, where he spent many months. His mission prospered.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, Shabbetai had heard of Nathan of Gaza's repute as a *Qaddish* . After completing his mission, he went to Nathan *Qaddish* . Nathan there revealed to him the contents of visions he had had in regard to Shabbetai's being the messiah, a role which Shabbetai originally refused. Ultimately, he was prevailed upon to accept the truth of Nathan's vision.<sup>21</sup> On May 31, 1665, he publicly declared himself the Messiah in the streets of Gaza.<sup>22</sup>

His first act was to abrogate the seventeenth of Tamuz as a fast day. This brought a cry from the authorities in Jerusalem. They had opposed him before, why should they change their position now? Also Shabbetai wanted to sacrifice

at the Temple site on the seventeenth of Tamuz. The authorities tried to get rid of him, accusing him of illegal acts but they failed. He was arrested and then released by the local Turkish ruler.<sup>23</sup> The Rabbis were also worried about persecution from the Sultan because of Shabbetai's claims to be the Jewish Messiah and his predictions that the Sultan would be brought down, and Turkey conquered by the Jews. They asked him to leave<sup>24</sup> which he did whether voluntarily or against his will. There was a ban of excommunication issued from Jerusalem against him which was sent to Izmir and Constantinople.<sup>25</sup> Following his expulsion from Jerusalem, Shabbetai has little to do with the flowering of the movement. From now on what occurs, depends on happenings in Faza, or better what legend tells happened in Gaza. In these first months, little comes from Shabbetai Zevi, and most from Nathan in Gaza.

Shabbetai left Jerusalem in the month of Av, 1665, for Safed and Damascus.<sup>26</sup> He was accompanied by Samuel Primo, who had become his private secretary.<sup>27</sup> He then returned once again to Izmir. The ban against him had apparently been forgotten. Here he again declared himself the Messiah. The masses joined him and went into a frenzy. The Turkish rulers were bribed not to notice what was occurring around them. Now, the autumn of 1665, begins the rise of the Shabbetian movement. The peak is reached, between now, and the middle of 1666.<sup>28</sup>

Much information has come down to us in regard to the "Messiah's" activities in Izmir. Nathan remained in Gaza. At this particular juncture, Izmir was a large city, in which lived a number of Christians from Europe who were eye-witnesses to events. Shabbetai arrived around Succos of 1665, dwelling alone for two months, although the inhabitants were aware of his presence. On his arrival, his brothers received him with open arms, in contrast to the embarrassment he had caused them only a short time before. Around Hanukkah, the mass movement began.<sup>29</sup>

Shabbetai and the masses fed on each others ecstasy. He began to receive honorary messages from other places. People who had been to see Nathan were honored in Izmir. They scattered the writings of Nathan and propaganda for the Messiah over the Jewish world, testifying to the truth of Shabbetai's Messiahship.<sup>30</sup>

At this point, reports began to be spread to the West. Representatives and merchants of Christian countries told about all they had seen and heard. The propaganda machine of Nathan of Gaza, and Samuel Primo, went into high gear, spreading reports of miracles and visions.<sup>31</sup>

In Izmir, the rabbinic authorities apparently opposed the movement, but the enthusiasm of the believers overwhelmed them. Shabbetai's relatives began to speak highly of the new Messiah. Though the scholars may have been opposed or divided, there were many powerful people and merchants who

supported the new movement. When the rabbis objected, Shabbetai declared a special day of prayer, and changed the order of the service. The rabbinic authorities could do little and dared not lay a hand on him.<sup>32</sup> Shabbetai simply refused to brook any opposition. When a certain Portuguese merchant, Hayyim Pena, would not acknowledge him, and then was allowed to read the Torah in the Portuguese synagogue, the followers of Shabbetai broke into the synagogue by force, stopping the services. Then, Shabbetai used the synagogue for his own unusual ceremonies and sermons and desecrated the Sabbath. Shabbetai took the Torah, sang a song, unequivocally declared himself as the Messiah and declared the 15th of Sivan as the date of redemption. This prophecy came from Nathan and would involve the conquest of Turkey.<sup>33</sup>

When Rabbi Aaron de La Papa opposed the movement he was expelled from his office which was given to Chayim Benevista, a former opponent, but now a believer. Shabbetai quickly gained control of the community. The people were honored to kiss his hands. Opponents feared him. He changed the Sabbath to Monday. Even the local Turkish official, the Kadi, was honored by a visit from the Messiah Shabbetai Zevi who spoke against his opponents. The Kadi dismissed him. Another source says that the opponents spoke against Shabbetai to the Kadi, who summoned Shabbetai. In any event, he was not arrested. The tumult in Izmir was so great, as to have a report of it reach Constantinople.<sup>34</sup>



After appointing "kings" for the world he was to conquer, Shabbetai Zevi left for Constantinople at the beginning of 1666.<sup>35</sup> Graetz says that Shabbetai was given three days to leave for Constantinople.<sup>36</sup> It is uncertain whether he was forced to leave, or went voluntarily. Delayed by storm, the ship carrying the Messiah did not arrive in Constantinople until February, 1666. He was arrested upon arrival, whether because his opponents informed against him<sup>37</sup> or the ruler feared the tumult, cannot be known for certain. In any event, he was seized on February 7, 1666 near Constantinople on the sea near the Dardanelles or Gallipoli. The arrest was made by the Vizier, the Emperor being then at Adrianople. His fame had gone before him, and many Jews were there to give him a welcome. These people were apparently treated roughly by the Turks.<sup>38</sup> Many Jews were abandoning their homes to go to Palestine. This worried the rulers more than their words, since economic connections with Europe were completely in the hands of the Jews. Shabbetai, therefore, was brought before the Grand Vizier. He could have been killed but was only sent to prison.<sup>39</sup> Shabbetai claimed he was there only to collect charity, but he was imprisoned anyway in Constantinople. That he was not executed, was seen as a miracle by his supporters. Since there were too many visitors here, he was transferred to the fortress of Abydos at Gallipoli,<sup>40</sup> perhaps, because the authorities were bribed. The Vizier did not want trouble since he was

ready to make war against Venice.<sup>41</sup> He arrived there on the 19th of April, 1666. For Passover, he slew a paschal lamb for himself and his followers and ate it with the fat, an act forbidden by the Talmud. Here he held regular court with the large amounts of money sent by his brothers and rich supporters. Jews streamed in to see him. Everybody profited, including those who transported the Jews and the inhabitants who charged well for bread and board. "A veritable shower of gold poured into Abydos."<sup>42</sup>

His sentence was lightened by bribes. It was a Turkish custom to allow visitors in prison. Shabbetai had freedom of movement. The thousands of visitors spread tales of miracles and legends.<sup>43</sup>

Shabbetai awoke now. He produced a new minhag, proclaimed the end of the fast of the 17th of Tamuz. He was inclined to change the calendar and the holidays. The sources all agree, he lived in gold and silver opulence in Gallipoli.<sup>44</sup> He made the 25th of Tamuz a holiday.<sup>45</sup> His fortieth birthday was made to correspond with the 9th of Ab. This traditional day of sadness, became one of great joy.<sup>46</sup> Organized opposition to these changes made no headway. The change of the 9th of Ab to a feast day, extended to Jerusalem and Gaza.<sup>47</sup>

The movement now, near the 9th of Ab, reached its height. Everyone now waited for Nathan of Gaza to meet Shabbetai Zevi again in the summer of 1666. Though there were plans and

letters to this effect, Nathan did not leave Gaza until after Shabbetai's conversion. Moslems also began to come to see Shabbetai. This upset the Sultan also.<sup>48</sup>

Elul, 1666, marks the beginning of the end. Shabbetai Zevi then received two visitors from Poland. The two Poles informed Shabbetai that in Poland, a certain Nehemiah Cohen was announcing the approach of the Messianic kingdom, but not through Shabbetai. Shabbetai ordered that Nehemiah come before him immediately.<sup>49</sup> Upon his arrival, Nehemiah challenged Shabbetai regarding the Messiah ben Joseph, who was supposed to come and die before the Messiah ben David made his entrance. Shabbetai claimed he had already come in the person of one Abraham Zalman, who had been killed in Poland. Nehemiah brought proof from Zohar and Midrash that Shabbetai Zevi's personality was not that of the Messiah.<sup>50</sup> Nehemiah himself claimed to be the Messiah ben Joseph.<sup>51</sup> He called Shabbetai a "disturber of Israel," one who brings only the sword upon Israel with lies. Shabbetai's followers evidently were disturbed by this discussion, which lasted for some days. They feared Nehemiah would go to the Sultan. Therefore, they plotted to kill him. To save himself, Nehemiah converted to Islam. He informed the Sultan that the Jewish Messiah was a violent rebel. Afterwards, he returned to Poland and Judaism.<sup>52</sup>

Meantime, there had come to Sultan reports of odd behavior on Shabbetai's part, involving lewdness and homo-

sexuality.

Nehemiah Cohen converted on the 5th or 6th of September, 1666. By the 13th, messengers from the Sultan arrived at Gallipoli. They dispersed the people and ended the tumult that had evidently reached serious proportions. Shabbetai Zevi was brought to a place in the court yard of the Sultan. Perhaps originally, the Turks had it in mind to kill Shabbetai. But, they thought better of it, since killing him would only make him a martyr for those who believed in him or it would start a new religion which would be equally dangerous. In any event, he was brought before the Sultan at Adrianople on the 16th of September. Given the choice between death and accepting Islam, he accepted Islam.<sup>53</sup>

# Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Scholem, Gershom, 1"ח' נ"ח' א'האע'נ' ו'נ'ה'נ' ו'נ'ז' א'הע  
Volume 1, p. 85. 5"ה'ה', 3"נ'ז'ס'ס' : א'נ'ה'ע-ה'ח'י
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 85.
- <sup>3</sup>Graetz, Heinrich, History of the Jews (Philadelphia, Jewish  
Publication Society of America, 1956), Volume 5, p. 118.
- <sup>4</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 86.
- <sup>5</sup>Graetz, op. cit., p. 119.
- <sup>6</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 87.
- <sup>7</sup>Dubnow, Simon, ס'נ'נ' א'ה'ה'ס'ס' ס'ס' א'ה'ה'ס'ס' ס'ס' א'ה'ה'ס'ס'  
p. 25. (1958, א'ה'ה'ס'ס' א'ה'ה'ס'ס'), א'ה'ה'ס'ס' א'ה'ה'ס'ס'
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 26.
- <sup>9</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 89.
- <sup>10</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 89.
- <sup>11</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 26.
- <sup>12</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 192ff.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 99.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 110ff.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 121.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 128ff.
- <sup>17</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 17.
- <sup>18</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 141ff.
- <sup>19</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 27.
- <sup>20</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 156ff.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 181.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 192ff.
- <sup>24</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 30.
- <sup>25</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 200.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 205ff.
- <sup>27</sup>Graetz, op. cit., p. 133.
- <sup>28</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 34.
- <sup>29</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 300.
- <sup>30</sup>Scholem, op. cit., pp. 310-311.
- <sup>31</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 31.
- <sup>32</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 316ff.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 323ff.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 330ff.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 351.
- <sup>36</sup>Graetz, op. cit., p. 145.
- <sup>37</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 35.
- <sup>38</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 365ff.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 367.
- <sup>40</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 36.
- <sup>41</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 376.
- <sup>42</sup>Graetz, op. cit., pp. 148-149.
- <sup>43</sup>Scholem, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 504.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 512ff.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 519.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 526.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 528.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 529.

<sup>49</sup>Graetz, op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>50</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>51</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 557.

<sup>52</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>53</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 565ff.

## Chapter II

If we are to analyze successfully the historiography of the Shabbetian movement, there are certain problems that bear discussion.

By the time Shabbetai Zevi appears on the scene, modern Cabalism was over a century old. Isaac Luria, the founder of the modern Cabalistic school had been dead almost one hundred years. The other giants of Cabalism, Hayyim Vital, Israel Saruk, disciples of Luria, also had long been dead. The question then to be asked in regard to the rise of the Shabbetian movement and its relation to Cabalism is why did the movement arise in the middle of the seventeenth century and not in the middle of the sixteenth century when Cabalism and Cabalistic theories were at their height? Why did Cabalism receive only now a messianic force? Therefore, it is not enough to say the movement is Cabalistic in origin and that the force behind was Cabalistic doctrine. Certainly, for some, this kind of speculation led to their participation in the movement and obviously when Shabbetai Zevi proclaims himself as the Messiah, he must have an authority to appeal and a text on which to base his appeal. Nevertheless, we still must ask how Cabalism succeeded now on a popular scale and not a century previously, when the intellectual giants of Cabalism were living.

We have then the problem of causation. Why do people believe or think one way at one time, on a particular subject, and why do they believe the opposite at another time?



Why is a Joseph McCarthy successful in his appeal at one period, but the same appeal made only a few years later falls on deaf ears? What turns an individual or groups of individuals from a fundamentalist religion at one point to an extreme rationalism and refusal to accept contradiction at another? Why in the middle of the sixteenth century was Cabalism an intellectual pursuit followed by a few individuals and a century later a popular concern for the masses with a force producing a Messiah? Is there a relation between what people think, and changes in the economic, social, and political spheres? Where there differences in the conditions in these spheres in the Turkish empire, between the mid-sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries? If these differences exist, might not an awareness of them help us to solve the problem we have broached?

By the mid-fifteenth century, Turkish Jewry was secure and prosperous enough for Isaac Zarfati to declare: "Turkey is a land where nothing is lacking...you can safely reach the Holy Land. Here you may wear the finest stuffs. Everyone may sit under his own vine and fig tree." This letter caused an influx of Ashkenazic Jews into Turkey. The greatest influx, however, came after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. The Turks were not successful businessmen. They distrusted Christians. Consequently, Jews with no Western Christian sympathies, became the business agents of the country. Jews prospered in many cities from

Constantinople to Cairo. Their populations increased and they were allowed to worship as they wished. The chief center of the Sephardic Jews was Salonica, where they almost outnumbered the native inhabitants.

They were manufacturers, diplomats, and physicians to Sultans.<sup>1</sup> The role and influence of the Mendes family is well known. With the death of Suleimen the Magnificent, the Empire reached its height and began its decline. By the time of Sultan Murad III, Jews were being persecuted for dressing too lavishly. Laws were passed, forbidding Jews to wear turbans, or to use silk in their garments.<sup>2</sup> Under Murad IV (1623-40) the Jews of Jerusalem were persecuted by the governor and a few years later some Ashkenazic Jews, expecting the Messiah in 1648, were massacred. In 1660, Safed was destroyed by the Arabs.<sup>3</sup> With the waning of Turkish power, Jewish prosperity and security vanished.<sup>4</sup> The eighteenth century for the Jews in Turkey is a chronicle of misfortunes.<sup>5</sup>

And so we return to our problem. In the sixteenth century, when Jewry prospered, the Cabalistic dreams of Joseph Caro or the Messianic predictions of Solomon Molko came to nothing. Isaac Luria could talk to animals and Hayyim Vital called himself Elijah, but no one seemed to pay attention, at least not enough to interfere with normal, everyday affairs.<sup>6</sup> But one hundred years later, when security and prosperity had vanished, an obscure chicken dealer's son, could proclaim

himself the Messiah, and set the Jewish world on fire. Judging from these few examples, it would seem that there is some causative relation between the sphere of the social, political, and economic, and the intellectual.

The Shabbetian movement also has some striking parallels in medieval messianic movements. These movements arose when times were insecure. Not only in areas of social change, but in areas of expansion when the traditional agricultural life is interrupted and the traditional way of life becomes impossible to pursue.<sup>7</sup> The main point seems to be one of insecurity; "In all the over-populated, highly urbanized and industrialized areas there were multitudes of people living on the margin of society, in a state of chronic insecurity."<sup>8</sup> "In addition to poverty the masses of journeymen and casual laborers suffered disorientation."<sup>9</sup>

Norman Cohn asks the same question we have asked. If the appropriate eschatology exists, what circumstances change normal existence so that the eschatology becomes a powerful force strong enough to generate an outbreak of revolutionary chiliasm? "It would seem that when the existing structure of a society is undermined or devalued, the members of that society become less able to face calamity. This process is a cumulative one; and if...some major catastrophe strikes the lower and more exposed strata of the population, the way to revolutionary chiliasm may lie wide open."<sup>10</sup>

In the case of the Shabbetian movement, we have the same

processes at work in which the normal, secure society is cracking apart and the people are left unsure as to what tomorrow may bring. The proper symbol system exists. In the medieval world this was eschatological, among the Jews of the seventeenth century, this was the Cabala. The society is undermined and the Cabala becomes a powerful force for change because exposed people are looking for a way out of an impossible situation.

On a more concrete level, the medieval world produced parallels that appear with Shabbetai Zevi. We see the same type of anti-nominism at work. In the early twelfth century one Tanchelm became the leader of a revolutionary movement. He taught that the sacraments were invalid if administered by unworthy hands, that is the clerics of the Church. Churches were no better than brothels.<sup>11</sup> A generation later, one Eudes de L'Etoile instituted his own church with his own bishops and archbishops and declared himself to be the Son of God.<sup>12</sup> Eudes and his followers lived in luxury, dressed magnificently, and held splendid banquets over which he held court<sup>13</sup> as did Shabbetai and his closest followers. There were always prophecies of a "Second Charlemagne" who would become emperor and conquer the world. Within a decade he and the Pope would die, but they would have established a reign of peace which would last a thousand years.<sup>14</sup> Change the word "emperor" to "Messiah" and we have Shabbetai Zevi all over again. As Cohn notes,

there are always men who are willing and desire to be seen as infallible, wonder-working saviours. They usually come from the lower strata of the intelligentsia and the secret of their ascendancy lay in their personalities. Some may have been conscious imposters; most were paranoid megalomaniacs, who saw themselves as agents of the divine who would remake the world.<sup>15</sup> We shall return later to Cohn's assertion that in several instances, there may have been manipulators behind the scenes who motivated these men and who propagandized the various movement. From what we have seen in this discussion, there is little that is unusual in the course of the Shabbetian movement or in the reactions of the leaders, and the led.

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Jewish Encyclopedia, Volume 12, p. 280
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 282.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 283.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 282.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 283.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 282.
- <sup>7</sup>Cohn, Norman, The Pursuit of the Millenium, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1957), p. 22.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 28.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 29.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 313.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 36.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 38.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 39.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 97.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

### Chapter III

#### Gershom Scholem

The three major historians of the Shabbetian movement are Heinrich Graetz, Simon Dubnow, and Gershom Scholem. We shall want to investigate the approaches used by these three men in investigating the Shabbetian movement. Of course, the results of their investigations differ. We shall want to see why, since they all used the same original source material, Graetz and Scholem being the more thorough of the three. Also, did they in any way set up the problem as we have in the previous chapter. The question is, why did a messianic movement break out with such force at this particular juncture, and not a century previously, when the giants of Cabalism were functioning?

Gershom Scholem in his book ה'נ"ב ה'תקכ"ב מנהגי צדק has done exhaustive research into the sources which bear on the Shabbetian movement. He, apparently, has read every original source, book, eyewitness report, and letter that bears on the movement. All of his investigations are in these original source materials. And all of his conclusions are drawn from his own work with the sources.

Scholem seems to be out to rehabilitate Shabbetai Zevi and to make of him something beyond a false Messiah who fooled many people. Scholem maintains that the cause behind the movement was the power behind the Cabalistic idea. That is, that the Cabala by the mid-seventeenth century had achieved such force among the people that it was able to





"ה'ל' אכאד ו... ובר' בלונדון פאגאא דא מיקדא יבד' בוד' אין  
 יבאד, אכאד מן במדכז בארץ ישראל יבאד, And מרדא דא  
 בוד' מ'ח מ'ה/ יבד' בוד' <sup>2</sup>אין

The movement spread to all corners of the Jewish world.

"וכ' מ'ח מ'ה/ ג'מ' אומדיון ודל'דיוח ג'ח, ססדן דה אק כרה  
 יב'ד'ח ע'ס'ין בל'ד' אר'פ'ס בל'ד' <sup>3</sup>אין

Scholem also discounts an economic cause for the rise of the movement. A variety of places embraced the movement whether wealthy or poor, stable or unstable.

"פ'ד'ד' בוד' אר'מ'ח בלון קוסטא, סל'מ'ין, ע'וורט, אכאד  
 או בארד' ג'מ' מ'ק'ם פ'ב'ל'ד'ח פ'ב'ל'ד'ח, וד' ב'א א'ין  
 דל'ד'ח פ'ב'ל' ג'מ' וד' ק'ד'ח יבד' מ'ו'ין סל'מ' <sup>4</sup>אין  
 הכרה ל'ד'ח וד' <sup>4</sup>אין

It should be noted that Scholem considers the Jewish position in Turkey at this period as strong (אין).<sup>5</sup>

This is altogether debatable.

The idea of a social cause is also rejected by Scholem. After the conversion, many upper class people claimed they were believers because they were forced into it by the masses. And the lower classes, looking for someone to blame, agreed that the upper classes had caused the downfall of the movement. But Scholem claims that in fact

"ה'ל'ד' מ'ח סל'מ' אח'י-כך, דוב'ס בל'ד'ס ד' ח'י' ב'כ'ה' פ'ש'ח  
 פ'כ'ס ב'ו' סל'מ'ח פ'מ'א'י'ן וד'מ'ין, וד'מ'ס פ'מ'א'ר'ח ב'ש' מ'כ'  
 בל'ד'ח פ'מ'א'ח. <sup>6</sup>אין

The movement, therefore, was not occasioned by social conflict. There were people of all classes among the believers. What then is the causative factor behind the Shabbetian movement? Scholem maintains that this cause is a religious one.

"כ' פוא עדרס-סאולח מ'חיוח ניווחה אהאוכה."

This was joined by other local differences. But it was the basic cause. This unified the movement, tested the religion and forced the leaders of the communities to join the movement of Shabbetai Zevi.

"אורק זכ פוא פ'נהפ מנהא פ'מיוחג ע'י'הפ האאפ נאפא-עפער  
 דב"ו הנהא ינהפא באר"י<sup>8</sup>

This religious movement had begun in Safed in the sixteenth century. Its strength was supplied by people from the entire exile. The future of Judaism was shaped from Safed. Communities in many places received from their inspiration, a world of ideas and a way of life.<sup>9</sup>

This basic religious cause was the new Cabala. The new Cabala had arisen after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. This tremendous catastrophe forced a change in the traditional forms of the Cabala. Previously, it had been studied only by the intellectually elect "who pursued the path of ever deeper penetration into the mysteries of God."<sup>10</sup> Now, Cabalism became a popular doctrine<sup>11</sup> with its spiritual center at Safed.<sup>12</sup> According to Scholem the expulsion set a process going which took a century to work out completely. "This process helped to merge the apocalyptic and messianic

elements of Judaism with the traditional aspects of Cabalism.... the new doctrines laid the emphasis on the final stages of the cosmological process."<sup>13</sup> The point is, that "the messianic doctrine...was made for a time the subject of an aggressive propaganda...the birthpangs of the messianic era...were... assumed to have set in with the Expulsion."<sup>14</sup> This expulsion caused the apocalyptic to recast the traditional, mystical Cabalism.<sup>15</sup> The Cabala of Safed and its new conceptions was able for a long period to dominate the Jewish world.<sup>16</sup>

This new Cabala was developed by Isaac Luria Ashkenazi and his followers; men like Hayyim Vital, Moses Cordovero and Israel Sarug. There is not the time to discuss Luria's motivations, the new kind of leadership principle he developed as revealed in Vital's חידושי or the new doctrines he developed out of the old forms of the Cabala. Luria was of the intellectual elite and a scholar, as is often the case with new mass leaders. He left no written remains when he died in 1572 at the age of 38.<sup>17</sup> The spread of Lurianic Cabalism was due to the work of Israel Sarug who "carried on a lively propaganda in the interests of the new school among the Cabalists of Italy."<sup>18</sup> He also spread the Lurianic Cabala into Europe and established schools for the Cabala in Italy. He was in opposition to Vital, who preferred not to have the new doctrines spread about. Though Sarug added ideas of his own, his writings and those of Vital became fused with the Cabala of Palestine. By 1650, one generation

after the beginning of its spread, the Lurianic Cabala was in control of Jewish theological thinking. What Jewish theology there was, was that of Lurianic Cabala.<sup>19</sup> "The influence of the Lurianic Cabala...from about 1630 onwards... can hardly be exaggerated."<sup>20</sup>

After 1492, the Cabala became a popular doctrine. It also developed new ideas. That is, it combined messianic fervor with mystical contemplation.

These new ideas combine a mystical interpretation of the fact of exile with an equally mystical theory of the path to redemption. The old spirit of mystical contemplation is enriched by the new element of Messianic fervor...this doctrine could not but lead to an explosive manifestation of all those forces to which it owed its rise and its success.<sup>21</sup>

For Scholem, the appearance of Shabbetai Zevi precipitated the step to messianism. The tension caused by the Lurianic Cabala caused the explosion. For the Lurianic Cabala formed a "messianic tension" wherever it went, in large and small circles; and these circles existed everywhere, though in a variety of forms. The doctrines were spread by the  $\rho'U\epsilon\gamma\delta$  who spread the doctrine of the Cabala without the technical terminology.<sup>22</sup> Israel Sarug who spread these new doctrines increased <sup>23</sup> "שג"ר ה'ע"כ נח נב"

This messianic tension, for Scholem, was the ultimate cause of the Shabbetian movement. As the Lurianic Cabala spread all over the Jewish world, these tensions were increased

until, with Shabbetai Zevi and Nathan of Gaza, the whole Jewish world exploded.

כפי שיש מן הפסוק עגל הזה  
 24 "העצמות של ידם והתקין את בורקין כעבור דור אחד."

The force of the Cabala of Safed tied an idealogical in with a social function.<sup>25</sup> Why did it triumph? It triumphed because it answered the questions of that generation; the problem of the poor Jewish position and their sense of *חסד* and *אמונה*. Because it answered their questions, the Lurianic Cabala became the property of the many. It tied together the *חסד* and *אמונה*. It was studied in order to bring *אמונה*.<sup>26</sup> The Cabala of Luria is not cause by itself. But combined with other problems

"לכך נחלש כללם ופחיתותם עמ'הם לא נאמר זה דוחף  
 ה'טו"ק פשוט... הכיוון אחריה' כי יצר מלח משה' ה'ה  
 27 "אולם בחול'ם שגורם בל'עם אפ'כך"

Scholem's rejection of certain causes for the rise and spread of the Shabbetian movement are, within limits, well taken. That the pogroms of 1648 were the sole cause of the movement seems unlikely, given Scholem's reasons against this. Though certainly they were a contributory factor, as he would probably agree. His rejection of social and economic causes because all groups were involved, is well-taken, if it is true that most of the wealthy classes were involved. Scholem often indicates this is true, but it would be difficult to find out for certain. He has, however, not addressed the problem as we have set it up. This precludes the possibility of seeing the cause of the movement in the insecure and

declining position of the Jews of the Levant. On the contrary, he states that the position of the Jews of Turkey was good, a statement not borne out by the facts. Also, there might be one cause in one area and another cause in a second area. The fact that such movements seem to arise only at times of insecurity, and in societies on the wane, is not discussed by Scholem, since he has only approached the problem in a literary, ingrown way. That is, he reconstructs the history of the movement, and discusses causation only from the point of view of the literary sources and does not take into account outside influences that might have made the sources what they were. Whether made by general social and economic influences, or by individuals who, perhaps, had a vested interest of one sort or another in the success or failure of the Shabbetaian movement.

Scholem maintains that the cause of the breaking out of the movement is religious. That is, in the new Lurianic Cabala, developed after 1492, is to be found a force and a tension which led to the explosion that was the Shabbetaian movement. One understands how Scholem might be led to put forth such a proposition, since he pays scant attention to outside influences. On the other hand, this kind of a proposition is difficult to disprove, beyond saying that one cannot accept this kind of causation. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that the only way to cast doubt on this would be to prove that there was another cause which would displace

Scholem.

It is true that Cabala became popular after 1492, especially after Isaac Luria. The question is, in what form did it become popular? Did the average Jew, one of the mass, read the classic Cabalistic works or even such a work as Vital's חיי חסד? Or, was what they knew of Cabala, merely stories of legends and miracles which were propagandized? Scholem, himself, records many of these legends which were propagated among the people. It makes a great deal of difference, in discussing the Cabala as Scholem does, and in giving it the force he says it had, whether or not the people knew the Cabala as such, or only stories told by the educated Cabalists. Scholem, himself, admits that ר' יצחק spread the Cabalistic doctrine without the "technical terminology." The average Turkish Jew was not literate. And if he was, could he or would he read intricate Cabalistic works? The average American, who is literate, hardly gets beyond the pictures of Life Magazine; let alone the text. How much the less so the Turkish Jew of three hundred years ago.

If this is true, that the average person of Shabbetai Zevi's time knew only legends and stories, how could such ideas as a "messianic tension" or being caught between the poles of חסד and דין have made themselves felt? Something beyond this is necessary to motivate the masses. Were Germany's masses moved by Mein Kampf or Hitler's harangues; and how many Communists ever read Karl Marx and

were moved to revolution by it? If the Jews of three hundred years ago did not know the Cabala, how could they be so motivated by it?

Leaving aside the question as to whether or not such a doctrine as Cabalism is able of itself to move great masses of people; there is a problem of meaning. What is meant by such a phrase as "messianic tension." It sound good, perhaps profound. But does it have any meaning when one thinks about it. What kind of tension is a messianic one? Why does the Cabala create such tensions when it spreads to various circles? And why do the combination of mystical speculations in Cabala, when combined with apocolypse and a catastrophe, produce an explosion? There may be new doctrines in the Lurianic Cabala; but what in this newness (in *החדש*, *החדש*) is there in and of itself to produce tensions and an explosion?

Of course, the inability to answer these questions would not disprove the contentions of Scholem as one can prove or disprove a geometrical problem. If one wishes to hold to these contentions, he may continue to do so. But some doubt has been cast as to the validity of this kind of approach in determining what causes such upheavals as the Shabbetian movement.

Scholem's attitude toward Nathan of Gaza is instructive in regard to his approach. Nathan was born in 1643, and studied in the school of his father until he was twenty years



old. He was a genius in his studies, and a highly emotional person. He was in Jerusalem, when Shabbetai was there; but we have no indication that they recognized each other. At twenty, he began to study Cabala and the Zohar by himself, and was apparently given to flights of vision.<sup>28</sup> In these visions, he was awakened to the Shabbetian movement, and his own prophetic destiny. In his visions, he saw Shabbetai Zevi, and heard predictions that the Messiah was about to come to save his people and to conquer their enemies. Nathan was the first to recognize Shabbetai Zevi as the Messiah and only then, did his friends and acquaintances recognize him as such. Nathan was an extraordinary person, with qualities not often united in one person. "He raised the flag of belief in Shabbetianism."<sup>29</sup>

Nathan differed by Shabbetai Zevi in several aspects of his personality. Nathan had energy, clear thought, and the strength to write. Shabbetai, on the other hand, was always passive, given to periods of depression, alternating with periods of extreme exhilaration. Both were necessary for the movement to emerge. In Nathan was crystallized the secret changes of the time and the center of the transfer of the historical strengths in those changes in the Cabala. To Nathan, Shabbetai Zevi was the supreme symbol.<sup>30</sup>

Although Nathan was young, only twenty two, the sources indicate that he had great communal influence. He was engaged in *hineid nifh* for himself and others and in fixing

certain fasts. His repute spread from Gaza to Egypt and reached the ears of Raphael Joseph Chelebi, who sent greetings to him in 1665. And later, Rabbi Samuel Gandour, one of the group of rabbis around Raphael Joseph, became his confidant and steady companion.<sup>31</sup>

While in Egypt, Shabbetai heard of Nathan. After completing his charity collecting mission in Egypt, he went to Nathan in Gaza in order *לעבודו, ויגאלו לעבודו*. According to Scholem, he came to Nathan as a sick man to find a cure<sup>32</sup> for the mental torments. We today would call him a "manic-depressive." Nathan told him that he was not sick, but really an exceptional person: The King Messiah. Nathan revealed to him the contents of his vision that he had had a short time before. Shabbetai, at first, refused this role. But Nathan stayed with him, trying to persuade him to accept his mission and the truth of Nathan's vision. They opened their hearts to one another, speaking of personal matters and individual thoughts. Upon their return to Gaza, a period of depression hit Shabbetai. He did not go to the synagogue on Shavuot. In the synagogue, a spirit proclaimed to Nathan, that Shabbetai Zevi was indeed the Messiah. He went into a state of ecstasy, which was witnessed by one Abraham Pererya, a merchant and industrialist from Amsterdam.<sup>33</sup>

With this, Shabbetai Zevi realized he was indeed the Messiah. A period of exhilaration came upon him. All that was hidden during his depression, now came powerfully to the

surface in the presence of Nathan, a recognized man of God. On May 31, 1665,<sup>34</sup> he declared himself the Messiah in the streets of Gaza. We thus see exhibited the mania of Shabbetai. He performed some strange deeds in the synagogue and changed the ritual.<sup>35</sup>

Scholem maintains that the testimony of these facts were not written many years after the events, but in fact are a Shabbetian pseudo-epigrapha, written mostly by Nathan himself, in which the messianship of Shabbetai Zevi is predicted. It represents the new side of the redemption as seen by Nathan in his vision. Scholem maintains that the author is well acquainted with Shabbetai Zevi; he "knows the soul of Shabbetai Zevi."<sup>36</sup> Sasportas, who asked for proof of Nathan's authenticity and Nathan's prophecy,<sup>37</sup> did not understand this testimony, according to Scholem. He was not aware of the spiritual side of Shabbetai Zevi. He saw the vision as confused. In fact, says Scholem, Nathan wrote the apocalypse after he saw the vision of the chariot and prophecy. It was written by one with intimate knowledge of Shabbetai Zevi. It was the fruit of the cleaving of Nathan to his Messiah and of listening to his conversations.<sup>38</sup>

Following his expulsion from Jerusalem, Shabbetai Zevi had little to do with the flowering of the movement. Scholem notes that many people held to Nathan's words which were better understood than the deeds of Shabbetai. How the movement developed, depended on what happened in Gaza or what

legend says happened in Gaza. An individual Messiah was only necessary as a banner, not as a living individual.<sup>39</sup> Nathan preached to many in Gaza on repentance and prayer.<sup>40</sup> The personality and personal magnetism of Nathan was such as to be able to blot out opposition, especially in regard to the desire of many for some sign that the Messiah had come.

Letters began to be written and much propaganda was scattered abroad from Gaza.<sup>41</sup> Nathan, himself, began to invest legends by spreading reports of new visions.<sup>42</sup> For instance, a letter to Raphael Joseph from Nathan, tells what had been revealed to Nathan in the vision of September 5, 1665. In this vision, the Messiah was proclaimed. The letter was spread in the circle of Raphael Joseph and then scattered immediately into Europe. It is a combination of Cabalistic, mystical roots and popular beliefs. In this, is its importance. It accompanied Shabbetians wherever they went. In it, are different types of hasidism, dwelling together in harmony.<sup>43</sup>

Nathan held some interesting opinions of himself. At one point, he claims to be the reincarnation ( *SiCSe* ) of Isaac Luria, the Cabalist of Safed.<sup>44</sup> If individuals would only have faith in Nathan, it was in his power to declare innocent the guilty. And the information was vouchsafed to him, that the soul of Bar Kochba was reincarnated in Shabbetai Zevi.<sup>45</sup>

What is Gershom Scholem's approach and attitude in

respect to Nathan of Gaza? I find, in Scholem, an uncritical acceptance of Nathan and what Nathan says or testifies to having happened. Scholem has no doubts as to the credibility of Nathan or his visions. In regard to Sasportas, the author applies all the tools of scientific investigation at his disposal. He never accepts, at face value, the course of events as related by this or that eyewitness. But the credibility of the main characters of the story, is never questioned.

For instance, when it comes to fixing the year of Shabbetai's birth, Scholem investigates closely all the sources.<sup>46</sup> However, when it comes to the role of Nathan, he forgets to be critical. In the sources, Nathan is recorded as having had a vision predicting the coming of the Messiah, Shabbetai Zevi, in a letter Nathan sent to Amsterdam, and in a book by Abraham Konki.<sup>47</sup> Scholem discusses it as follows:

"בשנת פולק האונסטל אבאפ ע'ל'ו ... ורוא סדר'  
 בעולם מלח'ע ועד סוף ... ורוא צופה המוכנה בעל'וע ואם נא-  
 וואס באאמ אה דמח דיו'נא של אה' צה' ח'קו'נא המוכנה,  
 ואם דמח דיו'נא של יציק אג'ו ח'קו'נא ע'דא נאאד נאדרא,  
 ע'דא, הכסא נכבד. ואמ'ו בוד'צ'ק דבר' נאאד, נכ אור י' נג  
 משיכ' בא אה' צה' נא אה' יצ'א ע'ל או'ה'ו יא'ג'ר"<sup>48</sup>

Scholem lays great store by such a vision.

"נא מ'קור'ה נאדרא של נא'ן ע'א המרא נא."<sup>49</sup>  
 Scholem is perfectly willing to accept the authenticity of such visions and he puts great store in them. But why are

they necessarily historical? What proof do we have, beyond Nathan's testimony? People have had visions of Messiahs before. Whose visions are true? It takes more than visions to set people off on mass movements, even if Nathan was the extraordinary person, Scholem says he is. Sasportas apparently had some doubts about Nathan's authenticity and said so. But Scholem discounts Sasportas because, according to Scholem, Sasportas is constantly changing his position.<sup>50</sup> The point is that Scholem accepts the veracity of the visions; first in that Nathan actually had them, and second, that visions of a Messiah, prove such a one actually exists. Also, Scholem invests these visions with a power it is difficult to believe they had.

Nathan has such insight that he is the first to recognize Shabbetai as the Messiah.

15 בפסוק הראשון בארץ אור  
 בזה אהי צה, ראש ה'ש' אכסטי' אהי צה; וראש אהי  
 כאמרו... וראש ה'ש' וראש ר' לעזר פלגומד באמרו  
 51 "רק ראש אהי צה נהי ראש העולם"

Here again, Scholem draws conclusions not necessarily warranted. If we know that Shabbetai Zevi was not a Messiah, the question becomes, whose idea was it, that he was the Messiah? Did Shabbetai see himself as the Messiah? It would seem, he did not, since he refused the role when Nathan first offered it to him.<sup>52</sup> His friends did not see him as the Messiah.<sup>53</sup> Who is Nathan to come along and say he is a Messiah? Scholem forgets to be critical; to ask, "why

Nathan?" What else might he have had in mind? True, Nathan was an extraordinary person, given to mystical activities. But he was not the only brilliant student of the Cabala who ever met Shabbetai or the only visionary in the area (if indeed he was one). These ideas were floating all over. Since there was no Messiah, and since Shabbetai himself did not see himself as such; why did Nathan want to produce one? And if we are to assume that Nathan actually had a vision of a Messiah, can we believe that Nathan actually saw Shabbetai or heard his name in the vision, a person he had never met. If the times were ripe for such a movement, we still do not know who gave Nathan the right to point the Messiah out, nor why he picked such a character as Shabbetai Zevi. It is simply not enough to say that the mere meeting of Nathan and Shabbetai set off such a reaction between them that a mass movement would thus be ignited.

Let us look for a moment at Shabbetai's refusal at first to accept his "mission,"<sup>54</sup> and the successful attempt by Nathan to have him do so. Nathan desired to have Shabbetai accept the truth of his (Shabbetai's) mission.

"ע"ה צ"ה ו'ה' דה'ק'מ' ל' ה'ל' ר' נח'ן חב"ד' עפ"י ח'ש' ע'  
 א' כ'א' ח'ל' ח'ל'ו' כ'א'ח' ה'ל' א' ע'ח'ו'ח' נ'א'ח'ח' נ'ס' י'ז'א'ק'  
 י'ח' ע'ד'ע'ס'ק' ו'ח'ח'ב'ן, ע'ח'י'ק' ק'ח'ח'ל' כ'י'ח'ז'ס'ק' ו'ח'א'ח'ח' ... י'ח'  
 א'ח'ח'ק' נ'ח'ן ע'ח'ח' ח'ח' א'ח' ע'ח'ס', ד'ח'ו' ק'ח'ח' ח'א'ח'ח' ... י'ח'ח'ח'  
 ח'ח'ח'ח'ח' י'ח'ד'ו', ו'ח'ח'ח' א'ח' ע'ח'ס' ל'ח' ח'ח'ח' ... נ'ח'ן ע'ח'ח' ח'ח'  
 ע' ח'ח' ק'ח'ח'ו' ... ע'ח' י'ח'ו', ח'ח'ח'ח' ... ו'ח'ח' ח'ח'ח' כ' ח'ח'





Shabbetai pours out his soul to Nathan, but not Nathan to Shabbetai. Nathan motivates Shabbetai. It is difficult to see where Shabbetai motivates Nathan (except in a general way, if one is prepared to accept the fact that Nathan felt he was serving his master. I doubt, though, that Shabbetai would be aware of this).

Scholem notes the manic aspects of all this. He is fully aware that Shabbetai was a manic-depressive and therefore unstable.<sup>59</sup> But, he never takes the jump from stating that fact to asking what effect it might have on the individual. Might not a person of this nature be inclined to feelings of self-glorifications? A sense of extreme exhilaration is no more normal than a period of extreme depression. We would not agree with an individual that he is worthless, when he feels depressed; why agree with him that he is the Messiah, when he feels exhilarated. Gershom Scholem accepts the authenticity of Shabbetai's messianship. But one might be led to wonder when one considers the context of Nathan's influence and Shabbetai's sickness.

In regard to Nathan, there are other aspects which Scholem mentions but never critically investigates. How much faith are we to put in a man who claims to be the reincarnation of Isaac Luria, or who advances the notion that Shabbetai Zevi is the reincarnation of Bar Kochba? Where does he come by the authority to declare innocent the guilty? Or does he have another reason for putting forth





that probably had no rational basis whatever.

Shabbetai had some notion about changing the position of women. From this Scholem deduces that

<sup>65</sup> "באמת ד'א' ע' ד'ע'ה' ד'ה' ח'ל'ן כ'ל' ד' ר'פ'ור'מ' ד'ס'ו'ר'א'  
Whatever reasons Shabbetai had for wanting to change the position of women, basic reform in the modern sense, does not seem a likely explanation. We must ask again about the rationality of Shabbetai Zevi. Is Scholem reading into Shabbetai preordained plans which we have no way of discovering he did, or did not have?

Before leaving Izmir, Shabbetai appointed "kings" over the world he was to conquer as the Messiah.<sup>66</sup> Here especially, we see Scholem's attitude to Shabbetai: that he was a rational person, highly inspired, with a mission to complete. Appor-tioning out kings and kingdoms at first blush, seems like so much childlike nonsense. Not so to Scholem, who sees in this the climax to Shabbetai's work in Izmir.

"ה'א'ל'י'ת' פ'א'ת'מ'ל'כ'ו'ת' ל'א'ר'צ'ה'... ב'ע'ו'ל'ת'ו' ש'ל' ש'ב'ת'א'י' ד'ב'י' ב'א'ל'מ'ו'ר'  
כ'ת'ו'ב'ו'ת'ו' מ'ו'ק' ש'ע'ל'ב'ה' א'ח' א'ת'ר' י'ס'ר'א'ל' ע'ד' כ'ע'י'כ'ו'ת'ו' ד'ק'ו'ס'ט'א'  
כ'א' ב'ח'י'ת' א'ו' י'ו'ת'ר' ע'ק'י'ת'א'... י'ד'ע' א'י'ז'מ'יר' א'י'נ'ג' י'כ'ו'ס'  
ד'ל'י'ו'ת' א'ל'כ'א' ח'ו'נ'ת' ב'י'י'ק'ם' ה'ד'נ'כ'ו' <sup>67</sup>

But how is one to know that Shabbetai had a plan to complete? What is there that is particularly consistent or logical ( ע'ק'י'ת'א' ) about his actions from the time he left Palestine, outside of the fact that he went; and along the way acted in rather odd fashion? How are we to

know that Shabbetai Zevi knew that Izmir was only an interim station? And if only an interim station, a station on the way to what? Conversion? Did Gershom Scholem, in his attempt to be positive toward Shabbetai Zevi, invest him with a spirit he did not have or that we cannot know he had?

If we are willing to grant that Shabbetai really was a strong, spiritually motivated personality, who felt that he had a mission from God and a plan for carrying out that mission, what are we to do with the fact of his conversion? And a conversion that he apparently went to with little persuasion. After all, if he were quite so extraordinary a person, he must have been aware that if the Turks killed him, he would become a martyr, giving the movement a large boost. But the courage of his convictions was quickly dissipated.

It is within the realm of possibility that he had a prearranged plan, as Scholem seems to insist. But then something must have gone haywire, and what went wrong, must be investigated. Scholem ignores the possibility that Shabbetai's pronouncements were only so much hot air, or that Shabbetai's mental illness might have had a large part to play in his conversion. Above all, Scholem has not set up the problem to ask why the movement could and did occur and what gave the Cabala a force it previously did not have.

Scholem must explain Shabbetai's conversion. He says Shabbetai converted because he felt God had not yet appointed the time nor had He revealed His Kingdom. Shabbetai reacted

to happenings on the outside by sitting with clasped hands and waited for a sign from God which never came. This passivism destroyed a movement and saved himself. But what role might his sickness have played when he was suddenly put in a precarious position? How do we know what Shabbetai felt at that moment? It is reading into a situation to say that he felt "God had not yet appointed the time." He was passive when it came to saving a movement, he was not so passive when it came to saving his own life.

There is no reason to go into profound explanations for the conversion. We know Shabbetai Zevi was unstable. We know that originally he rejected the role of Messiah. He converted simply to save his own life. We know he was not the Messiah. Why should he act like one?

Heinrich Graetz

Heinrich Graetz, in his reconstruction of the Shabbetaian movement, does not approach at all the problem of causation. He does not ask why the incident of Shabbetai Zevi occurred nor does he ask why it occurred at the particular juncture it did. One supposes, that for him, and the historians of the period in which he wrote, the writing of history meant to attempt to relate only the facts, and not to be concerned with interpretation. Graetz, nevertheless, always displays an attitude towards the subject under discussion. Indeed, his entire history is a polemic, an attempt to justify Judaism to the world. In so doing, he must explain away what, to him, were the less agreeable "encrustations" that had become a part of the pure, pristine kernel and which must be sloughed off in order that the entire world could see the true Judaism in all of its profound and enlightened glory. Most of the excrescences were the less rational, more oriental aspects of Judaism as he saw it. And the worst of these was bound up with Cabalism and such doctrines as were taught in books like the Zohar. Shabbetai Zevi and his cohorts were the evils of Cabalism in concrete manifestation. Whereas, Gershom Scholem brings a pro-mystical, pro-Shabbetai Zevi bias to Shabbetai Zevi and the Shabbetaian movement, Heinrich Graetz brings a totally negative bias to the subject. And this colors his entire presentation. The result is that neither historian, for all their erudition, brings to the

reader a satisfying picture of what happened in those few months of 1665-1666.

A few illustrations should prove the point. Before mentioning the name of Shabbetai Zevi, Graetz observes that "...Spinoza possessed...an ally...who labored to disintegrate Judaism"<sup>68</sup> or "He was tall, well formed had...a pleasant voice....But his mind was befogged by reason of the predominance of fancy...."<sup>69</sup> The Cabala is a "confused jumble."<sup>70</sup> "This Lurian mysticism dazzled the bewildered brain of the Smyrna youth...."<sup>71</sup> Raphael Joseph Chelebi is a man of "unspeakable credulity."<sup>72</sup> Chayim Benvenisti was "instigated by Shabbetai to blood-thirsty fanaticism."<sup>73</sup> The great mass of people is a "senseless multitude"<sup>74</sup> and it was Jacob Sasportas' task "to unmask the gross deceptions practiced...."<sup>75</sup> These examples serve well to indicate the general aspects of Graetz's approach.

Graetz, it would seem, refuses to put any credence in or give any value to any system that is not rational. Cabalism is a mystical system and foreign to his thought. While the above strictures against the ideas and cast of characters of this movement might have some basis, it serves little purpose for the historian to describe them in such terms. For Graetz has given us only his own value judgment, he has not proved in any reasonable way that "gross deceptions" were practiced. He does begin with the assumption that Shabbetai Zevi was not the Messiah. But he does not inquire



into what caused the movement and what may have propelled Shabbetai into the role of Messiah. It serves as little purpose to call names as to try to describe something called a "messianic tension."

While the outline of the facts given by Graetz, does not differ substantially from those of other historians, certain interpretations on a more particular level come through. He seems to see Shabbetai himself as the instigator and culprit behind the outbreak of the movement. To Graetz, Shabbetai always had delusions about becoming the Messiah. When Abraham Yachini came along with his manuscript, predicting Shabbetai as the Messiah, it merely confirmed him in a delusion he already had.<sup>76</sup> His future wife Sarah, came along "to confirm his Messianic dreams."<sup>77</sup> Shabbetai becomes the leader. He found Nathan and made him his third confederate.<sup>78</sup> Shabbetai had to convince Nathan of Gaza as to his mission, not the other way around. The way Graetz sees it, Shabbetai "palmed off" on Nathan the spurious document Yachini had given him to convince Nathan of his mission.<sup>79</sup> It was Shabbetai who dispatched messengers (of course, they were of a "fraudulent and fanatical character") to predict his Messianic appearance.<sup>80</sup> And it was Shabbetai who incited Chayim Benevenisti to "bloodthirsty fanaticism."<sup>81</sup> Shabbetai Zevi, in Graetz's reconstruction, is much less passive than Scholem makes him. In fact, he is the leader of the movement. But what of Nathan?

In describing Nathan, Graetz is at his polemical best. He was "...a youth with superficial knowledge of the Talmud, acquired Cabalistic scraps, and obtained facility in the highsounding, but hollow, nonsensical rabbinical style of the period, which concealed poverty of thought beneath verbiage."<sup>82</sup> As mentioned above, he was found by Shabbetai, not the other way around. After becoming acquainted with Shabbetai, he began to have revelations and visions predicting the beginning of the Messianic era in 1666.<sup>83</sup> For Graetz, Nathan is merely a crazy ecstatic running around predicting nonsense. Only once, does he mention Nathan as a propagandist.<sup>84</sup>

The real propagandist in Graetz's view is Samuel Primo. If anyone, it is Primo whom he sees as a power behind the throne. Shabbetai met Primo in Jerusalem. This man became his private secretary and accompanied him on his further travels. Primo plays the role most usually associated with Nathan. While Graetz seems to make Shabbetai the instigator, he is not quite certain, and seems to feel that there is more going on than quite meets the eye. While Primo was convinced of Shabbetai's mission, he had his own plans to accomplish. "He (Primo) appears to have made use of Shabbetai more than to have been employed by him."<sup>85</sup> While Graetz seems to feel this, he carries this observation no further and does not attempt to draw whatever conclusions there are to be drawn from such a statement.

Primo played the part of propagandist, making certain

"...that reports of the fame and doings of the Messiah should reach Jews abroad."<sup>86</sup> In a sense, Graetz does not know quite what to do with Shabbetai Zevi. He is the instigator, but others are active in a concrete way. It is Primo and his confidants who have a fixed plan regarding changes in or the abolishing of the rabbinical system.<sup>87</sup> "Samuel Primo took care that most fabulous accounts should reach the Jews of Smyrna and those at a distance..."<sup>88</sup>

Graetz seems to feel that the Shabbetians had something up their sleeves; but as with Primo's plans, he does not draw any conclusions. He only mentions the fact that Nathan wrote to Raphael Joseph Chelebi that within a year and some months, Shabbetai would "...make the sultan his subject and lead him about as his captive."<sup>89</sup> In Izmir the Turkish authorities could not or would not interfere in the tumult caused by Shabbetai. And in Constantinople "the Turkish government in fact seems to have stood in awe of the Jewish Messiah."<sup>90</sup> Graetz reorganizes the extensive power that lay in the hands of the Shabbetians and that they had certain "treasonable goals." But where this power came from and what concretely were these goals, he does not inquire into.

In Graetz, there is little that one can analyze. Scholem provides a clearcut approach and interpretation that is open to investigation. Graetz is simply negative to Shabbetai Zevi and the entire movement. It attained great power because

the senseless masses were duped by those who indulged in the nonsense of the Cabala. The leaders were either fools who themselves were taken in by the Zohar or rogues who delighted in causing trouble, or who had their own plans to bring to conclusion. This is Graetz's attitude. Beyond this, he desires to lay down the facts as he is able to glean them from the sources. In this, he and the other historians, do not differ a great deal. He does not look into the causative factor beyond saying the Cabala and certain corrupt and/ or deluded individuals gave rise to the movement. He does not ask why now and not earlier. And he has no notion of social and economic forces or broader historical forces. This of course, is not surprising in a grounding breaking historian such as Heinrich Graetz. And these reservations in no way detract from his monumental work and accomplishment.

Simon Dubnow

Simon Dubnow, in his reconstruction of the Shabbetaian movement, lays more stress on the events of 1648 in Poland than do either Heinrich Graetz or Gershom Scholem. Tied in with this, is his conception of Judaism as being influenced in its history at various periods by different centers such as Babylonia, Spain, and Poland. Dubnow also gives a political cast to the movement in that it was, for him, a unifying factor for Jews and Judaism.

Since 1648 was the year in which the Messiah was to come and instead became a year of catastrophe, it began to be looked upon as the year of the "ח'ן ש' ה'תש"ח." The center in Spain was long since gone and "נחמד עשיו כמנחם"

באחרון של אומה ... כ'כ/אפריל פ"ג מנצח וביאור נפך  
מלאכות בדרכים יקרה ... כל בלעדי דווקא חג גזאלס.  
י"ג יקרא עשרה שנים כל כך אל קריתם בצ"ח חת חייו חתיה

The vision of Isaac Luria and Chaim Vital spread all over the Jewish world. Fasting and repentance, in this time of seeming catastrophe, would hasten the coming of the Messiah. Dubnow ties in the Cabala and its popular version with the terrible events in Poland.

terrible events in Poland. כבוד צדקת ה' לא יאמר  
בטוב צדקת ה' בפי', קמו בלוד' כ נסחוב גנוב מפי' ה' שכל צד  
אנ' כל פדוקס לבוד צד למעמק' וכל צד היקדוק צדק עקבא  
בל' ימחן"ג

This messianic movement was able to spread so quickly because the Jewish communities of East and West were linked closely.

All of the basic work of the movement was done in three port cities. Izmir was the birthplace of Shabbetai Zevi. In Constantinople he did his basic work; and Salonica was the last refuge for his adherents.<sup>93</sup> Dubnow here makes a case for the essential unity of the Jewish people. But he does not draw any economic conclusions from these connections nor from the strategic place the Jews held in the economic life of Turkey.

In his discussion of Shabbetai's early life and development, Dubnow again brings the influence of the events of 1648 as important to the emergence and success of the movement. Early in his life, Shabbetai often saw himself as the Messiah. He and his friends heard songs that told of the troubles of Zion. He influenced his friends and they in turn influenced him. They all felt the troubles of their people. In 1648, there came a change in the character of Shabbetai's messianism:

"במאורעות פארעם פון יאר 1648 האבן זיך געפונען  
<sup>94</sup> "נאכדעם וואס מען האט געזעהן דאס וואס האט געפאלן  
 נאכדעם וואס מען האט געזעהן דאס וואס האט געפאלן

When he learned of the tragedies that came to the Jews of Poland in that year, he had visions of the cries of the martyrs. "ווען ער האט געזעהן דאס וואס האט געפאלן  
 און געזעהן דאס וואס האט געפאלן

נאכדעם וואס מען האט געזעהן דאס וואס האט געפאלן  
<sup>95</sup> "נאכדעם וואס מען האט געזעהן דאס וואס האט געפאלן  
 נאכדעם וואס מען האט געזעהן דאס וואס האט געפאלן

He left Izmir, not through coercion, but because there the "spirit of messianism hovered in the air." Here he came

into contact with events in Poland through refugees from that unfortunate area. <sup>9611</sup> "והוא נחשב לאחד מהנביאים הגדולים" And he was furthered influenced in his course by the document of Abraham Yachini which predicted that he would be the Messiah who would redeem his people. His third wife, Sarah, was another tie to the events of 1648. She became a symbol:

"מ' שמועט עטאז אה' עראש מ' זענען ווערן מ' שמועט יעדע  
 עטאז'ע, ע, ח"ה עקטור אה' שמועט' קען' און קען' , ח"ה'  
 עטאז'ע זענען עטאז'ע עטאז'ע" <sup>97</sup>

Shabbetai Zevi was attracted to her not only because she thought herself to be the wife of the Messiah, but also because she was from Poland and had been a part of the pogroms carried out there against the Jews.

Dubnow has little to say about Nathan of Gaza. Only that he recognized Shabbetai immediately as the Messiah. He himself had prophesied regarding the coming of the Messiah, Shabbetai Zvi (נבואתו על הגאון שבתאי צבי).

"וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אָהֳרֹן בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים" (שמות 7:1)  
 "וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אָהֳרֹן בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים" (שמות 7:1)

Interestingly, Dubnow has Shabbetai influencing Nathan to write to Raphael Joseph Chelebi in Cairo. Nathan does not write of his own volition.<sup>99</sup>

In Dubnow's reconstruction, we get a glimpse of the danger the Shabbetian movement posed to the Turkish Empire. Nathan's original prediction contained a statement that

100 " ... (מ'חל) ... הן כהר מנסיון עזרה נדבך סתע' וספ'ס' דער יאר  
Dubnow does not say that the Jews were actually planning

to conquer the Turkish Empire. He implies this by noting that Shabbetai Zevi had fooled the people that he was about to take over the Holy Land from the Sultan.

וְכָל הָעָם הָיוּ בְּיָדָיו, וְכָל הָעָם הָיוּ בְּיָדָיו, וְכָל הָעָם הָיוּ בְּיָדָיו.  
 101 "וְכָל הָעָם הָיוּ בְּיָדָיו, וְכָל הָעָם הָיוּ בְּיָדָיו, וְכָל הָעָם הָיוּ בְּיָדָיו."

The Rabbis of Jerusalem were afraid of persecution by the Turkish rulers because of the prophecies of Nathan.<sup>102</sup>

And of course, Nehemiah Cohen had accused Shabbetai of being a rebel.<sup>103</sup> This notion of conquering the Holy Land though not the entire Empire, seems to be part of the national coloring that this author gives to the movement. That the ultimate concern and objective of the Shabbetian movement was the unity of the Jewish people and was an expression of this desire for unity and to have the ancient homeland as the newest center of the Diaspora.

Essentially, Simon Dubnow sees the Shabbetian movement in a positive light, since it contributed to Jewish unity. He does not note the tremendous upheavals in the Jewish communities caused by the movement or the persecutions carried out by Christians in several areas. One must also take issue with the political coloring the author gives the movement. It does not seem likely that such was the case or that at a certain point, Shabbetai suddenly developed something called "political messianism." A Zionist, he most assuredly, was not. Nationalism is a modern concept and has no antecedents in the seventeenth century. Also the influence of the events



of 1648 are perhaps exaggerated as a cause. That they were a contributing factor, there can be little doubt and that the despoiled and uprooted Jews of Poland would be attracted to such a movement seems reasonable. That Shabbetai Zevi was influenced profoundly as an individual by these happenings, is only conjecture on Dubnow's part.

There is a certain superficiality in Dubnow's reconstruction. This is because of its being only one incident in a work that covers all of Jewish history. Shabbetai Zevi is only one character among thousands. One result is that Dubnow pays little attention to the character of Shabbetai. We get no inkling that he might be mentally unbalanced. His antinomism is underplayed. We do not hear of changes in rituals or holidays or of clashes with established rabbinic authorities. And Dubnow, like Graetz and Scholem, does not set up the problem of why the movement happened when it did. Of course, since he gives 1648 as the cause of the movement, there is no problem in regard to the giants of Cabala of a century earlier. But there is the problem of why it took almost twenty years from 1648 to 1665 for the movement to get started. Dubnow also has little to say as to what role there might have been for the Cabala. Certainly there was a lot of this mysticism floating around. Did it have any influence?



- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 22.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 58.
- <sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 19.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 53.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 164ff.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 169.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 170.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 174-75.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 175.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 178.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 179.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 181.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 185.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., Volume 2, p. 472.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid., Volume 1, pp. 188-89.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 205-6.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 211.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 215.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 217.
- <sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 219.
- <sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

- <sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 232.
- <sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 83-84.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 169ff.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 169.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 169.
- <sup>50</sup>Ibid., Volume 2, p. 478.
- <sup>51</sup>Ibid., Volume 1, p. 169.
- <sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 178.
- <sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 169.
- <sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 176.
- <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 177.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid., pp. 178-179.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 179.
- <sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 179.
- <sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 101.
- <sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 218.
- <sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 103.
- <sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 103.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 322.
- <sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 326.
- <sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 326.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>68</sup>Graetz, Heinrich, History of the Jews (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), Volume 5, p. 118.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 142.



## Chapter IV

Of the three major historians discussed in the previous chapter, only one goes into any depth in discussing the cause for the outbreak of the Shabbetian movement. However, Gershom Scholem's analysis is not very satisfactory. None of the three approaches the problem as it was set up in the first chapter. I have maintained that the Jewish communities in Turkey and elsewhere in 1665, were in a state of serious decline, and thus were ripe for such a messianic movement. In the same way, this occurred in non-Jewish medieval environments and in modern Germany, where Nazism, as a religion of sorts was to solve all of German's economic and political problems.

The Jews of that period were well-acquainted with the Cabala as it had been popularized by Isaac Luria and his school of Cabalists in Safed. This popular conception, or symbol system, was appealed to as the basis for the Shabbetian messianic movement by the leaders of that movement. But did the leaders of the movement really believe in the symbols and ideas they were espousing? If the time was ripe for a messianic movement among the Jews, what set it off? If the overriding cause was the economic and social situation, without which there could have been no such movement; was there an immediate cause which lit the fuse? Was Shabbetai Zevi the immediate cause, or were there other individuals and interests behind him which propelled him onto the world Jewish scene? This latter would seem to be the case since

Shabbetai Zevi, himself, was nothing extraordinary. Until he went to Gaza, he was only one of what must have been a large number of Cabalists in the area, with perhaps a few oddities of his own tacked on. Beyond the well-known facts regarding the course of Shabbetai's career as related in the first chapter, what other information can be gleaned from the sources that might help in building a stronger foundation for the outbreak and the success, though shortlived, of the Shabbetian movement?

Shabbetai's father was originally a chicken and egg dealer. He became an agent for English merchants when Izmir became a trading center between 1625 and 1650, during one of the numerous wars between Turkey and Venice. He became wealthy, as did his other sons. These Jews then were not isolated from the countries of Europe. Merchants from Italy, Holland, France, and England, lived in Izmir. Gershom Scholem conjectures that Shabbetai Zevi gained a knowledge of the languages of Europe from contact with these merchants. He gives as the reason for the use of Jewish merchants, their knowledge of languages of East and West.<sup>1</sup> We might also add that these Jews might have been valuable as agents, because of their contacts with the Jews of Western Europe. The Jews of Turkey traded with the capitalists of Amsterdam and Hamburg through Venice and Leghorn. Speaking of economics, it is interesting to note Dubnow's observation that the Jews of East and West were closely linked and that the three port cities of



Izmir, Constantinople, and Salonica were the centers of the Shabbetai movement.<sup>2</sup>

When Shabbetai Zevi left Izmir around 1651, he went to Egypt, where he came into close contact with Raphael Joseph Chelebi. Chelebi was the head of the Egyptian treasury, mintmaster, a banker, and involved in commerce. He was also the Nagid of the Jewish community in Egypt. Also, he was inclined to *hiz'ion* and asceticism. Raphael Joseph brought Shabbetai into contact with Samuel Vital, the son of the Cabalist Hayyim Vital. Shabbetai thus became a part of Raphael Joseph's Cabalistic circle.<sup>3</sup> Shabbetai spent some months or years in Cairo. Coming through in the sources is some notion that Shabbetai was first promoted or first promoted himself as the Messiah during this first visit to Egypt. Graetz notes that, "He appears to have partially revealed his messianic plans to Raphael."<sup>4</sup> At this time, he married his third wife, Sarah, a prostitute who had proclaimed in Livorno that she was to marry the Messiah. She was brought to Raphael's house and married to Shabbetai.<sup>5</sup> Pinheiro in Leghorn wrote to Shabbetai of her claims, and he immediately claimed her as his bride. Chelebi had her escorted to Cairo.<sup>6</sup> Though Scholem maintains it is mixed up, one source claims that she was the first who awakened in him the notion that he was the Messiah.<sup>7</sup> Even before meeting Nathan, then, a case can be made for some messianic rumblings on the part of Shabbetai and/or his supporters.

The sources are not clear as to whether Shabbetai was in Cairo once or twice, nor during which visit he met his wife; nor whether he met Nathan on his return to Jerusalem the first or second time. Each historian reconstructs the events in a slightly different manner. But all seem to agree that Shabbetai Zevi first met Nathan in 1665, after his marriage to Sarah. Scholem's account has it that he married Sarah on his first trip to Cairo, around 1661, and met Nathan on his return to Jerusalem, after his second visit to Cairo, when he was sent there to collect charity. Given the number of years involved, this account seems most reasonable.

Shabbetai was chosen to go to Cairo to collect charity to enable Jerusalem to pay its increased taxes to the Turkish government. It apparently was wellknown that Shabbetai was a friend of the wealthy Raphael Joseph. And on this account, and because his brothers were also well-known, he was sent. Interestingly enough, Scholem credits him with an understanding of financial matters. During this period, he was mentally stable and his mission was a success.<sup>8</sup> On his return from Cairo, Shabbetai stopped at Gaza, and made the acquaintance of Nathan.<sup>9</sup> Nathan had, according to the sources, great communal influence as the center of a movement to repentance and *hinejs liph*. His reputation had spread beyond Gaza to Egypt. Raphael Joseph made his acquaintance through a messenger in 1665. Later, a certain Rabbi Samuel Gandour,

one of the circle around Raphael Joseph, became his confidant and constant companion.<sup>10</sup>

In Egypt, Shabbetai heard of Nathan. They met. From this moment, begins the Shabbetaim movement. It would seem that Nathan had a great amount of influence over Shabbetai. Some sources indicate that Nathan immediately recognized Shabbetai as the Messiah. This position is held by Scholem and Dubnow,<sup>11</sup> though Scholem admits that Shabbetai had to be persuaded to accept the role of Messiah.<sup>12</sup> Nathan certainly always directed the movement. Shabbetai Zevi was the focal point, but the barrage of propaganda that descended on the Jewish world came from Gaza. Following his expulsion from Jerusalem, Shabbetai had little to do with the flowering of the movement. This depended on what happened in Gaza, or better, what legend says happened in Gaza. This Scholem himself admits.<sup>13</sup> In some way, then, the Shabbetaim movement arose out of the meeting between Nathan and Shabbetai. The sources do not say exactly what happened. We do know that Shabbetai entered Gaza either as a mystic or as a mentally unbalanced person and came out as the Messiah. The obvious deduction is that Nathan was able to gain a powerful hold over Shabbetai, perhaps by recognizing Shabbetai's instability and by manipulating his delusions or illusions of grandeur.

Apparently, also, Nathan had heard of Shabbetai before this. The vision that Nathan claimed to have had, mentions Shabbetai by name. If one is not willing to accept Nathan

as a prophet, and I am not, then how did he know of Shabbetai Scholem, indeed, holds that Nathan had the vision before he met Shabbetai.<sup>14</sup> It should be noted in this connection, that Nathan had close contact with the circle of Raphael Joseph, as mentioned above, and these people were well-acquainted with Shabbetai. They could have informed Nathan that Shabbetai was coming to Cairo, if they had any messianic pretensions for Shabbetai. Reports of Nathan and Shabbetai began to reach Europe in October and November of 1665. These were sent via Italy to the West. There were close family and merchant ties everywhere. Particularly close, were the ties that existed between the children of Marranoes.<sup>14a</sup> Also, there is the possibility that the two had met previously, when Shabbetai made his first trip from Cairo to Jerusalem, or while he was in Jerusalem, or on his way from Jerusalem back to Cairo. The other possibility, which would negate this discussion, is that Nathan had the vision after he met Shabbetai.

Be that as it may, the propaganda barrage that followed would appear to have been planned. The vision was supposed to have occurred near Shavous in 1665. Within a short period of a few months, the vision had been spread over the entire Jewish world. It was read in Constantinople, Venice, Amsterdam, Hamburg, London, and Posen, to name only a few of the many places. In it Nathan proclaimed:

"אמ'נו ב' ישראל, ידוע לך לכו, שגורר אש'נו ב' י'  
 שוררנא (א'ל'א'ר), ו'קרא א'ו ש'ה' ל'ב', א'ר א'רר

וְהָיָה שֶׁלֹּא יִקְרָא כֹהֵן מִלְכָּא נִפְלֵאָה עַל מִנְיָן שִׁנְיָה  
 15" וְיִפְלֵאָה עַל מִנְיָן שִׁנְיָה  
 וְיִפְלֵאָה עַל מִנְיָן שִׁנְיָה

And to Raphael Joseph: "In a year and a few months he will wrest the Empire from the sultan of Turkey...."16

In order for these letters to have so quickly become known, those who sent them must certainly have had contacts in other parts of the Jewish world. Trade was brisk between the Jews in Northwest Europe and those of the Levant by way of Italy, which is of course, the route followed by these letters. One might take note of the program envisioned for the Messiah. There is more here than the redemption of the Jewish people to their land. What does wresting the Turkish Empire away from the Sultan have to do with the Jews returning to the Holy Land? Why is Germany the only Christian nation to be conquered?

Shabbetai returned to Jerusalem, where he was opposed by the rabbinical authorities. Perhaps the rabbis there took seriously the prophecies regarding the Jewish conquest of the Turkish Empire, and therefore were afraid of persecution from the local Turkish ruler.17 Or, they were angry because he distributed the money collected in Egypt according to his own discretion and favored his own followers.18 These rabbis had seen Shabbetai before. Why should their opinion of him change now? They had heard about his abrogation of the Fast on the seventeenth of Tamuz. Now Shabbetai wanted to perform a sacrifice on the Temple site, on the seventeenth of Tamuz.

He had become a threat to their authority. They apparently tried various ways of getting rid of him, but failed. At one point, he was arrested by the Kadi (the local Turkish ruler), but was released. This was seen by the "believers" as a great victory. Sasportas does not know of Shabbetai's "strange deeds."<sup>19</sup> He heard only that Shabbetai *היה נביא* "20 *היה נביא* 'על פסוקים וכו' . Whatever he did or whatever the reasons the rabbis opposed him, Shabbetai quickly became a celebrity in Jerusalem. If Nathan's propaganda machine had not made him one even before he arrived there. He soon left Jerusalem. Whether he was driven out or left voluntarily, is a matter of debate. Before leaving, however, Nathan declared that from now on, Gaza and not Jerusalem would be the sacred city and the center of the movement. Missionaries were also dispatched ahead of Shabbetai to proclaim that the Messiah had come in the person of Shabbetai Zevi.<sup>21</sup>

In Jerusalem, we meet a figure of whom it would be interesting to know more about. Samuel Primo accompanied Shabbetai when he left Jerusalem in the office of private secretary. But Primo was much more than a secretary. He was an early follower and a zealous recruiting agent. "....he had a secret plan to be accomplished through the Messiah. He appears to have made use of Shabbetai more than to have been employed by him."<sup>22</sup> Kastein also maintains that Primo had all the ideas which he would lay before Shabbetai. He

edited anything Shabbetai said outside of his own circle. It was a relationship of master to slave. He believed in Shabbetai as the Messiah, but felt he was weak. "....It was imperative for him to keep the Messiah under his thumb."<sup>23</sup> Another author, notes that Primo was "cleverly managing to give to the advent of the Pseudo-Messiah an air of dignity."<sup>24</sup> And Scholem himself says that it was Primo who wrote most of the letters that came out of Gallipoli.<sup>25</sup>

One might well speculate that there is more here than meets the eye. Like Nathan, Primo was able to maintain a large amount of influence over Shabbetai. He appeared to have used him for his own purposes. How Primo met Shabbetai is uncertain, though he may have travelled with Shabbetai before he arrived in Jerusalem. We must pose the question; was Shabbetai Zevi being used by other people for their own purposes? He was not in control of his own actions and he was playing no part in the flowering of the movement which was then breaking forth around his name.

The propaganda machine developed by the leaders of the movement bears looking into. After Shabbetai left Gaza, people began to flock there to receive *ש'ן* and listen to the preaching of Nathan. The essence of this preaching was a call to repentance and prayer<sup>26</sup> (and, presumably, to Shabbetai Zevi). This movement of repentance was part of the Shabbetian program and spread over the Jewish world along with fasting and asceticism. Somehow the Jews in great numbers

were driven to extremes to achieve this repentance and it made a great impression on them.<sup>27</sup> This kind of appeal in messianic movements is not unusual. It happened in the middle ages when certain flaggelant movements became revolutionary movements, against whom force was brought by the authorities.<sup>27a</sup> We shall return later to the role of the leaders of these flaggelant movements. Suffice it to say that apparently when people are raised to such heights of fanaticism, they are easily manipulated by those who have issued the call to repentance, asceticism or what have you.

This call to repentance was part of the propaganda of the Shabbetians. This was under the direction of Samuel Primo and Nathan of Gaza. It had begun with the first circulars, describing Nathan's vision, and in the letter to Raphael Joseph, quoted above. Primo reported constantly on Shabbetai's doings, Nathan continued to send circulars from Palestine, and the two messengers mentioned above, made certain that everyone was kept aware of the miraculous doings of the Messiah.<sup>28</sup> Legends grew quickly. The volume of these letters and legends reached such proportions, and their contents became so absurd, that the rabbis of Constantinople investigated to see if someone was forging them. They found a factory devoted to these forgeries "to commercialize the people's belief in the miraculous."<sup>29</sup> Through the first half of 1666, Nathan continued his work of sending letters on behalf of Shabbetai Zevi.<sup>30</sup>



From Jerusalem, Shabbetai went to Izmir, arriving there around Succos, 1665. He lived alone until around Hanukkah. His brothers, who previously had been embarrassed by him, now received him with open arms. He answered questions and received letters. His exhilaration returned during Hanukkah, and things began to pop once again.<sup>31</sup> He received honorary messages from persons who had been to see Nathan. They scattered propaganda and Nathan's writings, and testified to Shabbetai's messianship. (Was this a way to bring Shabbetai out of his mental depression?) Now began real tumult, Shabbetai and the masses, feeding on each other's ecstasy.<sup>32</sup> In Izmir, the rabbinic authorities were against him, but they had lost all authority. The moneyed classes, merchants and important people, were on his side. His family began to speak loudly of his messianship. The masses also followed him.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting to note the power held and obtained so quickly by Shabbetai in Izmir. It would seem that the way was paved for him by the propagandists. Kastein suggests that his brothers played a great part in his ready acceptance. That they were distributing their wealth in Shabbetai's interest among the lower classes. Whatever their motives, the "practical result was the purchase of votes for the Messiah."<sup>34</sup> One may safely assume these were rational men. (Irrational men are not successful businessmen.) Also, let us remember their sudden change in attitude to their brother. Before they

had been embarrassed by him, now they welcomed him with open arms. Again, we come to the question of power behind the throne. Were others using Shabbetai for their own purposes? One might suggest that wherever Shabbetai goes, the way has been prepared for him. Nathan had had his vision in Gaza, Primo gave him direction in Jerusalem; in Izmir his brothers had prepared the way with money. And always the flow of propaganda: letters, circulars, legends, reports of miracles. It would be rather difficult, but not impossible, to establish a connection between Shabbetai's brothers and Nathan and Raphael Joseph. There is, furthermore, the possibility of a connection between these Jewish businessmen of the Levant and Jewish capitalists in Amsterdam and Hamburg. We know they were connected for business purposes. Indeed, Jews may have opened up trade between Amsterdam and the Levant.<sup>34a</sup> But did they all have a common self-interest in the Shabbetian movement? Let us not forget that a Turkey controlled by Jews would be most beneficial to these people. Is this a far-fetched notion? No. First of all, this was part of the program envisioned by Nathan and was in the letter Nathan wrote to Raphael Joseph. Secondly, Turkey was weak and the Jews composed a large part of the population. Thirdly, the Jews were concentrated in the port cities of Constantinople, Salonica, and Izmir. Most of the commerce with the West was in the hands of Jews.<sup>35</sup> And fourthly, coming through in the sources is an indication of the tremendous power held by

Shabbetai albeit for a short time in Izmir and Constantinople.

He quickly gained authority over the community. People honored him by kissing his hands. Even his opponents acquiesced out of fear.<sup>36</sup> The rabbinic authorities were ignored. "...Shabbetai Zevi became sole ruler in the community, and could lead the Jewish population at will,...the Jews of Smyrna (Izmir) feared,...the Turkish Kadis very little." Or they were bribed into silence.<sup>37</sup> At one point, he went to see the Kadi of the city. He denounced his opponents to him. Whether the Kadi did anything is unlikely, but it is somewhat surprising that Shabbetai was not arrested. Reports of the tumult reached Constantinople. Orders came back for Shabbetai's arrest; but he had already sailed for Constantinople.<sup>38</sup>

Opponents dared not publicly come out against him. Every expression of hostility reached his ears, and he felt justified in taking action against his opponents.<sup>39</sup> He paid no attention to the Turkish Kadi nor did he have to play the part of informer to the Kadi. He had a bodyguard who could handle opponents. Aaron de la Papa was opposed and lost his job.<sup>40</sup>

The non-Jewish elements in the city began to complain when trade and commerce were disrupted. The deposition of the Sultan was being discussed openly in the streets. The Kadi summoned the rabbis, but they were in the best position since the whole Jewish community could not be arrested. The Kadi made some threats which the Shabbetians proceeded to

ignore. The Kadi was bribed to do nothing.<sup>41</sup> Whatever the Kadi could or could not have done, the Jews of Izmir were certainly not afraid of him. When the Kadi ordered Shabbetai to leave for Constantinople, Shabbetai ignored the order.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Shabbetai left for Constantinople at the end of December, 1665.

Because of a storm, Shabbetai's ship did not arrive in the capital of the Turkish Empire until February of 1666.<sup>43</sup> He was arrested immediately upon landing. Obviously, the tumult that had occurred in Izmir, had reached the ears of the Vizier and the Sultan, and they did not wish the same thing to happen in Constantinople. The Jews of Constantinople were already reaching heights of enthusiasm. The Sultan may have simply been afraid of what might occur. There is also the likelihood that the Jewish opposition to Shabbetai warned the Sultan of the danger.<sup>44</sup>

Was there a danger? Was it more apparent than real? The historians mention the fact that Shabbetai Zevi went to Constantinople to take the crown from the Sultan of Turkey. However, no one seems to take this seriously. But the fact remains, that the Turkish rulers were so anxious to arrest Shabbetai, that they did so even before he could set foot in the capital city. And let us recall the program for the Messiah envisioned in Nathan's first "vision." Shabbetai Zevi was the Messiah, whose purpose it was to become the ruler of Turkey. He had set out from Izmir "...not attempting to

conceal the object of his journey."<sup>45</sup> And this in the eyes of the Turkish authorities was high treason. The dangers seemed real enough to the Turks. (So real, in fact, that the Sultan and the Vizier were directly involved in the arrest of Shabbetai Zevi.) Something else worried the Turks. Many Jews were abandoning their homes to go to Palestine. This worried the rulers more than words. Since economic life and relations with Western Europe were in the hands of the Jews, if they left, the Turkish economy would be in a precarious position.<sup>46</sup> Now, of course, if it was truly the intention of the Shabbetians to oust the Sultan, one way would be to destroy the economy by having all the Jews pick up and leave, thus directing the European merchants to Jerusalem (or Gaza) rather than to Constantinople.

Arresting Shabbetai, however, did not stop the movement. In the fortress at Gallipoli, he held court before his admirers. But the authorities did nothing overt against him. In the turmoil that existed there, why did they do nothing? After all, the Turks were not averse to simply doing away with individuals who even hinted at treason. And here, the Jewish Messiah was holding court in oriental pomp and splendor. Could it be that his power was so great that they did not dare to touch him? Were there too many thousands who believed in him and might revolt if physical harm were done their Messiah? "There was a large consensus of opinion...which agreed that it would have been quite easy for him to select twenty thousand

men from his army of followers...to arm them and force the Sultan to abandon his rights over the Holy Land...."<sup>47</sup>

But months passed and Shabbetai did nothing.

But something had to be done. And the Turks did it. They realized that Shabbetai could not be made into a martyr. Kastein puts it well:

The object to be achieved was two fold-- the Messiah was to be let live but he must be rendered harmless, whilst the movement behind him must at the same time be given its death-blow.<sup>48</sup>

Using whatever insights they had into Shabbetai's character or whatever threats were necessary, the Turkish authorities persuaded the Jewish Messiah, Shabbetai Zevi, to convert to Islam. By depriving the Shabbetian movement of its leader, and destroying its faith in him, the movement itself was destroyed.

I have, in this short reconstruction, attempted to approach Shabbetai Zevi and the Shabbetian movement only from the bare facts and to connect these facts in some reasonable manner. What I have not done, is to invest the incidents and characters who took part in this movement with a mystical profundity which we cannot know they had, as did Gershom Scholem, or merely to approach the incident negatively as did Graetz. I have approached Shabbetai Zevi as a deluded character, not as a Messiah; and have refused to see Nathan as a prophet. Raphael Joseph Chelebi may have had mystical interests, but it is also obvious that he was a hard-nosed

businessman. How could the mintmaster to the Sultan of Egypt, be a mystic in everything he did and still be successful in the kind of job he had? The propaganda that flooded the Jewish world was consciously produced. If Nathan of Gaza invents a legend, how can we give any credence to the legend, to Nathan's trustworthiness, or to his belief in the legend? And, finally, some attention must be paid to the avowed program of the Shabbetian movement which was to take over the Turkish Empire and to the evident power that Shabbetai Zevi held in Izmir and Constantinople.

When all of the pieces of the puzzle are put together, what is the picture that emerges? It would seem that Shabbetai Zevi was used by certain individuals to further their own private interests. The ultimate goal being the take over of the Turkish Empire. It would, of course, be beneficial for Jewish merchants in Western Europe, if Turkey were under Jewish control. The reasons why this notion is not very far-fetched, were given above.

I have mentioned several times, the close connection that existed between the Jewish merchants and capitalists of East and West. These men appear in the Shabbetian movement also. First, Shabbetai's brothers are successful businessmen. Then, Raphael Joseph Chelebi, in whose circle Shabbetai traveled, was a banker and businessman, as well as mintmaster in Egypt. He had early contact with Nathan of Gaza, and one of his intimates, Abraham Gandour, became

Nathan's confidant. And thirdly, there is the interest in the Shabbetian movement exhibited by the capitalists of Amsterdam, Hamburg, and London, as well as those in Italy. We can only conjecture as to what contact there may have been between these people. But there are a few connections one can point to. Raphael Joseph and Nathan are aware of each other. We suggested before, that Nathan may have been informed that Shabbetai was traveling to Gaza before he got there; and Nathan wrote one of his first letters to Raphael Joseph after he revealed his vision to Shabbetai. Also, Raphael Joseph apparently sounded out Shabbetai's messianic inclinations on his first visit to Cairo.<sup>49</sup> Another interesting point is the change of attitude toward Shabbetai on the part of his brothers, after the movement broke out. Regarding the Jews of Western Europe, we know there were trade connections with them.

How was Shabbetai Zevi manipulated? He was mentally quite unstable. He was open to influence from others. Early, he thought in terms of being the Messiah. He had certain characteristics of megalomania. It would not be difficult for sharp-eyed people to recognize and manipulate his mental weaknesses. There are several persons we can point to as possible manipulators. Raphael Joseph probed him on his first visit to Cairo. His third wife, Sarah, according to at least one source, first awakened in him the notion that he was the Messiah. She was not the most savory



character around. Why would she not be willing to take part in what might prove to be a profitable deception? Given Shabbetai's sexual difficulties, it is interesting to speculate on the power a known prostitute might have over him. Then there is Nathan, who launched him on his career and whose influence over Shabbetai Zevi is not denied by anyone. He persuaded Shabbetai to accept the role. It was to him that Shabbetai went with his mental difficulties, and to whom he poured out the trials of his soul. And finally, we have Samuel Primo, who as Shabbetai's secretary, saw to it that Shabbetai came into contact only with certain people. He wrote letters in Shabbetai's name. All the ideas were his. And one supposes that he made certain that Shabbetai received the proper information and praise to bolster his megalomania. Indeed, one feels a little sorry for one so completely and yet so subtly under the thumb of others.

Examples from medieval messianic movement fortifies the possibility of this kind of manipulation to achieve other purposes. In the early thirteenth century, a certain Hermit was used by the Flemish resistance to France. He was recognized as the nephew of a certain Baldwin, a Flemish hero. He was crowned. Thousands came to meet him. Ambassadors were sent, and the King of England offered a treaty of alliance. Ultimately he was unmasked and hanged.<sup>50</sup> A flagellant movement in the fourteenth century was only ended by force. The Pope, in his bill against the insurgents, recognized that the people

were being led by heretics who knew very well what they were doing.<sup>51</sup> Norman Cohn asks "...was there...some self-appointed Messiah who was trying by means of the flagellant movement to bring about a state of affairs in which he could publicly assume the role of eschatological saviour?"<sup>52</sup> The sources indicate this is probable. In 1320, a boy had a vision. But a mass movement came into being only when propaganda and support was organized by an apostate monk and an unfrocked priest. And in the fifteenth century a messianic movement centered around a certain Hans Bohm. He "...had been exploited by men who were far shrewder than he" by certain local lords playing politics. A hermit exercised control over him, inspired him and told him what to say. "...It was the hermit who turned the religious pilgrimage into a revolutionary movement."<sup>53</sup> It is possible then, for leaders behind the scenes to manipulate and use certain personalities and ideologies for their own purposes. Leaders of these movements knew what they were doing. As in the Shabbetian movement, they were educated. "The clergy (was) ...dismayed by the subtlety and eloquence of their teaching and by the skill with which they handled abstruse theological concepts."<sup>54</sup> And finally, throughout Norman Cohn's book, the point is made that while the apocalyptic literature existed and these movements used this literature, the basic cause for the outbreak of these movements is social and economic. The chiliastic and apocalyptic words of themselves, do not produce such outbreaks,

any more than could the words of the Cabala. John Ball's followers were found among those "envious of the rich and the nobility."<sup>55</sup> Such movements come about at a time when people are caught up in the insecurities of changing times.<sup>56</sup> The symbolic system of the Lurianic Cabala has been in existence for a century. But, given the deteriorating situation of the Jews of the Levant in the middle of the seventeenth century, it became something for people to fall back on. Combine this with the proclamation of a Messiah, with the judicious use of propaganda and the correct type of appeal, such a movement breaks out. One supposes that not all such movements are used by those with ulterior motives. But in the case of the Shabbetian movement, some persons were using the symbolic system of Cabala to achieve their own purposes.

Those people failed, because of the instability of Shabbetai Zevi. He was not able to act when the movement was at its height. He waited as enthusiasm subsided. When put into a dangerous situation, he immediately capitulated. And, finally, the objectives of the leaders was probably beyond their capabilities, especially in regard to the lack of communications (a lack more apparent to us than to them). At all events, the lesson for us is clear. We must be on guard against any and all of those who would manipulate the symbols and ideals we consider important. And who would manipulate us as well.

## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup>Scholem, Gershom, Volume 1, p. 86. (1117 'N'2 h'ich222 21222 23 'h2c  
5"2e h, 21/2 22: 2121-2h)
- <sup>2</sup>Dubnow, Simon, p. 25. (221 'N'2 21222 22 h12 2121 2222 22 'N' 222  
(1958, 222, 2121-2h), 2121 2122)
- <sup>3</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 143.
- <sup>4</sup>Graetz, Heinrich, History of the Jews (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), Volume 5, p. 125.
- <sup>5</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 29.
- <sup>6</sup>Kastein, Joseph: The Messiah of Ismir, translated by Huntley Paterson, (New York: Viking Press, 1931), p. 118.
- <sup>7</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 146.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 157.
- <sup>9</sup>For Nathan's background see above, p. 32ff.
- <sup>10</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 174-75.
- <sup>11</sup>See above, p. 33.
- <sup>12</sup>See above, p. 5.
- <sup>13</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 205.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 178.
- <sup>14a</sup>Ibid., Volume 2, p. 384.
- <sup>15</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 29.
- <sup>16</sup>Kastein, op. cit., p. 125.
- <sup>17</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 30.
- <sup>18</sup>Graetz, op. cit., p. 132.
- <sup>19</sup>Scholem, op. cit., Volume 1, p. 194ff.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

- 21 Graetz, op. cit., pp. 132-33.
- 22 Ibid., p. 133.
- 23 Kastein, op. cit., pp. 127-28.
- 24 Jewish Encyclopedia, Volume 10, p. 198.
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- 39 see above, p. 8.

<sup>40</sup>Kastein, op. cit., pp. 162-62.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 175ff.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>43</sup>Dubnow, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>44</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 361ff.

<sup>45</sup>Kastein, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>46</sup>Scholem, op. cit., p. 367.

<sup>47</sup>Kastein, op. cit., p. 258.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>49</sup>See above p. 65.

<sup>50</sup>Cohn, op. cit., pp. 78-81.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 248-49.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

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