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# THESIS

TOPIC:
The Sabbatean Movement in Yemen and its outcome:
Expulsion of Mawza

Ronnie Kehati
March 1, 2001

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## BRIEF HISTORICAL SYNOPSIS OF THE YEMENITE JEWS

### INTRODUCTION

Except for references to a Jewish king from existing Himyar until 629 C.E. and to the most noted Jewish convert to Islam, Kaab al-akhbas, we have no historical data about the existence of Jewish community in Yemen. Only towards the end of the 9th century C.E. do we learn about Yemenite Jews from both Jewish and Muslim sources. During this period that the Zaydi dynasty was founded in Yemen which would rule Yemen until 1962. Its founder was Imam Yahyâ al-Hâdî, who in 897 C.E. signed a pact between the Jewish and Christian communities in Najrân, a city in Northern Yemen. The pact granted Jews and Christians permission not only to keep the land they possessed before the Muslim military victory, but land purchased after it, as well. Remarkably, no taxes were decreed on this land except for the one-ninth of the yield from the recently purchased properties; no new taxes were imposed on the old land. Muhammad's poll tax (*jizyah*) however continued. There is no mention in the pact of any discriminatory codes that were imposed and were popular in other Muslim countries, originating with Umayyid caliph Umar the II (717-729 CE). "It should be mentioned, moreover, that Yahya's pact was retained in Zaydi sources."[1]

The principal data we have linking the Yemenite Jews to the center of the Jewish people in Babylonia begins in the 10th century. The Great

[1] Tôbî, Yôsef. *The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture*, Brill, Laiden, Boston, Koln, 1999. p. 4.

Academies in Iraq sent messengers to obtain "monies collected for them by Jewish communities in Yemen."[2] We discover this from letters dispatched by the leaders of the academies (*Geonai* Baghdad) to Jewish Yemenite public figures. The letters were discovered in the famed Cairo Genizah, one of the prime sources of our understanding of medieval Yemenite Jewry as it is of the history of Mediterranean and Eastern Jewry. Yemenite Jews were attracted to both the important political and spiritual Jewish centers in the East, Abbasid, Baghdad and Fatimid, Cairo. Opting for one over the other was far from an easy undertaking. We are aware of confrontations within the Yemenite Jewish community over this and other issues. For example, there were controversies as to which academy should receive the monetary donations or which of the Presidents (*negidim)* in Baghdad or Cairo should be referred to in the synagogue devotions and prayers?

This dispute was resolved with the rise of Maimonides as the spiritual Jewish leader of Egypt. His boundless authority over Yemenite Jews cannot be overstated. We find Maimonides's imprint on almost every aspect of their earthly, as well as their spiritual life.[3]

From the Genizah documents, we may conclude that the economic situation of Yemenite Jewry up to the middle of the 13th century was tolerable. Furthermore, Aden, the southern entrance to the country, was

[2] Ibid. p. 7.
[3] Alexander, T. *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore*, 1990, V. 11-12, pp. 102-120.

the most significant port on the oceanic trading route adjoining the Far East and the Mediterranean. This situation changed with the collapse of the Ayyubi dynasty in Cairo and the ascension of the Mamlukes. Yemen itself was governed by the Rasuli dynasty and the relations of the Jewish community with the outside world declined. Nevertheless, there is no evidence of any oppression directed against Jews until 1454 C.E. The Rasuli era in Jewish Yemenite history is also characterized by its notable religious and literary achievements that is primarily due to the influence by Maimonidean works and philosophy.

The crucial period of the social and economic situation of Yemenite Jews in modern times occurred during the ascension of the Banî Ṭahîr dynasty in Southern Yemen in 1454. This dynasty exhibited an acerbic attitude towards the Jews. It removed nearly all the Jews from the regions in which they resided claiming that the land was holy ground *(Dar-al-Islam)* and non-Muslims may not inhabit. Their true aim, however, was to chastise the Jews because of a Messianic movement that had developed among them. This Messianic movement was led by an unnamed Jew, who also had some Muslim followers. The invasion of the Mamlukes in the first years of the 16th century and the ensuing conquest of the country by the Ottomans did not ameliorate the situation of the Jews. In many instances, a decline occurred because of religious and political clashes between the opposing forces in the northern part of the country, the

Zaydis, and the established ruler, the Ottomans. Both abused the Jews. The Zaydis accused the Jews of conspiring with the foreign tyrant, while the Ottomans persecuted the Jews to demonstrate their alleged empathy with the Muslim populace.

Despite that, under Ottoman control (1536-1635) the Jews had some measure of protection. Conditions changed when the Zaydis triumphed and drove the Ottomans from the country. Jews, now, were completely subject to the benevolence, and sporadically, to the animosity of the Zaydis. The first display of animosity occurred during the rule of the Imam al-Mutawakkil Ismâ`îl (1644-1676). In the year 1667, a group of San'a Jews under the leadership of Shelomo Jamal, one of their rabbis, declared their messianic yearnings in association with the Sabbatean movement. Consequently, the Imam was determined to deprive them of all their rights as a safeguarded religious minority *(Dhima)*. Prior to his death, he commanded his successor al-Mu'ayyad Ahmad (1676-1680) to banish the Jews from the country unless they converted to Islam. That wish was executed in 1679, preceded by the seizure of Jewish property and the destruction of their synagogues. The intervention of some of the Muslim leaders however, permitted the Jews to stay in Mawza, a city near the Red Sea port in West Yemen. This decree was disastrous for the Jews, impacting negatively upon their economic, political, demographic and spiritual life (more than half of the Jews disappeared during this

period).[4] Dislocated from their age-old homes, Jews were cut off from their heritage. When they returned from their banishment, they had to construct new neighborhoods outside the city walls and far from the homes in Muslim villages to prevent Jewish "contamination." Thenceforth, they were considered as impure persons, barred from direct communication with Muslims. Furthermore, Yemenite Jewry sustained a decline of their social and moral position resulting from the exile and the inadequacy of their temporal and spiritual leadership. There is even some indication that prostitution was practiced in the Jewish community, where it has hitherto never existed.

Yet, the dreadful results of the events of 1667-1680 were followed by a period of reinvigorated growth. This development occurred during the years 1740-1800, under the leadership of Shalom 'Iraqi, who served as the treasurer under three successive Imams, and of Rabbi Yihye Sâlih.[5] These two figures shaped the face of Jewish-Yemenite society, through the middle of the twentieth century. Yemenite Jewry, in the 19th century, suffered incessant subjugation, not because of solely anti-Jewish sentiments or policies, but because of the collapse of the entire central authority, as a result of external and internal circumstances. By 1872, the condition improved, when the Ottomans again occupied the country.

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[4] Ratzabi, Y. **NidaheYisrael**, chapter on Yemenite Jewry; documents relating to the history of Yemen's Jewry, *Sfunot*, Vol.II, pp. 290-2; Korah, A. **Divery Hayamim**, pp. 8-12; Korah, A. *Se'arat Teyman*, p.7.

[5] Tobi, Y. *"The Authority of the Community of San'a over the other Communities of Yemen,"* Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, (1974), p.3.

Immigration was a means used by the Jews of Yemen to renew their relationship with the Land of Israel. They established communities in Yaffo and Jerusalem, and later in the new colonies. For the most part, the Ottomans nullified all discriminatory decrees. Jews again became a tolerated minority required to pay the poll tax. This was the result of the *tanẓîmât,* a group of broad amendments promulgated by the Ottoman Empire. In truth, though, it made little difference; Jewish-Muslim relations steadily deteriorated.

The situation of the Jews declined again after 1918, when the Ottomans departed Yemen. The contumacious Imam Yaḥyâ ibn Ḥusayn al-Hâdi (1904-l948), finally became the only actual ruler of the country. He reintroduced all traditional decrees pertaining to Jews, including the poll tax when he took control of San'a for six months in 1905, and demolished new synagogues constructed in San'a during the Ottoman period. He forbade the emigration of Jews from Yemen and impaired their economic system. The Zaydi edict of orphans was activated. In spite of this, the Imam shielded the Jews in their association with the Muslim majority and its leadership. Muslims who persecuted them were punished. Upon his assassination in 1948, the Jews believed that they had lost their great protector. His assassination occurred exactly at the time of the establishment of the state of Israel. Yemenite Jews took advantage of the

proposal made by the leaders of the new state that they immigrate to Israel and the new Imam, Ahmad al-Mahdi, agreed to their departure.[6]

[6] Goitein, S.D. (1974). **Jews and Arabs: Their Contact through the Ages**, (3rd revised ed.), Schoken Books, New York, pp. 235-239.

## THE SABBATEAN MOVEMENT IN YEMEN

### EXPULSION TO MAWZA

Within Yemen, messianism was historically and culturally prevalent in both Jewish and Muslim societies. For Jews, it involved their anticipation of redemption by a descendent of Davidic ancestry, who would reestablish the people in exile in the land of Israel and restore the Jewish kingdom. An early evidence of this anticipation was in the prayer recited during Rosh Hashanah calling for the coming of Zerubavel ben She'alti'el, who, had been the savior of Israel during the Babylonian exile.[7] While Muslims, according to the Shiite doctrine, believed that the progeny of the daughter of Mohammed would reappear after a long concealment to restore the dominion of justice in the world. This messianic concept was firmly established in ancient Judaism, but had persistently stimulated Jewish Messianic movements in the middle ages, in Yemen as well as other countries.[8] Different sects in Islam had a different *mâhdî* belief. It is possible that the connection between Jewish messianism in Yemen and Islam dates back to the rise of the Zaydis's reign.[9] The Zaydis's belief in the *mâhdî*

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[7] It is customary for Yemenite Jews to recite the following passage after the blowing of the shofar during the Rosh Hashana service: *"On the same way you have heard the sound of this shofar, Zerubabel the son of She'altiel will come and blow the big shofar, and he will gather you from the four corners of the world, and will settle you in the court of the Temple.* See: **Pirqe De-Ribbi Eli'ezer,** 31: (last four lines) and **Sālih**, 1971, p.144.

[8] Macdonald, M. *Encyclopedia of Islam, "Mahdi in Islam,"* Vol.III, pp. 111-115.

[9] Hirschberg, H.Z. (1947), *"Maqrun ha'al ha-qarnayim ve-'ezra: 'uzayr ben allah, Leshonenu"* 15, pp. 125-133 (Hebrew); A.Z Eshkoli, **Ha-Tenu'ah Ha-Meshihit Be-Israel**, Jerusalem (Hebrew).
See:Tobi, Y. (1999) **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 49.

triggered a —messianic political movement— that opposed governance according to Zaydi doctrine. Furthermore, we know of false Messiahs that arose in Yemen during the time of Maimonides, in the 15th century and in the 19th century. In the 19th century two Messiahs arose among the Jews and a similar movement spread among messianic Muslims in Yemen. Undoubtedly, Yemenite Muslim apocalyptic writings had a great influence upon Jewish Yemenite apocalyptic writing.[10] Yemenite rulers considered both Jewish and Muslim Messianism as a threat and they relentlessly crushed it. The messianic movement in Yemen in the aftermath of Shabbetai Zevi needs to be carefully studied and against this setting.

Nonetheless, the Shabbetai Zevi the messianic movement in Yemen had some unusual features in contrast to similar movements in other areas because of the central figures of the movement such as Shabbetai Zevi, Nathan Ha-Azzati, and others. Although, the movement did not develop in Yemen but in Israel, the countries of the Ottoman Empire and Europe, it expanded into Yemen because of news that the Messiah had arisen for the Jews. As Gershom Scholem has indicated, the messianic movement in Yemen acquired a regional character because of its almost complete isolation from the western world. Moreover, Lurianic qabbalah and its centrality to the messianic

[10] Ratzabi, Y. (1970). *"Apoqalipsot ve-hishshuve qez be-yahadut teman," Mehqere Ha-Merkaz Le-Heqer Ha-Folqlor* 1, pp.295-312 (Hebrew).

concept were not received by Yemenite society (however, they were well received in Europe, the Near East, and North Africa). Nevertheless, because of local political developments, messianic passions appealed to Yemenite Jewry during the 1600s.

Through the Zaydis's successful rebellion in 1629, the Ottomans were driven out of Yemen. During Turkish rule, the Jews did not live in peace, particularly in the final years of their hegemony as attested by Rabbi Shalom Shabazi in *Hemdat Yamim* (a commentary to the Torah).[11] However, they faired much worse under the Zaydis because the Zaydis were religious extremists and severe in dealing with the Jews ".[12] In addition to the religious reason there was a national component to the Zaydis anti-Jewish policies. The Zaydi leaders blamed the Jews for supporting the Ottoman rule.[13] Religious fervor deepened when al-Qâsim's son, the Imam Ismâ'îl al-Mutawakkil rose to power in 1644. Notwithstanding, all the events mentioned above; there is no indication in Jewish sources that repressive anti-Jewish policies occurred at dates prior to the events linked to Shabbetai Zevi in 1667. According to different sources, the Jews of Yemen expected the arrival of the Messiah some time during the 17th century because of the

[11] Shabazi, S. (1956) *Hemdat Yamim*. Jerusalem, pp.447-448 (Hebrew); Tobi, Y. (1972a) "Yedi'ot hadashot le-toledot r.shalom shabazi," Jerusalem, pp.45-46 (Hebrew); Tobi, Y. (1999) **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 50.

[12] Tobi, Y. (1986). *"Iyyunim Bi-Mgillat Teman,"* p. 73 Jerusalem, (Hebrew). It discusses the destruction of the synagogue in San'a in 1620 after the Zaydi revolt against the Turks and the expulsion of the Jews from their part of the city.

[13] Ḥibshûsh, S. (1958). *"Qorot Israel Be-Teman,"* ed. Y. Qâfiḥ, *Sefunot* 2, pp. 246-288; Tobi, Y. (1999) **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 50.

appearance of two comets in the year 1619. According to Yisrael Ha-Kohen of Dubayrah, the city of priests in the Shar'ab province in Southern Yemen:

> "And so also at the end [of days], a star shall arise in the east, and it is a star of the messiah; as it says, and there shall be a ruler (yerd) amidst Jacob. Rabbi Yose said: In the language of the Arameans, the east is called yerd. And it spends fifteen days in the east. If it tarries even longer, it is only for the good of Israel; and then you may expect footsteps of the messiah."[14] Then an incident took place where all the sages and elders died in all the cities of Yemen and all the sages died in the city of the priests al-Dubayrah wherein I reside, and I alone remain, and the revered rabbi Yisrael ben Noah, may his name endure forever, and we are still awaiting the footsteps of the Messiah. Perhaps he was born in that year and the time for him to be revealed has not yet arrived, for Moses our master was born in Egypt and the astrologers sensed it but he was not revealed for eighty years.[15] (See Numbers 24:17).

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[14] Langermann, T. (1996), **Yemenite Midrash: Philosophical Commentaries on the Torah**, Harper Collins publishers, New York, p.176.

[15] Tobi, Y. (1999) **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 51.

This incident left its imprint upon the Jewish community in Southern Yemen. Shabazi also mentions it in *Hemdat Yamim* in a remark on the verse above. Shabazi states that he was born in the year that the comet appeared, possibly revealing some of his own messianic aspirations. Yisrael Ha-Kohen's writings had a profound influence on Shabazi.[16] In 1646, Yisrael Ha-Kohen wrote while waiting for the coming of the Messiah: "*Today we have reached the year 1957 of the Selucid era, the year 1646 of Creation, and we are still waiting the coming of the Messiah. Perhaps he will not come until after the passage of eighty years, like Moses," etc.*[17] Thus, Shabazi's poem called *hadal lakh asir nibdal* describes the prophesy of 1619 :[18]

Redemption by a son, In the secret summing, The years of jubilee and Daniel

But hidden, Sealed in religion, And he is not revealed to all Israel

And a new star, Has already risen, Like a wand in God's mercy

And in 1930, On light mist, Two are the savior stars

The son of Joseph, and Yinnon, finally, The two kings of Israel

And in repentence, My lover came, And he shall build a city and a wall.

[16]Tobi, Y. (1999) **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 52.: Rabinowitz, Z.M. (1970), ***Segullat Israel***, (Tel Aviv edition), vol. I, p.19;

[17] Ibid.

[18] According to Tobi 1999 p.52 and Ratzahbi 1970, p. 313. This poem has not yet been published in its entirety. It was copied in a manuscript *tiklāl*, the National and University Library, Jerusalem, no.8 1351.

Tobi remarks that "a reminder of this event also appears in 'An Event in the Days of Yisrael Mashta,' in which the exact date of the appearance of the two comets is recorded, before dawn on the 14th day of Nissan.[19]

Many tragedies befell the Jewish community of Yemen following the prophecy of 1619. They were imprisoned and physically abused by the Turks, whose actions worsened as the whole region became infested with locusts followed, by starvation. In addition, Shabazi lost his father and other members of his family during this turbulent period, as he recounts in the story of the 1619 comets. It's no wonder that many Jews were awaiting the arrival of the messiah. The tragic-filled period in Yemen paved a road that led to messianic fervor because people perceived these awful events as the agony a society must undergo prior to the messianic birth. Moreover, Zakharayah Ha-Zidoni wrote in 1626 (which was 1937 of the Selucid year) that "in 1940 You shall accomplish vengeance" [—note the pun in Hebrew on the number of the year and the word for vengeance].[20] Three years later the Ottoman Empire was driven out of San'a by the Zaydis.

Most communities in the 17th century, irrespective of their religion, believed that a sudden presence of comets, or a shift in the planetary alignment, meant that the messiah was on his way. Moreover, 17th

[19]Tobi, Y. (1999) **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 52; published by Ratzabi 1970, pp.310-311, and by Hubârah 1970, p.362.
[20] For more information see: Tobi, Y. (1986). ***'Iyyunim Bi-Mgillat Teman***. p. 130, Jerusalem (Hebrew):p. 73.

century Yemen and Hijâz also experienced several unusual historical and natural phenomena at times. There was the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire from San'a, and that same year, a massive flood submerged the holy sights of Islam in Mecca, destroyed buildings, and drowned eight thousand people. In 1632, a falling star crashed in Yemen; in 1644, a violent earthquake shook the region, and a Yemenite chronicler writes that the mountains and the rocks moved and crushed everything below.[21] Although there is no allusions to these occurrences in Jewish sources, it is likely that they triggered a more intensive messianic expectation among the Jews, particularly following the incident at Mecca. Jewish poets in Yemen had written of the destruction of Mecca at the "end of days."[22] Thus, clearly the scholars in 17th century Yemen were overwhelmed by messianic passion. This fear was clearly expressed in the poetry of Yosef ben Yisrael who wrote: "The Lightning of God Flashed" and Shabazi, who wrote: "Lightning from the South Shines." Both describe the Messiah and the time of redemption, and really are nothing more than apocalyptic poetry.

In the mid 17th century, a sage named Yizhaq Wannah transmitted the teachings and customs of *qabbalah* to the Jewish community in Yemen. Although in the early half of the 16th century qabbalist poetry

[21] Tobi, Y. (1999). **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 53; Wâs'î (1927). ***Abd al- Wâs'î al Wâs'î, Ta'rîh al Yaman***. Cairo, pp. 52-54

[22] Tobi, Y. (1986). ***'Iyyunim Bi-Mgillat Teman***. p. 130, Jerusalem (Hebrew); Scholem, G. (1946) *Ge Hizzayon: Apoqalipsah Shabbeta'it Mi-Teman, Qovez 'Al Yad* 4, p. 134 (Hebrew);

appeared in Yemen, it took approximately a century before qabbalist groups to form, particularly in San'a and the Southern Shar'ab. Both, the poets-sages mentioned above, Yosef ben Yisrael and Shalom Shabazi dwelled in Shar'ab, while Yizhaq Wannah resided in San'a. Wannah based most of his essays on the *qabbalah*; moreover, he introduced into the *tiklâl* of the Yemenite Jews, qabbalistic poems and prayers, essentially the spiritual service for greeting the Sabbath with the poems of Yizhaq Luria.[23] Furthermore, in his essays, he placed greater importance upon *qabbalah* than on the study of *Mishnah, Talmud*, or even *Halakhah*. [24].

By the 17th century, *qabbalah* became prevalent in Yemen, particularly during the Shabbetai Zevi period. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Lurianic *qabbalah* and its messianic mythos had a direct effect on the strengthening of messianic hopes in that country or the belief in Shabbetai Zevi. We may make this assumption due to the lack of response or mention of Lurianic *qabbalah* in the writings of the Yemenite scholars in the 17th century. Gershom Scholem has observed that no influence of Lurianic *qabbalah* could be detected in Shalom Shabazi's poetry or in his commentary on the Pentateuch,

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Ratzabi, Y. (1970). *Apoqalipsot ve-hish shuve qez be-yahadut teman, Me-hqere Ha-Merkaz Le-Heqer* 1, p. 306:"the King messiah will be enthroned in Mecca."

[23] Ratzabi, Y. (1981). *'Iyunim be-hitpathut mahzor teman, 'Ale Sefer* 9, pp.91-114 (Hebrew). He discusses the role of Wannah in the development of *tiklâl* .

[24] Tobi, Y. (1999). **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 54; (1997) *Tikkun Seder Hashkamat Ha-Qeri'ah Ba-Laylah*; and his essay *Sha'ar Ha-Shamayim*, p. 6b (a manuscript in Tobi's possession).

*Hemdat Yamim.* Even *Ge- Hizzayon*, a Sabbatean composition from Yemen, fails to show any influence of Lurianic *qabbalah.*[25]

The introduction of Shabbetai Zevi to the Yemenite Jewish community occurred in 1666, when the Sabbatean movement had reached its zenith and close to the time of the expected apocalypse. The arrival of the messiah was not only expected because of the comets of 1619 and all the havoc that ensued thereafter. It was fueled by the appearance of another comet in 1665, thus prefiguring his imminent arrival. All these non-connected events left a huge impression on Shalom Shabazi. Although a letter arrived in 1666 via Egypt, declaring the arrival of the messiah Shabbetai Zevi, the Yemenite sages of San'a dismissed the rumors of redemption.[26] A consequence of the commotion stimulated by the news of Shabbetai Zevi was the increased development of soothsaying among Yemenite men and women in San'a, its suburbs, and areas of Shar'ab. The soothsayers convinced the Jewish community of Yemen to support Shabbetai Zevi and encouraged Jews to complete purification rites and atonement in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah. Thus, according to the soothsayers, one was prohibited from drinking wine (even on erev Pesach), eating meat other than roasted, or engaging in

[25] Scholem, G. (1946) *Ge Hizzayon: Apoqalipsah Shabbeta'it Mi-Teman, Qovez 'Al Yad* 4, p. 106.
[26] Tobi, Y. (1986). *Iyyunim Bi-Mgillat Teman*. Jerusalem, (Hebrew), p. 120: "The Judges and the guards could not threaten them (Chronicle of Hamâmi); Qorah, A. (1954). *Sa'arat Teman*, ed. Shim'on Graydi, Jerusalem, (Hebrew), p.9; Hibshûsh, H. (1958). *Qorot Israel Be-Teman*, ed. Yosef Qafih, Sefunut 2, (Hebrew), pp.252-253.

sexual intercourse; food had to be immersed in dust and ashes and not in salt.

Although the Jewish community leaders in San'a, and most of Yemen were skeptical about Shabbetay Zevi being the Messiah; it did not deter some Jewish leaders from joining his followers, Shalom Shabazi however, did. In his poem *"In a night's dream I dreamed,"* Shabazi affirmed that the redemption was to occur in 1666 (probably in response to the letter received from Egypt).[27] The poem contains few apocalyptic ideas, such as the attack by the Messiah against the armies of the gentiles and the devastation of gentile municipalities. In contrast, we find that the general popular belief among Yemenite Jews was that redemption would occur in 1667. Clearly, this delay did not arise from reports of rumors coming from outside of Yemen but from the Yemenite Jews themselves, *"who always favored the idea that the final redemption would come out of Yemen."* [28]

*Ge Hizzayon* is a Sabbatean work and the sole surviving document of its kind from Yemen. Nonetheless, its messianic character does not only originate from the idea of Shabbetai Zevi as the Messiah. He is mentioned only twice whereas Nathan of Gaza, Shabbetai's prophet is mentioned four times next to the name Zevi and not the full name

[27] Tobi, Y. (1999). **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p.58; (1986). ***Iyyunim Bi-Mgillat Teman***. Jerusalem, (Hebrew), p. 125.
[28] Ibid. and Scholem, G. (1967). **Shabbetay Zvi Veha-Tenu'ah Ha-Shabeta'it Be-Yamav**. Jerusalem, (Hebrew), p. 551.

Shabbetay (or "or pene Zevi—"the light of the face of Zevi). Yet, the author of *Ge Hizzayon* often applied the phrase "Messiah son of David," when referring to Shabbetai Zevi, as may unequivocally be proven by the fact that he attributed to the "Messiah son of David" all the details he knew of the life of Shabbetai Zevi. Furthermore, most of the composition is dedicated to the figure known as the Messiah son of Joseph who is more active than the Messiah son of David. The Messiah son of Joseph is he who will appear in Yemen, assemble its Jews, and bring them back to the land of Israel. The fact that Lurianic *qabbalah* was unknown to its author, indicates that *Ge Hizzayon* is a Jewish apocalypse from Yemen which affirmed Shabbetai Zevi as the messiah son of David and the heralder of redemption in 1666. Yet, in no way does the author minimize the role of the Yemenite Jewish exile and the Yemen in the setting of the messianic occurrences.

This type of depiction leads us to explain several matters in *Ge Hizzayon* as being germane to the redemption of Yemen even when it is not expressly stated in the text. For instance, the persecution of the Jews before 1667 and the abandoning or selling of property by those who believed in the arrival of the Messiah.

In general, the apocalyptic incidents and the messianic fervor of the early 17th century paved the "road of need" for the common folk of Yemen to believe in an imminent coming of the Messiah. Moreover,

those who had experienced personal loss, irrespective of their social status, fell into what may be called, "the abyss of despair." This explains why Slaymân Jamal[29] and Shalom Shabazi, men of great intellect, could embrace Sabbateanism. On the other hand, the leaders of the San'a community, President Slaymân Naqqâsh, and the head of the Rabbinical court Yihye Halevi were skeptical about it. The Imam of that time, al-Mutawakkil Ismâ'îl viewed the Jewish action of the selling of property as a violation of the laws of protection granted to them by the Islamic state and he felt that their actions released the state from the obligation of maintaining Jewish protection. So, in early 1667, Jewish wives, goods, and property were pillaged. A few months later, in order to maintain control of the country, no further actions were taken against the Jews. Nevertheless, the Jews, in response to what had happened, decided to pursue their messianic activity openly. Moreover, Slaymân Jamal's insurrection, by acting as a Messiah caused the Imam to respond in a harsher manner towards the Jewish community. Jamal was executed and the Jewish leaders of San'a and Hamdah,[30] were interrogated by the Imam. Although they were not followers of Jamal, they could not deny Jamal's insolence of proclaiming himself as the Messiah. At this point, the Imam decided to take drastic measures

[29] Tobi, Y. (1999). **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 70.

[30] Ibid p.71; Hibshush, S. (1958). ***Qorot Israel Be-Teman***, ed. Yosef Qafih, ***Sefunut***, 2, pp.254=255, writes that among the leaders of the Jews summoned by the Imam was a Jewish *nagid* of Yemen taken into custody from the city of Hamdah.

against the Jews. He revived the discriminatory laws that had not been applied in Yemen since the end of the 9th century. A principal Hebrew document, *Ḥamâmi*, specifies only two actions by the Imam: the first was the confiscation of **all** Jewish property (moveable and immovable goods); and the second was "the Headdress Decree."[31] To sum up, Jamal was executed while Naqqâsh, the *nagid* of the San'a, was exiled to Qamarân, a deserted Island in the Red Sea. There he remained a political prisoner for two years, and later, was reinstated as the *nagid* of San'a's Jewish community.

After Jamal was executed, natural disasters such as a drought transpired in Yemen and strengthened the belief among Yemeni Muslims that the country was being punished for his execution. The Jews labored very hard to disseminate this notion. A particular Jewish leader (believed by Tobi to be Shabazi), pledged to take Muslim property to make up for what the Imam had appropriated from the Jews. It is stated that he accomplished this through witchcraft that ravished Muslim property and harmed their towns and fields.[32] Under Imam al-Mutawakkil Ismâ'îl the situation of the Jews worsened. He imposed additional taxes on Jews during the great famine and he did not supply the Jews with grain unless they converted to Islam. Many poverty stricken Jews had no alternative. The Jews hoped that with the death

[31] Tobi, Y. (1999). **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston and Köln, p. 71; (1986) p.125. Tobi refers to this as *gezerat ha-'aṭarot*.

of the Imam and the rise of his nephew to power, their plight would turn for the better. Shabazi expressed these sentiments in three poems that he wrote to honor the new imam, al-Mahdî Ahmad ibn Hasan.. The first, *"Safî al-din mâ sha'noh bi-dîwânoh"* was published by Ratzahbi in 1959. Here, Shabazi honored Ahmad for his invasion of the city of Aden. A second poem dealt with Ahmad's great conquests, as did the third: *"Burayq al maghârib u-bâriq al-qiblah tasâdam," and "Yâ bawm itrannan wa-sîh."*

According to Arabic chroniclesand legal opinions of Muslim sages, Shabazi's poetry, and Yihye Salih's *Megillat Teman* the Jews found themselves in a worsening state under the new Imam who renewed the Decree of Orphans aside from forced Jewish conversions. In 1676, as he was nearing death, Ismail commanded in his own script that the Jews should no longer enjoy any protection by the state and that it was imperative to banish them from the community. His political successor was forced to carry out his final request. After great debates, the Jews were exiled for a year but were allowed to return because Yemen's economy was devastated. It was the Jews, who were the country's artisans and traders. They dealt with goods entering and leaving Yemen, thus, without their skills the country was in economic turmoil.

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[32] Ibid.p.75; al Tāzi, 'Abd al Hādi.. (1980). *"Al-nuṣuṣ al-ẓāhirah fi ijlā al-yahûd al fajirah," Dirâsât Yamaniyyah* 4, p. 120.

In chapter IV, we will examine Shabazi's poetry during this period of messianism; immediately before the expulsion to Mawza'. Poetry is an art that requires reflection. I hope that through Shabazi's reflections of the time, we will be able to determine, whether or not he was a Sabbatean and or a true believer of Shabbetai Zevi. This is important because it will clarify how isolated Jewish communities function and respond to elements of the outside world when they are in a state of spiritual crisis.

BRIEF

YEMEMNITE JEWISH LITERATURE

Extant Yemenite Jewish Literature extends for a millennium, beginning with the 10th century C.E. Yemenite Jewish literature may be divided into five periods. In the first period, ending with the close of the 12th century. Almost all of these literary works were written during the second half of the 11th century and the first half of the 12th. However, few of these works have survived, but the comparatively large number of those that did affirms the abundance of great spiritual and cultural activity.

Most works are in the domain of Jewish law.

1. A commentary on the six orders of the *Mishnah,* which is primarily based on the commentary of Nathan, the head of the Academy in Israel. The Yemenite author-scholar is anonymous, but the Arabic style of the text, indicates that it was written in Yemen.
2. A commentary on Isaac Alfasi's commentary on the tractate *Hullin,* also written in Arabic by an anonymous scholar. If we consider that although the Jews of Yemen studied the Talmud from Babylonian teachers, they also resorted to non-Babylonian texts.

Other works are linguistic. The most important is the *Mahberet ha-Tijān,* sums up matters of linguistics and diverse traditional preferences.

The work contains traces of certain linguistics that evolved from the 8th century and later in the great Jewish center in Tiberias. In addition, the remains of an Arabic work composed by Rabbi Nathaniel Fayyûmî (first part of the 12th century) which focuses on Hebrew and Arabic grammar has survived. It reflects the influence of Spanish-Jewish grammarians and their Aristotelian approach. Rabbi Nethanel Fayyûmî is also the author of ***Bustan al-'Aqul*** in English **(Garden of the Intellects)** an ethical-philosophical tract that was inspired by the writings of Spanish scholars of the 11th century.

From this period comes the poetry of the Yemenite *paytan* (poet) Rabbi Daniel Fayyûmî, brother of Rabbi Nathaniel, who composed in the same style of Spanish poets. The works of Yemenite Jews of this period are important because they clearly illustrate Yemenite Jewry's cultural achievement. Their culture that basically was shaped by the Jewish civilization of the Middle Ages, produced as a result of the inter-cultural relationship between Judaism and the Arab-Islamic culture.

The wisdom of the sages of Babylon and the scholars of Israel also reached Yemen. This not only involved spiritual creativity, but also liturgical study, grammar, and Jewish law. Still, Yemenite literature was primarily influenced by the philosophical, intellectual approach of Spain over many centuries. Sephardic culture was preserved in Yemen long

the expulsion from Spain and the development of the *kabbalah* in Safed.

The second period lasted from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century. It was the most magnificent period of creativity by Yemenite Jewry. Almost all of its diverse activity was shaped by Maimonides and his teachings. In this period Yemenite Jewry also began the work of compiling *Midrashim* to the Bible, especially the Pentateuch and the *megillot.*

Outstanding was the *Midrash ha-Gadol* compiled by R. David son of R. Amram al-Adani (13th century). The Maimonidean influence is detectable because the *Midrash ha-Gadol* is more intellectual than any of the other midrashic collections and is based on the Maimonidean view.

The third period begins in the 16th century. In chapter V, I will examine the Yemenite poetry of the later part of this era., Literary and spiritual creativity was deteriorating during the time, a phenomenon related directly to a weakening of the socio-political structure of the Yemenite Jewish society. The influence of the great spiritual center Safed began to reach Yemen, and is associated with Rabbi Zakharyah al-Ẓâhiri, one of the greatest 16th century poets of Yemen. Kabbalistic literature that began to be known in Yemen in the 15th century, assumes

an increasingly importance in the writings of the Yemenite Jews from the 16th century onward.

Most of the spiritual creativity in that period is in the area of poetry, the kind that laments the suffering of the Jews in Yemen and their great longing for redemption. Two great writers of that period: are Rabbi Yosef ben Israel, who lived in the latter half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century; and Rabbi Shalom Shabazi who lived during the second half of the 17th century. The effect of the Middle Ages is discernible in the works of the Yemenite scholars and poets of that era.

The fourth period starts in the middle of the 18th century with a great spiritual arousal. This event is again connected with a change in the socio-economic status of the Yemenite Jews. The most important scholar in that period is Rabbi Yihye Sâlih. The motif that personifies his creativity is the aspiration to encapsulate Jewish Yemenite culture and tradition in its diverse areas: history, law, linguistics, and liturgy. He was the first to anthologize a historical work, which summarizes the history of the Jewish community of Yemen from its beginnings until his day. Nearly all of the Yemenite sages of this period, are considered his students and follow his pedagogic methods.

The fifth period dates from the middle of the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century when the Yemenite Diaspora ended with the

*aliyah* to Israel. This literary period is fundamentally linked to Rabbi Yihye Kafâh and his followers and students. Two strains characterize their contribution. The first is the return to the sources and the roots of the Jewish Yemenite medieval cultural tradition that was influenced by the Maimonides and other Spanish scholars, while eliminating the seduction of the literature of the *Zohar* and the *qabbalah*. The second is the research of Jewish Yemenite history, culture, and tradition. This second feature was no doubt influenced by the Jewish Enlightenment Movement of the 19th century in Europe whose echoes reached Yemen.

Three basic types of books appeared in Yemen. The first is called the *"Taj"* (crown) and consists of the Pentateuch with the Onkelos translation and commentaries. The second is called the *"Tikhlal"* (compendium), a collection of the daily and holiday prayer book. The third is the *"Diwan"* (the collection of poetry), a para-liturgical compilation of songs pertaining to Jewish holidays, events in history, and the desire for redemption to Zion, for home-use, in family and congregational gatherings.

All books in Yemen were handwritten and copied manually because no printing press was available. Prayer books were written only by authorized scribes of Holy Scriptures, whereas, the Diwan could be copied by any person. Printed Diwans have appeared exclusively in Israel, and they recently replaced handwritten books. The Diwan is

written in Hebrew letters but consists of poems in three languages: Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew.[33] In fact, the custom of fusing languages in Hebrew poetry had already begun in medieval Spain, [34] still it is notably prevalent in the Diwan poetry of Yemenite Jews. Language fusion happens in different ways: occasionally complete songs or poems in the same collection are composed in different languages and are placed next to one another. In other cases, entire stanzas of one song are composed in one language and other stanzas in another language. In addition, there are also cases of alternating Arabic and Hebrew stanzas, or even sections as in Rabbi Shalom Shabazi's poem "Hil-bish ha-or hem-dat le-va-vi", or even with in sections as Rabbi Mordechai Tzadok Yitzhari's poem Y'sosum kol b'nai a-mo re-nanim . For example:

| תרגום | מקור |
|---|---|
| הלביש האור חמדת לבבי/במשכל, | אלבס אלנור גאית פואדי/באלעקלא, |
| נחקר בו בין היסודות/עד נגלא, | אנתקש פיה עלם אלבואדי/ואסתמלא, |
| בו איחד שם מרומם/העקר, | וחדת אסם אלאעצם/מראדי/אלאצלא, |
| זה למשה נגלה וקרא/בדבר, | די תגלא למוסא דו אלאנפראדי פי קולא |

or

ישושום כל בני עמו רננים/בבאור רב סעדיה בן גאונים
לתושבחות וסוד חכמת למואל/וצדקת איש בארץ עוץ וקינים
ודניאל וקהלת ואסתר/ורות עם שיר לורע נעמנים
דבר קדשו ובינתו ידועים/חצובים בלבבות לכתובים

[33] Ratzabi, Y. (1988) **The Yemenite Jews, Literature and Studies**, National and University Library, Jerusalem, (Hebrew), pp. 11-45.; (1968). ***Yalkut Shire Teman***, **Yemenite Poetry Anthology**, Bialik Institute, Jerusalem (Hebrew), pp. 30-46.

**Yemeni Jewish Poets and their Poetry**

The *Diwans* were produced over the duration of seven centuries. Its beginnings can roughly be traced back to the 11th century and followed through to the 18th century. Initially, the Diwans included works written by the Hebrew poets of the Spanish Golden Age: Solomon ibn Gabirol, Bahya ibn Paquda, Abraham ibn Ezra, Judah Ha-Levi, Abu-l-Barakāt and others, whereas the more contemporary leading Hebrew poets are Yemenite Jewish poets following Shalom Shabazi. Some *Diwans* erroneously have accredited their authorship to Shalom Shabazi, as if he composed all of them. Although, the *Diwans* are comprised of poets other than Shabazi. Nearly all the *Diwans* in Yemen were composed by Shalom Shabazi and by virtue of their general high quality and the notable and merited veneration for his work, the poems of the *Diwan* in its totality are all occasionally accredited to him. Most of the *Diwan* poets can be recognized by an acrostic at the top of the stanza (as in Yisrael Mashta's poem *"Yitav le-vav ho-geh b'mal-chuyot"* p.437.), however, many are nameless (*"Retze Sichi,"* Want My Prayer"). These anonymous poets are known as *Hallelot* poets.

The Diwan is comprised of hundreds of poems, and no single person sings all of them. It is an anthology, compiled over hundreds of years from many different regions, so that it contains an array of many

[34] Idelsohn, A.Z. (1925). **Thesaurus of Hebrew Oriental Melodies**, Vol. I, Songs of Yemenite Jews, Breitkopf & Haeryle Publishing House, Leipzig, reprint Ktav Publishing House, New York, 1973, p. 13.

different traditions. Certain songs are common among all Yemenite Jews, particularly the Sabbath and Wedding songs, whereas other songs are sung only in specific locales. Today, in Israel and in America the Diwans are mostly printed, especially Shlomo Makiton's, ***Hafetz Haim*** (which is a compilation of poems by Shalom Shabazi) and Rabbis Haim Ben Yehuda Hubara and Yosef Ben Shalom Shemen's, **Songs of the Great Rabbi Shalom Shabazi,** as well as small Diwans distributed by different organization like: the Association of Jewish Yemenites in the United States or the Yemenite Jewish Federation of America etc.

The classification of the hundreds of poems in the Diwan is based on several criteria, primarily on function and on structure. In the functional arrangement, the poems are introduced according to their subject (life cycle events, festivities etc.) while the formal arrangement introduces them in alphabetical order, in accord with the *Diwan* tradition.

The latter criterion is self-evident. The former consists of two groupings under the category entitled "Yearly Cycle (the Sabbath and holiday poems)," and two groups under the category entitled "Life Cycle (bridegroom and circumcision poetry)." Both year cycle and life cycle poems are relatively short, and their structures are limited to the

*nashid*[35] and girdle poems.[36] These groups do not contain *Shirot*[37] with *Taushich*[38], which are a later, more advanced and difficult configurations, present only in Yemenite poetry. The *Shirot* with *Taushich* are generally used for dancing and are categorized in the group "songs for all seasons", and linked to the life cycle and year cycle grouping according to the customs of the community.

*Sabbath* songs are part of the *Diwan*. *Diwan* songs are sung at home frequently at the dinning table , before or after a meal. They start on Friday night after the meal and span the length of the entire day; Sabbath morning, afternoon, *Shalosh Seudot* (third meal), and *Havdalah*. In using poetical terminology, the Sabbath poems are limited to two forms: *Nishwad* [39] and girdle songs. There are no *Shirot* with *Taushich*.

*Holiday songs* rarely appear in the *Diwan*. That doesn't mean that there is less singing during the holidays. Conversely, in the holiday poetry, most of the songs are liturgical poems, which are not included in the *Diwan*, but mostly in the *Tikhâl*, along with songs for all seasons from the *Diwan*.

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[35] *Nashid* is a song format popular in Yemenite Jewish *Diwan*, with a bolting rhyme. A direct extension of the medieval *Qasida* (a predominant format in medieval Arab Hebrew poetry: a long epic poem with a single bolting rhyme), whose number of verses is usually limited from four to eleven lines.

[36] A girdle song is a strophic poem whose opening rhyme (in the first stanza) rhymes with the end of each stanza, although each stanza has an internal rhyming of its own.

[37] Is the plural for Shira which is a *Diwan* form that includes girdle songs and more developed poems, with Taushich in the middle.

[38] Is a section of three short lines, of one hemistich each, in the middle of the Shira, seperating the long lines which begin and end the stanza.

[39] Is the plural of Nashid: See note above.

Wedding songs accompany all wedding rites. There are specific wedding songs for the ceremony and other events during the celebration. Furthermore, there are girdle songs, *Hallelot, Nishwad*, and *Shirot*, that are customarily sung at the wedding ceremony and during the *sheva b'rachot*. Wedding songs are the oldest in the *Diwan*; as affirmed both by the fact that many were written by the great sage, philosopher, and poet of medieval Spain, Yehuda Ha-Levi whose poems appear in the most ancient *Diwan* anthology in Yemen, and by the very prevalent style in which some of them are written. For example, poems such as *"Ahuv Yevarech Hechatan"* and *"Ahuv Mehar Hamor,"* constitute a unique group that defies poetical categoriziation (in the ***Amallel Shir*** *Diwan*, these songs are grouped as *Hallelot*). These are "songs of joy" which are sung during the bridegroom's haircut ceremony and his delivery to the wedding. The songs are exhibited here in order of their presentation during the wedding events, which begin on the evening of the Saturday prior to the wedding. The songs performed then are usually *"Ilah Alkul" (God of all)*, as well as *"Asabich Khalki" (I shall praise my Creator)* , which are primarily hymns of praise to God. During that evening, different *Shirot* are sung, which are appropriate for all occasions *(Im Nin'alu,"If the doors are closed,"* a song that Ofra Haza Z"L, made a top 100 song in America in 1985) and various *Hallelot*. The following Wednesday is the *Halaka* Day: the

bridegroom gets his haircut before the wedding ceremony. There are special songs for the events, *Zaffa*[40] and *Haduya*[41]: *"At Beinatsei 'Eden" (Thou Art Among the Trees of Eden)," "Lefelach Harimon (As the Slice of Pomegranate)," "Reach Hadas (The Scent of Myrtle) ," "Ayelet Hen (Graceful Doe)," "Bo Leshalom HaTan (You Are Welcome, Bridegroom)," "Emet ata Hatanenu (Truly You are Our Bridegroom)," "Ahuv Yevarech Hehatan (The Beloved Will Bless the Bridegroom)."*

Thursday is the wedding day. In the afternoon, prior to the ceremony, the guests assemble at the bridegroom's house and sing a free selection of Diwan songs. In the evening, after the marriage ceremony, they sing all of the wedding songs, *Zaffa* and *Chaduya*, as described above.

On Saturday, the bridegroom is called up to the reading of the Torah. The song *"Shelomot Yagi'u,"* whose words are appropriate for the occasion, is performed.

The following Monday is the day of the ritual feast at the bridegroom's parents' house. During the event, it is customary to sing "*Hatan Tena Hodakh (Bridegroom, Grant Your Splendor)"* and "*Hatani Ma Meod Yakra Menato (My Bridegroom, How Precious Is His Share).*" Many *Hallelot* are sung during the ritual feast, in a certain logical order: the first *Hallel (Praise)* is to the Creator of the world: *"Ahelel Le'eli(I Will*

[40] It is a festive wedding song, used for accompanying the bridegroom or the bride to the canopy.
[41] It is a short easy to memorize joyous wedding song.

*Praise My Lord)"* , or *"Ahalel Leyachid Hameyuchad (I Will Praise the Special One) "*, etc.; the second *Hallel* is to the bridegroom, one of the *Hallelot* beginning with the words *Hehatan Haze (This Bridegroom);* the third *Hallel* is the guests' congratulating the master of the house; the fourth is the master of the house congratulating the guests; *"Hahaverim Haelu Titbarkhu (These Friends, be Blessed)"*; the fifth is the joint blessing: *"Hine Ma Tov (How Good It Is)"*; the sixth is again praise to God: *Veyishrok Lehoshi'enu(He Shall Whistle To Redeem Us)."* During the seven days of festivities, the song *"Mehader Hatan Vekala(Embellisher of Bridegroom and Bride)"* is added to all the other songs.

In terms of structure, the songs are divided into forms: *Shir* (song, *Nashid* in Arabic, and *Nishwad* in the plural form), *Shira* (poem, and in the plural form: *Shirot), Hallel* (Praise, and in the plural form: *Hallelot),* along with various other transitional or rare forms. The majority of Diwan songs are *Shirot,* which may be divided into two sub-groups, based on their poetic structure: *Shirot* with *Taushich* and Girdle-song-type S*hirot.*

The Songs *(Nishwad)* are relatively short (4-11 verses each), and in terms of rhyming, they are the result of the Spanish *Qasida,* having an identical striking rhyme at the end of every verse. In contrast to the *Qasida,* which is a long epic poem, the *Nashid* is a short, introductory

poem. Although it is a complete and independent poem, its main function is an introduction to the long *Shira* to follow. The songs are all written in Hebrew, with a several exceptions, when Arabic and Aramaic are interwoven. The songs end with the opening word *Ana* (Please), or the acronym AAA, both of which stand for the blessing: "Please, Lord, save us; Please, Lord, make us successful" (Psalms 118, 25), which is said after the *Nashid*, in transition to the *Shira* that generally follows. Most songs consist of two hemistichs, a "*delet*" (door) and a "*soger*" (close). The close contains the "striking" rhyme, but sometimes all the "doors" (opening rhymes) also rhyme, as, for example, in the poems *"Ahavat Hadasa"* ( , *Ehye Asher Ehye," "Ayumati Te'oreer Ha Yeshenim.* "

Some *Nishwad* consist of four hemistichs, and may be regarded as a transitional form to the Girdle song (the term "stanza" in a Spanish Hebrew Golden Age poem refers to a verse in the *Qasida*): the first three hemistichs of every stanza rhyme with each other, while the last hemistich rhymes with the "guide" (opening rhyme) of the entire poem in 'bolting' fashion, as in "*Agil Veesmach."*

From a poetic perspective, the short poems' category includes two other forms: *Zaffa* and *Chaduya*, both in the wedding songs' group. These songs are characterized not by their form, but by their function: *Zaffa* is sung as a procession song while the bridegroom or the bride

are delivered to the location of the ceremony, and the *Chaduya* is a general song of joy. These songs include many greeting songs, in which one word is successively changed in alphabetical order: *Ahuv, Baruk, Gibor, Dagul,* etc.

Girdle Poems known in Hebrew as *Shirei Eizor* are an ancient form, originating in the Spanish Golden Age, and they usually embody stanzas of four rhyming verses. The opening first stanza (sometimes before a short "guide" of one or two verses), provides the striking rhyme for all the stanzas in the poem, rendering its uniformity. All the other stanzas have their own internal rhyming, but their closing verse always rhymes with the opening guide.

The long *Shirot* with *Taushich* are a distinct form of Yemenite Jewish poetry. The stanzas in this poetic form are usually longer, 8-10 verses, and more assorted: the first and last verses are longer, consisting of two hemistichs (door and close), and vary in meter. In the middle there is the *Taushich:* three short verses consisting of one hemistich each. Here as well, each stanza has its own internal rhyming, but the closure (last one or two verses) rhymes with the opening stanza. There are various formulations for this structure regarding the number of verses, length and meter; its structure principle is, however, constant.

The *Hallelot* are the final blessing, directed to all the participants, with an occasional specific address to a certain figure: the host, the

bridegroom, the circumcised baby, etc. The *Hallel* is a rhyming prose, and unlike the rest of the Diwan poems it is non-metric, with varying verse lengths. There are no *Hallelot* in Arabic in the Diwan. The majority of the *Haflelot* are in Hebrew, with few in Aramaic. The closing verse of the *Hallel* is often a biblical quotation, and it seems that the *Hallelot* were originally devised as a rhyming illustration of that closure. *Hallelot* are a form unique to Yemenite Jews, not to be found among other Jewish communities. Avraham Zvi Idelsohn has already observed that "there is no such form in the Hebrew poetry."[42] *Hallelot* are mostly sung as a grand finale of the arrangement *Nashid – Shira - Hallel*, but they are sometimes performed separately, particularly during ceremonial events, such as the ritual feast, which is part of the wedding events. Although the *Hallel* is relatively short, usually about one minute, it carries great importance. This must be among the most ancient and popular forms, as attested by its nature, which is more religious than other Diwan forms.[43]

All *Hallelot* have a typical structure: The opening is usually actual praise, directed at the celebrants or God. Then there is mention of biblical figures, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, Samuel, Hannah and Elkana, Yehuda and Ephraim, Eli, etc. Biblical

[42] Idelsohn, A.Z. (1924). *Otsar Neginot Yisrael*, Vol. I, *Neginot Yehudei Teiman*, (Hebrew), p. 12.

[43] Bahat, A. (1986). *"The Hallelot in Yemenite Jewish Diwan," Yuval*, Vol. V, the Abraham Zvi Idelsohn Memorial Volume, Magnes Publishing House, Jerusalem, (Hebrew), p. 158.

events are alluded to, as well as observance of religious commandments, and the longings for salvation in Zion.

The *Hallelot* contain praises addressed to various figures, depending on the nature of the event and the celebrants. First and foremost is God, creator of the universe, who is addressed in many key word: *Eli* (My God), *Melekh Malkhaya (The Lord of Kings) Yachid Hameyuchad* (One and Special), *Melekh Elion* (Supreme King), etc. At weddings, the *Hallel* is a tribute to the bridegroom, at circumcisions it is the baby or his father, and in other festivities, the host or the owner of this house, these friends, venerable teachers, all of these guests, etc., are the subject of the *Hallel.* All *Hallelot* begin and end with the word "VeHaleluya" (and praise the Lord), which also ends the *Shirot*, indicating that after the *Shira* one must move on to the *Hallel.*

The number of common *Hallelot* is around thirty (there are 31 Hallelot in the *Amallel Shir* Diwan and 28 in the *Hafetz Haim Diwan*), but this number does not imply that the same people sing all of them. Experience indicates that any group of people accustomed to singing together habitually, eventually develops a preference for certain *Hallelot*, which they all know by heart, and to which they keep returning.

**Poetic Rhythms**

The variety of poetical meters in the Diwan is great, including all of the meters common in the Spanish poetry, along with new meters that are variants of Spanish poetry or their offshoot.

There are some poems in the Diwan in syllabic meter [syllables in the modern sense of the term]. Some scholars count the vowels without the mobile *sheva* and the *hataf* (semivowel), with the same result]. It is apparent that all of these songs belong in the functional part of the *Diwan*, that of Sabbath, holidays and wedding songs *(Zaffa* and *Chaduya),* and are performed in free rhythm or short and simple melodies. Syllable meters were very customary in Spanish poetry in liturgical poems, and these songs in the *Diwan* are certainly the most ancient ones, mostly anonymous, some with alternating words in alphabetical order, attesting to their affinity with liturgical poems.
Other songs are metered in metric feet, with several variants, as found in Spanish poetry, along with new meters, found particularly in Shabazi's poems.

From the point of view of our everyday speech, these meters are archaic and meaningless, since in our times we read and sing according to the tonic system, i.e., according to the accentuation of the words, and not according to the vowels' length. However, when Yemenite Jews sing the *Diwan* songs, the poetic meters take on a

pungent meaning, probably based on an ancient tradition, and they often determine the punctuation and accentuation, even if they contradict the sequence of the words.

## I. SHABAZI POETRY AS AN HISTORIC SOURCE

The poems of Shabazi serve as a very important source to understanding the history of Yemenite Jewry. Yemenite Jewish poets, often composed poems pertaining to historical events or knit into their poetry events of an historic nature. Upon examining Shabazi's poems, we discern poems which embody the political and social situation of the Jews of Yemen and the events they experienced during the poet's lifetime.

Before we begin to examine these events, we need to determine the chronological context in which they were composed. The poetry found in the first Diwan has no relevance to the harsh decrees that befell the Jews of Yemen from 1667-1680, hence was not written later than 1667. Regarding the second Diwan, there is no allusion to the expulsion of Mawza, in 1679-1680. However, two poems on the famine were written in 1677-1678. We can assume that the Diwans were copied prior to the implementation of the Mawza decree of 1679.

In three of his songs, Shabazi describes two severe famines that took place in Yemen, and effected both the Jews and the gentiles. The first famine occurred in 1659 and is found in the poem entitled לאדוני אענה שיר חדש.

Part of the poem:

באתתק"ע המו הלבבות ועניים רבים מסביבות
שלמו אוצרות כחרבות ועליהם קטרג הצפוני

רבתה הארבה בגבולים
העשירים המו כבהולים
גם נדיבים דלתותם נעולים
כי אחזם רעד צור גאוני ויאיצם פחד ריש ועוני

The second famine occurred in 1677-1678 can be found in the poems: יקול אלשבזי נאלנא אלעוזי. and אלא תקארן זחל ומשתרי מריד

[על הרעב בשנות אתתקפ"ח-אתתקפ"ט לשטרות]
הכתובת: נשיד סימן סאלם יוסף משתא
המשקל: ארבע תנועות בכל צלעית (תנועות קצרות אינן במניין)

יקול אלשבזי נאלנא אלעוזי
מן אלזמאן אלכ'זי האן אלפקירא:
סנת אתתקפט מצ'ת באלגלול עוצ'ת
בעד מא אנקצ'ת כ'לוקן כת'ירא:
אלכראם תשוהת ולצ'יוף כרהת
ומן ופדתה אבתהת ותבקא חקירא:
לבס אהל אלכרם אלהם ואלהרם
ואלגני אחתרם מא שבע פטירא:
מן סנת אתתקפת צאלון אלטפה
וינדם מן נפה בקותן יסירא:
יא אללה באלרצ'א עלינא ואלחצ'א
ען כל מא מצ'א אנת אלקדירא:
וכאפי אלפוקרא ומטלק אלאסרא
מנטק אלשערא בעקלן מנירא:
סר קלובנא אליך יא רבנא
תייסר רזקנא ותשפי אלעת'רא:
פצ'לך אלשאמל חאלנא תג'מל

פי עקל כאמל תזכי אלאג׳ירא:

מן כ׳אף רבהו סיבלג מראדהו

בעדנאן חוזהו בין אלזהורא:

שאפי לכל אלים דענא בתסלים

בתוראת אלכללים נעם אלבשירא:

תנבא בטור סין ואלקום נאכסין

פי נטקן חסין ואחרף תנירא:

אנאר אסבאטנא פי תוראתנא

ואלנור חאטנא ת׳ם מסתדירא:

קם יא מרסלי באלסלאם כ׳ץ לי

אלשעב אלאפצלי כביר ואלסגירא:

יא הייא

תרגום:

יאמר השבזי השיגנו המחסור

בזמן המביש נדלדל העני:

שנת אתתקפ״ט חלפה במעשי און באה

לאחר שכילתה יצורים רבים:

נדיבים נתבזו והאורחים נמאסו

ואל אשר באת הופתע ונעשה נקלה:

לבשו בעלי הנדיבות דאגה וחוסר סבלנות

מן שנת אתתקפ״ח והעשיר במחסור לא שבע לחם:

השיגנו קוצר הרוח

ויצטער אשר ישיג מזון מצער:

הוי האל, יהי רצון, וחון עלינו

והגומל לעניים על כל אשר עבר אתה רב היכולת:

מתיר האסורים

מדובב המשוררים בשכל מזהיר:

מצפון לבנו אליך, הוי אדוננו,

בחסדך הגדול הרוח פרנסתנו ורפא הנופל:

הצלח דרכינו

בשכל שלם תזכה את הפועל:

אשר ירא את אלהיו ישיג את מבוקשו

בגן עדן מנתו בין השושנים (הצדיקים):

מרפא לכל בואב שימנו בשלום

בתורת משה בחיר האדם:

ניבא בהר סיני והעם רכוני ראש

במאמרים נכוחים ואותיות מאירות:

פקח עיני שבטינו בתורתנו

והאש תקיפנו שם סחור סחור:

קום, הוי שלוחי, ופרוש שלומי

אל העדה הנעלה גדול וקטן:

יא הייא

The poet gives a personal account of the famine, and he believed that comet he saw as a sign that a famine is about to occur. A village is desolate and the animals in the fields are searching for food. This famine impacts upon all social classes (rich and poor). The "gates" (home) of the generous people are closed and the robbery and thievery rage in Yemen. After all the animals were consumed by the people (because there was no other food) and after the locust destroyed all the fruits, people ate only the grass of the field and animal carcasses left in the field. The description of the famine in the two songs attest to this as we found in the song written in 1659, that the poet himself suffered personally from the famine's setting. A typical ending for the song in drawing forth a typical ethical lesson is:

בן אדם שוב אל אלוהים בהכנעה וקח מוסר כי בידך הבחירה

תן תודה לאלוהים בחייך תמיד כי חסדו לבעלי הסבלנות בלבד

In a couple of his songs, Shabazi explains the realities of the Diaspora Jews in Yemen and tells of the austere relationship existing between the gentiles in Yemen and their rulers. He hints at certain situations. It is doubtful that these poems were written because of this harsh relationship existing between the gentiles in Yemen and their rulers. For example, in his poem מסאן פי רצ'א אלרחמאן is found in the second Diwan, he writes about three edicts that the rulers of Yemen decreed upon the Jewish population of their land—the headress decree, the destruction of the synagogues, and the orphan decree:

יקול אלמשתאי אלהאים אני אחשוק גברת
(יאמר המשתאי הנבוך)
מולע כאטרי דאיים בפסח ועצרת
(דבק רעיוני תמיד)
וצרתו באלימן נאים בלי עוז ועטרת
(ונהייתי בתימן נרדם)
וכם אתגרע אלאגבאן והיכל דת מגולה
(וכמה אשתה מן הצרות)

ופרא בא בתאניות
והחריב בית כנסיות
בנויות הן לתלפיות

וקאצד כלטת אלאדיאן גזל יתמין דטפלא
(וכוונתו ערבוב הדתות)
וען עלמי בקית גפלאן וסר לבי ונקלה
(ומחכמתי נותרתי משולל)

We can learn from the poems that the edict of orphans in Yemen was not decreed at the end of the 18th century but rather in the second half of the 17th century. With respect to the religious subjugation—such as the destruction of the synagogue, the prohibition of learning Torah, forced conversion etc., Shabazi writes a great deal. For example in, שרד לאעיאני שיר אלחמאם is found in the second Diwan, he writes:

שור כי חמס פרא הפיצני לקח מחמדי

מבית כנסיות האיצני דרכתי לבדי

לחזור לדתו בא יעיצני כי גאה במרדי

היך אעזב ייחד לצור קוני השומר שבילי

אחשוק בדת נבוה יסיתני ואנשה מהללי

And in the collection of the slichot for Yom Kippur are many references to these edicts. For example, in the poem, ממעון קדשך שיות אובדות ונגזלות שור יה:

בין בני קידר נדדנו חוכים לעת בוא הגאולה

ופרא הצר

ושדי קצר

שרידי עצר

ועיקש תחבולות ועילה

וגזר עלי

החריב אוהלי

ומתוך היכלי

ספר תורה גלה

חבל על חן תורה ודרשה וקבלות

So too, in the poem, שומע תפילה עדיך יבואו

שמעה קול דלים ורשים ואויבים עליהם מתלחשים

להמיר דתם טף ונשים קנא לשם קדשיך

זכור רחמיך

ביום סבבונו כאריות להחריב בתי כנסיות

ועיני בקול מר בוכיות על עוז גנזי ארוניך

זכור רחמיך

זכרון מעמד יום שבת ושני וחמישי נשחת

חבל על עיקרי הדת חון ורחם על בניך

זכור רחמיך

Complaining about the high tax decree Shabazi wrote:

אלי שמע שועי

רחם עני דלה בתימן גלתה לה סבבו צרים ומס הגדילו

קנא לשם קדשך וחן תורתך ובתי כנסיות אשר הזילו

וראה ספרים מבלתי חטא נגנזו עלי בני אמה גדוד הקהילו

References to these decrees are exclusively found in the second Diwan. The basic nature of the following poem is of friendship towards the imam (even if it contains some relationship to harsh decrees). These decrees are discussed in generalities, as in the poem: תרומם גוי צדקה העטרת:

שאון גלי זמן גרם יגונים עדי כתב למשטמה וחרת

בני הגר יבקשו עלילות לזרע תם אשר אמם עקרת

and in the poem אל אל ברוך ומבורך:

אל אל ברוך ומבורך אצעק מעוני ודלות

כי אני גולה ומשלך בגבולי תימן בשפלות

We may, therefore, surmise, that the first Diwan included only poems written before the harsh decrees that were inflicted upon the Jews of Yemen, in the year 1667-1680. These decrees imposed conversions, exile, destruction of synagogues, and forced conversion of orphans. Thus, it is possible to date the composition (this Diwan) to before 1667. Contrary to this, in the second Diwan there is an explicit expression of the bitterness of this period. However, there is no mention of the Mawza expulsion.

The second Diwan included the poem יא בום אתרנן וציח which is a song of praise to the imam, al-Mahdî Ahmad ibn Hasan who ruled in 1676-1681. This is not the only poem of praise that Shabazzi wrote to this imam. Another poem praising the imam when he attacked the city of

Aden is called צפי אלדין מא שאנה בדיואנה and another pertaining to the great conquest in the West and South of Yemen entitled אלקבלה תצאדם בריק אלמגארב ובארק, were also composed. This imam was responsible for the Mawza exile, the destruction of its synagogues, and had prohibited public prayer (individuals could pray in secrecy). Therefore, one wonders how Shabazi would write words of praise about this imam? We can only speculate that these poems were written before 1679-1680, the years in which these decrees were issued. This theory confirms the conclusion that the songs in the second Diwan are from the period prior to the Mawza exile.

## II. SHABAZI'S POETIC STYLE AND CONTENT

The collection of approximately one hundered and fifty of Shabazi's poems in two Diwans, even if they constitute a fourth or even less of Shabazi's works. His known works, enable the researcher to understand their literary quality, something which is very difficult to do with the other Diwans of Yemenite Jews—which are handprinted and incorporate not only Shabazi's poetry but works of other Yemenite as well as Spanish poets. These one hundred and fifty poems reflect the general creativity of Shabazi, and represent Yemenite Jewish poetry in general.

Stylistically speaking, there are four types of poems: *nashwad, shirot, hallelot*, and *piyutim*. The poems written in the first three types, although they are steeped in a religious milieu, can be classified, according to the forms known in Spanish poetry; e.g., secular songs not intended to serve as synagogue prayers but, to be used for life cycle events. The *nashid* was written in classical form, which means that every stanza is being divided into an opening and a closing (see glossary). The *Shira* is longer than the *nashid*. The *halell* which, is recited between poem and poem, is a short poem using a very simple strophic structure. However, the *nishwad* and other Yemenite poems are interspersed. The *hallels* are put together in a special section. The *piyutim* too, are grouped in a special section in the second Diwan. All of them are solely for Yom Kippur; e.g., all poets of Yemen that observe their tradition till this day

composed piyuttim only for Yom Kippur, because for them that would be an interruption of the order of the regular service. Shabazi included prayers and secular songs in the second Diwan.

Regarding content, the first Diwan is of greater importance. The poems date from the early period of Shabazi's life, and contain reference to his personal autobiography, his relations with friends and indication as to where he lived. This was the period when he was not known as a public leader. He was dependent on the goodwill of the rich and the important people of this period because his economic situation was very difficult. In the poems of the first Diwan, Shabazi speaks about his teachers and he expresses his desire for knowledge and learning. These are short and simple songs of a personal expression. He does not use the *qabbalah* motif or the science of philosophy of the medieval period.

In contrast, the second Diwan Shabazi's personal "I" is identified with the national "I." He writes a great deal about the difficulties of the Jews in exile and the relationship between "Israel—the collective community," represented as the *Kallah* of God. In the second Diwan, Shabazi appears to us as a poet—a public messenger (the community leader in poetry), whose personal aspect disappears and who is voicing the collective agony of a nation suffering in an exile and is awaiting salvation. This poetic style gains momentum in the second Diwan. All of

these works are poems confined to a single area and are composed in three languages: Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew.

We should point out that Shabazi uses a standard form for the introduction and conclusion of his poems. We should examine the common forms. Many songs begin with a proem by Shabazi, such as אפתח בשיר, אענה בשיר, אקרא אל, אשבח, אהלל, etc. These are poems (songs) read aloud, in front of many people. The poet both composed and recited the poem in public. Other proems begin differently שור יה, יא צאח (הידיד) נוכח לידיד, לרעיה, לאלהים, לנפשו-אהוב לבי, איומתי, יא רסול (השליח), etc. Often the poet tries to attract the attention of the listener with a particular message. Frequently the opening stanza's of the poem are in the third person like קאל, יקול אלמשתאי, קאל אלשאער קאל אב שמעון, אלמועלם.

We cannot consistently figure out the poet's identity from the poem. In many songs, where the poet does not write his name in the beginning of the poem, the only source is the closing stanza which is an acceptable practice. Just as it is in the opening, so too is the ending, the poet sometimes declares: the words: אחתום לשיר, תמאם אלקול etc. The ending stanzas are a rich source of personal information regarding the poet and his surroundings that were unknown to us from the poems that were earlier known to us. Here he mentions his friends, he describes his difficulties, and he expresses himself in a lyrical and more personal way.

Generally speaking, the last stanza's content is similar to that of an ending of a personal letter greetings to a friend, expressing thanks to God or to the wealthy, a prayer, or begging forgiveness from God or asking for something.

Shabazi also wrote secular poems using Arabic techniques, which he knew well. The image of Shabazi as a righteous man in his generation was not suitable to general poems. Furthermore, they lack national or religious elements. Among the general topics in these poems influenced by Arabic poetry, we find the topic of migration. The poet was forced to wander from place to place and therefore, he experienced the feelings of being both a foreigner and a nomad. It seems that the poet relates to this situation more than the empty literature motifs use in Arabic poetry during the medieval period. In the poem, *Avteet ya gariv*, the poet turns to the nomad who found himself at a distance from his family and encourages him not to tarry in his exile because his lover (family) is waiting for him and the separation is very difficult for them. In another poem, the nomad asks those who begged him not to delay himself in the exile, to show patience and understanding to the stranger and not to mock his situation. While he is talking this way, he is also describing the suffering of the immigrant and speaks about the honor of welcoming the stranger and displaying generosity and concern for the widow, the orphan etc.

The central theme that crosses a thin line in most of Shabazi's published poetry as well as his unpublished is that of exile and redemption.

With this subject, so common in Hebrew literature of all periods, Shabazi's poetry reached a pinnacle which very few poets achieve. Both biblical literature and medieval Hebrew poetry, influence Shabazi's poetry. All describe the relationship between God and Israel as a relation between a lover and his beloved, a father and his son, and a master and his servants. This type of relationship between God and Israel is always described against the background of the tensions between Israel and the gentiles. The collective nation of Israel is described as a princess, a bride or a doe in exile. The poems constantly refer to the relationship of God to the Jewish people and his love for them. God, contrary to this, is compared as a lover, an uncle, a groom, a king, a deer, etc. His strength, His might, and His beauty are extolled. Like the classical medieval Hebrew poets Shabazi depicts the gentiles as wild enemies, or the sons of the maid Hagar etc. As the speaker of Israel, the poet complains about these children of the servant (Hagar) who oppress the beloved children. Shabazi's poetry, clearly alludes to the decrees against and the persecutions of the Jews of Yemen during his time.

On this background of degradation and oppression of his age, the poet repeatedly embraces his God reminding Him of His kindness towards

Israel in the past and anticipates an early salvation. He constantly lauds the greatness of God (Creator of the universe). God's main goal is to show His kindness to His people Israel. Most of his poems invoking the distant past directly open with the description of creation of the world or with one of the important periods in the history of Israel (the exodus from Egypt, the receiving of the Torah at Sinai, or the building of the first Temple). The goal of these songs is not only to embrace the distant past but also to compensate the poverty and the degradation of the Jews in the exile by reminding them of God's salvation of Israel in ages past. The poet affirms that God will not desert His people and that the glory of the past can serve as a testament to the future redemption of Israel

### III. Shabazi's Poetry and the Messianic Link

During the years 1677-1678, between the decree on the destruction of the synagogues and the decree to exile the Jews in Yemen, a famine prevailed in Yemen that further exasperated the societal status of the Yemenite Jews. The harshness of the starvation is echoed in two poems by Shabazi (mentioned on page 42-43). He writes that the situation became so bad that people ate weeds in the field and the carcasses of animals.[44] In newly translated Arab sources, the Mawza exile emerges as just a climax of an entire series of oppressive acts suffered by the Yemenite Jews, and an immediate result of the messianic activity of 1667.[45]

Nonetheless, despite the tremendous suffering endured by the Jews of Yemen resulting from their belief in Shabbetai Zevi in 1666-1667, they did not lose their belief in messianism nor Judaism. The conversions mentioned above should be understood as the mental and spiritual breakdown of the weaker personalities in the community who could not endure the starvation precipitated by the famine. The more common reaction to the oppression by the government was the noble attitude of Jamal, who was martyred, and of other leaders of the community who refused to convert in return for acquittance from harsh punishment. We

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[44] Serri and Tobi. (1976). **The New Poems of Rabbi Shalom Shabazi**, Machon ben tvzvi, Hebrew University, Jerusalem. pp. 10, 32, 33, and 126.

[45] See: van Koningsveld, P.S., Sadan, J., and Al-Samarri, Q. (1990). **Yemenite Authorities and Jewish Messianism**, Leiden University, Faculty of Theology.

attain some understanding pertaining to the strength of the messianic belief among the Yemenite Jews from the words of an anonymous Yemenite Jew found in the *tiklâl*:

> The year of the redemption was in 1667 and on account of our many sins the coming of our Messiah was delayed and some harsh decrees were renewed and the kings of the nations sought to drive us out in the year 1678 and they appointed a time [...] Now we await and hope for His salvation, He in his mercy and great kindness may he do with us for the sake of His name and expedite the coming of our Messiah and redeem us from the nations and uphold the words of the prophet: As in the days of your exodus from the land of Egypt I shall reveal miracles, may it be His will. [46]

Therefore, Jamal blames the community itself, and has no criticism against the deceit of Shabbetai Zevi. Neither does Shabazi see any falsity in the notion that the year 1667 was to be the year of redemption. Shabazi's poem:, מסאן יזהי אלחלצ'רה[47] he petitions the Almighty and requests that his people be redeemed. Shabazi holds the Zaydi rule culpable for the hardships that transpired against the Jews of Yemen as

[46] Manuscript of the National Library in Jerusalem, no. 4497 (Ya'ri 1963, p. 48, Tobi, 1999, p. 81).
[47] Tobi, Y. (1986). **Iyunim bmegilot teyman**, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, p.137.

the result of their belief in Shabbtai Zevi. In another poem entitled; נבואות שמעתי דברי, Shabazi accounts how matters began:

שמעתי דברי נבואות/מפי חזיון נביאנו/כי יש קץ לגלותינו.....

I heard words of prophecy/From the voice of the vision of our prophet

Prophecies were borne on me/That there is an end to our exile.....

מלכי ערב חברו עלי/ומי זה יקום לעזרתי/הזכירוני מעללי/ לולי אלהי ישועתי

"The King of Arab conspired against me/And who is he who will arise to aid me

They mentioned my deeds/If not the God of my salvation"

עמד וקנא בגללי/כי בקשו להמיר דת.....

"Stood and envied on my account/For they sought to change my faith"

סליחה בני איש תם. בקשו/אולי העון יכופר/יום זה את יי דרשו

/כי ברית אבות לא תופר יומם ולילה התקוששו/התנערו מגוש עפר

"The sons of an innocent man begged forgiveness/ Perhaps the sin will be atoned

On that day call on the Lord/For the covenant of the fathers will not be breached

Day and night purify yourselves/Arouse yourselves from the weight of dust....."

פתאום יבוא עת ישועה/ונעלה ברנה הר ציון/נשמע קול שופר

תרועה/ומלך ישב באפריון כמשפט וצדקה זרועה במגדל עוז

וגי חזיון

"Suddenly the time of redemption shall come/And we shall go up to the Mount Zion in joy"

"We shall hear the sound Shofar blowing/And the king is seated in his canopy

In justice and charity strewn/In the tower of strength and the vale of vision"

Shabazi understands the *transgression* as the rationale to why the Messianic redemption was not fulfilled. Thus, he implores his community to beg forgiveness from God. Especially astonishing is his use of עוז and מגדל and חזיון גי due to their apparent link with the Sabbateanism.

*Migdal Oz* is the name given by the Sabbateans to the Galipoli fortress where Shabbetai Zevi was incarcerated[48] and *Ge Hizayon* is the name of the Sabbatean treatise from Yemen. However, we cannot presume that the belief in the messianism of Shabbetai Zevi lasted in Yemen as long as it did in other countries.

[48] Scholem, G. (1967). **Shabbetai Zvi veha-tenuah Hashabtait beyamav**, Jerusalem (H). pp. 375-376.

## CONCLUSION

By and large, it is feasible to assert that messianic activity in Yemen in 1667 grew as a local movement, even though it was nurtured by letters and rumors about the messianism of Shabbetai Zevi. However, as we have indicated above, the Sabbatean belief was not accepted in Yemen. The Jews of Yemen viewed this experience simply as another episode of the messianic longing that was part of their history. Consequently, there was no backlash in Yemen to Sabbateanism and the hardships that descended on it because of messianic faith (not until the rise of the Enlightenment at the end of the 19th century). Therefore, it is conceivable that essays pertaining to Sabbateanism and brought to Yemen from the outside were not censored by the sages of Yemen. Hence, the work of the Sabbatean Nehemyah Hiyya Hayyun called *Divre Nehemtah* was accepted in Yemen and the Jewish sages had a tendency to quote it in their books.[49] Another book called *Hemdat Yamim* was revered and used by the Yemenite Jewish sages. Nonetheless, we should not conclude that there were secret Sabbateans in Yemen after the collapse of the movement. In one of Shabazi's poems לקוני לבי ועיני מודים בשירה is mindful of the need to lessen messianic expectations and tension: "The day of redemption is unclear and the end of days will not be revealed; happy is he who awaits, and believes."[50]

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[49] Tobi, Y. (1999) **The Jews of Yemen: Studies in their History and Culture**, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Koln, p.83; (1982). **Kitve hayad ha-teymanim hemukhon** Ben Zvi, Jerusalem. no. 5, p.22.

[50] Idelsohn, A.Z. (1919). *Hameshorer hateymani r. Shalom ben Yosef shabazi veshirato haivrit*, Mizrah Umaarav 4, pp. 8-16, 128-137 (H)

There also appears to be some significance in the fact that Shabazi's poem בחלום לילה חלמתי, in which he expressly discloses his faith in the prophecy of Nathan of Gaza on the coming of redemption in 1667, is *missing* from the two manuscripts in which it was copied.

During the 19th century and more recent times, the Jewish sages of the Yemenite community have severely criticized Sabbateanism in an attempt to diminish its significance. Amram Qorah acknowledges this, and attempts to explain what is recorded in the Arabic chronicles concerning the declaration of revolt by the Jews of San'a that the *nagid* Jamal and a few of his deranged cohorts made a huge error in judgement. This is contrary to Idelsohn's view that Shabazi believed in Shabbetai Zevi a conclusion based on allusions found in Shabazi's poetry. The scholars Nadaf and Ashaykh claim that these allusions should not be interpreted as reffering to Shabbtai Zevi and his movement.

Given the research available to us, we can conclude, that the Shabbetai Zevi movement did not precipitate the expulsion of the Jewish population of Yemen to Mawza. Rather, the expulsion to Mawza transpired as a reaction to belief in messianism by Jew and Muslim, social-economic chaos (due to the famine), and the ascent of a new imam.

# GLOSSARY

**Bolt**- The last hemistich of the verse, usually the second, completing the *delet*.

**Bolting Rhyme**- Is a single rhyme for all verses of a poem. Commonly found in *Qasida* and *Nashid* formats.

**Diwan**- Is a paraliturgical book of Yemenite Jews. In Spain, the term pertains to a collection of poems by a single poet, and later on, to a collection of poems by many poets.

**Girdle Song** (in Arabic *Muwashshah*)-

Is a strophic poem whose opening rhyme, rhymes with the end of each stanza, although each of the stanzas has an internal rhyming of its own.

**Hallel**- A praise (in plural *Hallelot*), a blessing sung at the end of the continuum *Nashid-Shira-Hallel*. The text of *Hallel* is rhymed prose not metered, often ending with a biblical verse.

**Nashid**- (in plural *Nishwad*), a song format popular in Yemenite Jewish *Diwan*, with a bolting rhyme. A direct extension of medieval *Qasida*. The number of verses of a Nashid is usually limited (4-11 in most cases).

**Qasida**- A prevalent format in medieval Arab and Hebrew poetry: a long epic poem with a single bolting rhyme.

**Shir**- Song in Hebrew = *Nashid*.

**Shira**- (in plural *Shirot*) A Diwan form which includes girdle songs and more developed poems, with *Taushich* in the middle.

**Stanza**- Is a poetic unit consisting of several verses (also known as strophe). The girdle songs mostly consist of four line stanzas and the Shirot have a large number of lines in each stanza.

**Taushich**- Is a section of three short lines, of one hemistich each, in the middle of the *Shira*, separating the long lines which begin at the end of the stanza.

**Tikhlal**- Is the prayerbook (liturgy) of Yemenite Jews, similar to the *Machazor* in other congregations.

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