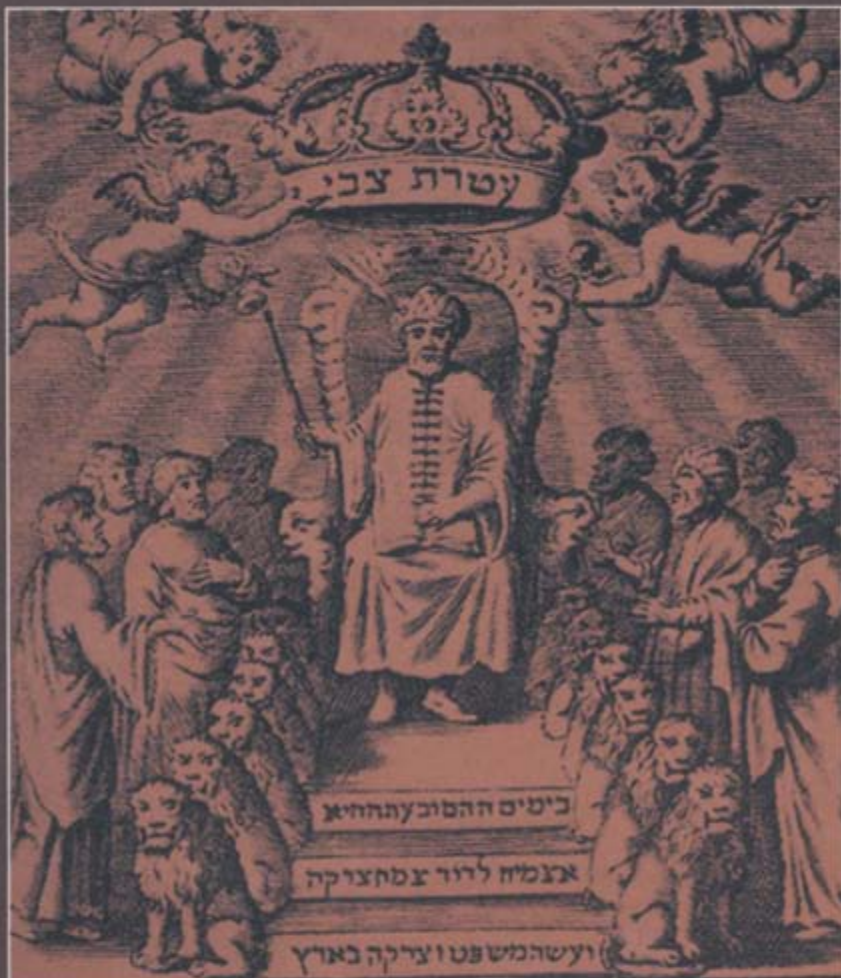


THE SABBATEAN PROPHETS



MATT GOLDISH

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For Richard H. Popkin

Contents

Preface	<i>ix</i>
Prologue	<i>1</i>
1	Messianic Prophecy in the Early Modern Context <i>8</i>
2	Messianism and Prophecy in the Jewish Tradition <i>41</i>
3	Nathan of Gaza and the Roots of Sabbatean Prophecy <i>56</i>
4	From Mystical Vision to Prophetic Eruption <i>89</i>
5	Opponents and Observers Respond <i>130</i>
6	Prophecy after Shabbatai's Apostasy <i>162</i>
Notes	<i>173</i>
Index	<i>211</i>

Preface

Gershom Scholem's magisterial work, *Sabbatai Ševi, The Mystical Messiah (1626–1676)*, was my introduction not only to the phenomenon of Sabbateanism, but in many ways also to academic Jewish studies. I read it as an undergraduate at the University of California, Los Angeles, while I was under the influence of two other great thinkers, the late Amos Funkenstein and Richard H. Popkin. My decision to pursue Jewish history as a calling was inextricably bound up with these experiences. I marveled at the annals of Jewish culture I encountered in my courses, the unexpected mirror of the Judaism I knew from my yeshivah experience. My private reading in Scholem about the strange intrigues of the kabbalists and Sabbateans captured my imagination and has never let go.

At that time I recall being troubled by the precise relationship between the early theoretical chapters in Scholem concerning Lurianic Kabbalah, and the rest of the book, which is essentially historical. In graduate school at the Hebrew University I was able to expand my understanding of both Sabbateanism and the larger background of early modern culture. I saw that Scholem's centralization of the role of Lurianism in the Sabbatean story had raised doubts for many scholars. Some of the most important critiques came from my own teachers, including Richard Popkin and Moshe Idel. Around 1993 I wrote about Sabbatean Enthusiasm, a paper influenced deeply by my teacher, Michael Heyd. I attempted to place the movement in the context of widespread European prophetic phenomena and the reactions of established authority to them. The paper was never published, but it served as the basis for the current study.

Looking over the vast literature connected with Sabbateanism now, it is clear to me that this movement, like any other, can be examined from a variety of viewpoints. Scholem looked at it from the perspective of the history

of Jewish mysticism, but, fortunately for all subsequent scholars, he also created a thorough and brilliant history of Sabbatean events. Students of Scholem and his writings, including Elliot Wolfson, Moshe Idel, Yehuda Liebes, and Avraham Elqayam, while often critical of Scholem, continue to study Sabbateanism mainly in the context of mystical scholarship. Indeed, they often delve much further than Scholem had into the specific kabbalistic (if not only Lurianic) meanings of Sabbatean writings. This school remains at the center of Sabbatean studies. Since the mystical theology of Sabbateanism became much more complex after Shabbatai's apostasy, and scholars of religion as well as theologians thrive on complexity, a disproportionate amount of this work deals with the later periods of the movement.

Other scholars, such as Meir Benayahu and the many authors of document-based papers, have presented new primary material relating to the history of the movement. Jacob Barnai and Elisheva Carlebach have helped locate Sabbateanism in the social history of Jewish communities. Popkin, Heyd, and others have discussed the impact of Sabbateanism on European thought. Harris Lenowitz has placed the movement in the literary tradition of Jewish messianic pretenders since ancient times. There have also been sociological and anthropological approaches to the movement, such as those of Stephen Sharot, Sture Ahlberg, and W. W. Meissner; and political approaches, such as that of Jane Hathaway. These are all legitimate and fruitful ways to look at the movement. Scholem opened the paths to all of them but did not exhaust any of them.

The field has become particularly active in the past few years, during which at least four new volumes on Sabbateanism have appeared. Recent studies of Sabbateanism extend even outside academe. One of the most unexpected outgrowths of Scholem's work is the appearance in recent years of a quasi-religious sect, the neo-Sabbateans, based around the "Dönme" list serve operated by Dr. Lawrence G. Corey, a Jungian psychologist in Los Angeles. The historical Dönme are Sabbateans who converted to Islam in imitation of Shabbatai's apostasy, mainly in the 1680s, but kept an underground Sabbatean faith which is still preserved. Corey's group takes Scholem's research as its point of departure and glorifies the "holy apostasy" of Shabbatai to Islam as a great moment in spiritual ecumenicalism worthy of symbolic imitation. Several important Kabbalah scholars have participated in this forum.

What has been missing from the literature is an attempt to actually retell the story of Shabbatai Zvi's movement of 1665–66 in its larger historical context,

and a reckoning with some of the criticisms leveled at Scholem. My goal in the present study is to supply this wider view, with a focus on the role of seventeenth-century ideas on the rise of Sabbateanism, especially those about *prophecy*, in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worlds. I address prophecy in the widest meaning of the word, encompassing not only predictions of future events, but every type of experience perceived as direct communication with God—what early modern critics of such activity called “Enthusiasm.” I focus on the height of the movement in 1665–66, when Sabbateanism was public and very widely accepted. My aim is not to create a complete narrative as Scholem did, but to offer some background and then a series of “depth soundings” in selected areas by closely examining a few central documents. Exploring Sabbatean prophecy as part of Jewish and general culture in Europe and the Ottoman Empire can help us understand a great deal more about the place of Jewish ideas in the seventeenth-century world and their interrelationship with contemporary conditions.

I am indebted to many people for their help in preparing this study. The influence of my teachers, Michael Heyd, Yosef Kaplan, Moshe Idel, and Richard Popkin, is obvious throughout. I can only aspire to their great wisdom and style. While I never studied officially under David Ruderman, he has inspired and helped me in more ways than I can describe. Harris Lenowitz has been both a good friend and an indispensable discussion partner throughout the process. I am also grateful to Shlomo Berger, Cornell Fleischer, Geoffrey Parker, Carla Pestana, and Phil and Julie Weinerman for their help. Elliot Wolfson’s advice was both wise and kind. My mother, Professor Dorothy Goldish, and my sister, Judith Goldish, gave me excellent editing advice.

I received material support from the Social and Behavioral Sciences Research Institute at the University of Arizona and the Department of History and Melton Center for Jewish Studies at Ohio State University, for which I am deeply appreciative. Leonard Dinnerstein, my mentor and friend at Arizona, was very supportive and helpful. Leonard introduced me to my wonderful editor at Harvard University Press, Joyce Seltzer, who was gentle yet firm in steering me in the right direction. I am very thankful to her for taking my project on.

I am especially grateful to my honored father and mother for helping me materially and morally at all times. My wife, Betty, did not begrudge me the time I invested in this project and managed to listen to hours and hours of monologue about Shabbatai Zvi with patience and only the occasional lapse

into sleep. My daughters, Raquel, Michalle Tzivia, and Yael Simhah, also contributed in their special way.

My teacher, mentor, and friend, Richard H. Popkin, has inspired me in this and every project I have undertaken in my professional life. He is a role model both as a person and as a scholar.

The Sabbatean Prophets

Prologue

In the spring of 1665, Rabbi Nathan Ashkenazi of Gaza, already a famous mystic at the age of twenty-two, made a startling announcement: he had learned in a prophetic vision that Shabbatai Zvi, a rabbi from Izmir (Smyrna) then resident in the Land of Israel, would be the Jewish messiah.

Shabbatai Zvi had in fact declared his own messianic status in the past; this time, because of Nathan's support, he was taken seriously.¹ A small band of believers gathered around Shabbatai, and over the next year and a half their fervor convinced most of the Jewish world that he was indeed the true messiah. This was no mean feat, in part because of Shabbatai's personality quirks. For, in addition to being a great kabbalist, Shabbatai was also prone to "strange actions"—rash behavior that transgressed important commandments of Judaism. In the manic phase of his intense mood swings he would pronounce the Tetragrammaton, the ineffable four-letter name of God, as it is spelled (a violation of the Second Commandment in Jewish law), eat forbidden foods, change prayer services, or annul fast days. Such ritualized antinomian conduct had already caused his excommunication from his native city and several others over the previous eighteen years. But Nathan and the other theologians of the movement successfully cast these bizarre episodes in a positive light, explaining that they were necessary mystical exercises by which the messiah would redeem the world.

Shabbatai proceeded from Gaza through Syria to his former home in Izmir, where he remained for some months before moving to the Ottoman capital of Istanbul (Constantinople; many contemporaries continued to call it by the older name). Jews everywhere waited expectantly for Shabbatai to take the reins of the empire from the sultan and begin his messianic rule. Instead, he was imprisoned by the vizier for insurrection. But the guards were

2 Prologue

liberally bribed and Shabbatai treated his luxurious jail as a palace, entertaining Jewish notables from around the world there. Finally, in the winter of 1666, he was called before the sultan and, under the pressure of a probable death sentence, converted to Islam. The Sabbatean movement did not end at this juncture, as one might expect, but continued in various forms up until the present day.

The basic question about Shabbatai Zvi for generations has been, why was he so widely accepted? Why was he far more successful than any of the numerous messianic pretenders known since antiquity? How did he inspire masses of Jews to believe in him and support his mission? Here, I argue for the centrality of messianic prophecy to Sabbatean propaganda, and for the impact of the seventeenth-century environment, which gave so much authority to contemporary prophecy.

Shabbatai Zvi was a strange man in a strange age—an age of rapid social, political, and religious change, when no certainty about the world and its future seemed possible any longer. In this atmosphere numerous figures in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim worlds imagined themselves to be the messiah or savior of the world. Shabbatai seems more qualified than some of these, less qualified than others, and probably the least certain of his own calling as a redeemer. Little in his upbringing appears to hint at this turn in his future, but perhaps some clues point that way.²

Shabbatai was born to an upper-middle-class family in Izmir, Turkey. Two centuries after Constantinople had fallen to the Ottomans, Izmir, a formerly obscure seaport, had developed into a bustling entrepot of 50,000 souls, where merchants from around the Mediterranean and Europe came to buy and sell goods of every description.³ Aside from the large Muslim majority, residents included Greeks, various Europeans, and Jews.⁴ Shabbatai's father, Mordecai Zvi, was a factor for a company of English merchants and appears to have made a fair living at it. Though Shabbatai's family were probably Levantine (Romaniote) rather than Spanish (Sepharadi) Jews, the majority of Izmir's Jewish community consisted of former *conversos*. These were descendants of Jews who had converted to Catholicism in Spain and Portugal, were raised in the Iberian Peninsula as Catholics, and later escaped and reverted to their ancestral Judaism. They were a unique lot. Their Iberian identity was generally as strong as their Jewish one, and they often retained vestiges of Christian ideas.⁵ Their influence on Shabbatai was marked: he spoke Spanish rather than Turkish, studied in Sepharadi *yeshivot* (talmudic

academies), and in his euphoric periods loved to sing Spanish *romanceros*. He also knew a great deal about Christianity that he might have picked up from either the many European Christians in Izmir or from the *conversos* in the Jewish community.

While his brothers (he was the middle of three) inclined toward business, Shabbatai's passion was for Torah study, ascetic living, and mysticism. This in itself was not unusual for an exceptionally bright Jewish youngster in that period, and Shabbatai found like-minded students in the *yeshivot*. Later in his youth, however, his path appeared to diverge from that of his fellow students. His personality showed signs of irregularities that over time developed into a full-blown disorder, posthumously diagnosed as bipolar or manic depressive syndrome.⁶ Contemporaries regarded such symptoms at first as a form of madness, probably the deleterious effects of the influence of Saturn (Shabbatai in Hebrew). Later the Sabbateans recast or "alpha-switched" these same qualities as positive and mystical, as the other face of Saturnine melancholia is genius and prophecy.⁷

The disorder appears to have afflicted Shabbatai only occasionally in his younger days, but with increasing severity as he grew older. In the normal states between mood swings Shabbatai exhibited exemplary pietistic behavior and showed great creativity in his interpretation of kabbalistic texts. In his manic phases, however, he began deliberately to transgress rabbinic and biblical commandments. It was perhaps around the same time that he began to prophesy about his own messianic identity. The ritualized transgressions and messianic prophecies are interrelated, for Shabbatai stressed the ancient tradition (further elaborated by the kabbalists) that the law of God would be changed in the messianic era, and the traditional system of *halakhah* (Jewish precepts) would ultimately be nullified.⁸ It is hard to say whether the nihilistic urge to break the commandments came first and was afterwards justified in his mind by the messianic calling, or whether the calling came first followed by the strange acts.⁹

Another problematic aspect of Shabbatai's personality was reflected in his relationship to women. As a pious ascetic, Shabbatai would have subjected himself not only to the standard strictures of Judaism from his youth—not touching or looking more than necessary at women before marriage—but also to the particular rigors of kabbalistic ideas. These speak of the cosmic disasters caused, for example, by masturbation, which creates countless demons that wreak havoc on the transgressor and the world. The kabbalists' universe abounds with evil female spirits, such as Lilith, the jilted first wife

4 Prologue

of Adam, and the many succubi and shades that populate mystical literature. The feminine is often represented as the left or evil side in the kabbalistic world view, and kabbalistic symbolism bristles with complex conceptions of divine gender.¹⁰ The sexual tension of a handsome young man (so he is described by many contemporaries), practicing such piety and absorbing these ideas while living in the middle of a busy port city, might have been standard for *yeshivah* students, but it could also have engendered a greater level of unconscious frustration and confusion in a sensitive individual.

Shabbatai seemed to venerate his mother, who died before the movement began. According to the eyewitness account of Thomas Coenen, the Dutch minister in Izmir,

He told the Jews of Izmir, “that anyone who goes up to the tomb of his mother (and why the tomb of his mother I was unable to determine) and places his hand upon it, will merit reward as if he went up to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.” Believe me that barely any Jews from his adherents, if any at all, refrained from traveling to that tomb. With intense religious fervor they arrived at the grave site to merit such a great reward, as well as the forgiveness of their sins. From the day the Jews received this instruction, no man or woman was seen who didn’t rush to merit this expiation, just like people are wont to do in Italy and elsewhere. . . . They also went to a well next to the Jewish graveyard and drank of its waters. They called the well “Well of Our Master” because it was also by the spot where Shabbatai Zvi used to come alone or with his companions, twenty years ago or more, in order to pray, as I have discussed above.¹¹

From another source we learn of a contemporary story that Shabbatai returned to Izmir and resuscitated his long dead mother!¹² The sacralization of his mother’s grave, but not that of his father or other ancestors, indicates he had more than a normally close filial relationship with her. Coenen’s comparison with the Catholic practice of pilgrimages to the graves of saints is quite apt—Shabbatai appears to have seen his mother as a holy figure, an image suggesting a Freudian interpretation.

Nathan of Gaza tells us a most interesting bit of information about Shabbatai’s self-image: “When he was six years old a flame appeared in a dream and caused a burn on his penis; and dreams would frighten him but he never told anyone. And the sons of whoredom [demons] accosted him so as to cause him to stumble and they beat him, but he would not hearken unto them. They were the sons of Na’amah, the scourges of the children of man,

who would always pursue him so as to lead him astray.”¹³ Here the latent sexual tension of the ascetic life and the kabbalistic world of demons born of sin, especially sexual sin, come to the surface. Not only did some real or imagined experience Shabbatai underwent as a child cause him anguish in connection with his penis, and thus his future sexuality, but he struggled with the demons of sexual fantasy, of whom Na’amah was the queen.¹⁴ Nathan describes Shabbatai’s struggle with these temptations as horribly torturous, which it undoubtedly was, but says Shabbatai was ultimately victorious. We might wonder whether his victory came at the price of a normal relationship with women in his future life, or even of his sanity.

Given the background of Shabbatai’s unusual relationship with his mother and his struggles with sexual temptation, it is not surprising that his marriages did not proceed in the usual manner. As a young man in Izmir he was wedded to suitable women on two occasions, and both times the marriage ended in divorce because Shabbatai failed to consummate the union. Notwithstanding the mystical and pious explanations that circulated, this strange turn of events can only be understood as a result of the gender difficulties we have already seen in Shabbatai’s life. His nuptial exploits next shifted from the unfortunate to the bizarre. After arriving in Salonika he invited the sages of the city to a feast; he erected a wedding canopy and proceeded to marry himself to a Torah scroll. The mystical explanations he proffered again made no headway with the authorities, and they banned him from the city.¹⁵ In this case it is not hard to conclude that a marriage with the inanimate scroll to which his spiritual devotions were directed was a form of erotic displacement. Shabbatai, unable to form a sexual bond with a human wife, sought instead to reify the symbolism of the Jews’ loving relationship with the Law through this strange ceremony. This was presumably the same disposition that led Shabbatai, around the same period, to purchase a large fish, dress it as a baby, and place it in a cradle.¹⁶ Once again, the mystical explanations that Shabbatai offered mask the more primitive psychology of a person apparently emotionally unable to conduct sexual relations and have children. The next stage of the story was Shabbatai’s “successful” marriage to Sarah, his wife at the height of the movement in 1665–66.

Although the rabbis were not persuaded by Shabbatai’s mystical explanations of his strange behavior concerning women and family matters, it seems that Shabbatai believed in his own interpretations. He saw himself as a holy warrior who battled the dangerous female demons and preserved himself in a state of purity. Like the Virgin Mary, his saintly mother had prepared the way for her son to lead the ascetic life demanded of the future

6 Prologue

messiah. As Nathan of Gaza explains, it was Shabbatai's willpower in his fierce battle with the sexual demons, and the intense suffering he underwent during these trials, that made him worthy of the messianic role.

Whether or not this is connected with the highly sexual kabbalistic symbolism of Shabbatai's conversion to Islam, as it has been described in recent research, is unclear. That aspect of Shabbatai's "crowning" with the white turban of Islam is given by Nathan of Gaza and other Sabbatean theologians, but some of it may have originated with Shabbatai, who is described in a recent paper as the embodiment of "the divine androgyne in his being."¹⁷

The background of Shabbatai's personality may tell us something of his own preparation for the messianic calling. However, it is only through the lens of the historical perspective of the period that we can really begin to see why a person with Shabbatai's odd combination of mystical genius and personality disorders would consider placing himself in the role of messiah. Even more significant, that perspective can help us understand why most of the Jewish world was prepared to believe in him.

The success of Shabbatai as a messianic figure was partly the result of a coincidence of charismatic personalities, favorable local circumstances, accommodating mentalities, and expeditious political conditions. The breadth and speed of the spread of belief in his mission throughout the entire Jewish world, and its phenomenal success in diverse Jewish communities, suggest some common assumptions that prepared the ground for this new movement.¹⁸ The reigning theory for the last generation has been that the mystical system of Rabbi Isaac Luria (d. 1572), with its emphasis on ideas of exile and redemption, was the single central factor that brought Jews from all backgrounds into the faith. According to this view, by using the imagery and theology of Luria's thought, Nathan and other Sabbatean ideologues were able to convince the Jewish world that Shabbatai was the destined redeemer.¹⁹ This theory was sharply challenged in recent debates. One argument points to the likelihood that most Jews did not know or care much about kabbalistic ideas.²⁰ Furthermore, it appears that the vast majority of believers in Shabbatai adopted the faith without even being exposed to Sabbatean theology—the writings of Nathan took much longer to circulate than the first spectacular news of Nathan's prophecy.²¹ New approaches are thus necessary to make sense of the movement's broad appeal.

Ultimately, the most important factor in the spread of this and all Jewish messianic movements was always the deep belief of traditional Jews everywhere in a coming messiah. But the acceptance of Shabbatai Zvi as the

messiah, like the acceptance of most propositions in religion, science, and politics, was founded mainly on a specific type of faith in authority. Social movements spread according to the same dynamics as contagious diseases, and one of the keys in even the largest movements is the overwhelming influence of a few individuals.²² In the case of Sabbateanism, a small circle of important rabbis became convinced by what they had personally seen and heard in Gaza, adopted the faith, and spread the news to their closest cohorts by mail or in person. (It is noteworthy that the very earliest believers were almost all residents of Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire, and of European extraction almost to a man—mainly from Spain and Portugal.) Because this was an extremely august group of Jewish leaders and thinkers, their opinion carried sufficient authority to convince masses of Jews and even important rabbis. The social patterns of communication thus somewhat mitigate the need to find a single factor affecting all Jews. At the same time, the spectacle of prophecy rather than any mystical theology was clearly the main catalyst in the first and most critical success of the movement.

This is not to say, of course, that the Jewish world accepted the word of these rabbis blindly. They had to present the evidence that convinced them to believe, and that evidence had to make sense to Jews all over, especially in the major centers of Europe and the Ottoman Empire, whence it spread to the outer communities. Although Nathan's writings may have been a part of this picture, it is clear that an ordinary Jew would not examine his tracts, decide that they were convincing as mystical reasoning in the Lurianic tradition, and then choose to believe. A far more powerful unifying factor was the willingness of seventeenth-century Jews to believe in acceptably validated messianic prophecies, especially those of a kabbalist like Nathan of Gaza. This openness to prophecy was not the *cause* of the movement, but an exceptionally potent and broad influence characteristic of the seventeenth-century setting, which combined with other aspects of the period to facilitate the success of Sabbateanism. The reasons for this attitude among the Jews of many nations must be sought in the history of prophetic and messianic ideas and their especial influence in the early modern world. It was a complex age, when messianism, prophecy, science, humanism, and mercantilism not only coexisted, but profoundly influenced one another and made logical bedfellows in the Baroque mind. This was the world of the Sabbateans.

*Messianic Prophecy in the
Early Modern Context*

But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

—Daniel 12:4

Prophetic messianism was central to the rise of the Sabbatean movement. While both prophecy and messianism had a very long history before the seventeenth century, the early modern period had fused these impulses, and they received tremendous attention. Messianism is the expectation that in the (usually near) future, a redeemer will come to this world to bring justice and peace and institute a utopian era. A great many societies believe in a messiah or future redemption, though these ideas certainly vary from place to place and time to time.¹ Still, most such expectations are similar in general outlook, and when an impressive pretender turns up who does not quite fit the expected mold, believers are sometimes willing to accommodate their views to fit the facts on the ground.

Gershom Scholem suggested that two major streams of messianic thought coursed through medieval Judaism: the popular-mythological and the philosophical-rationalist.² A closer look discloses many variations within these categories.³ For each believer some messianic notions are culturally determined, some are common to many cultures, and some are personal.⁴ While religions and societies, including Judaism, attempt to impose uniform beliefs in this area as in others, no two people end up with identical messianic ideas or mental scenarios.

The most basic kind of expectation is at the individual level: the person hopes for a messianic redemption from his or her own sufferings and lowly condition, or perhaps from a burden of sin. Each person with messianic be-

lief wants to believe that whatever scenario ultimately plays out, he or she personally will be saved from the evil and suffering afflicting his or her life.

Another messianic expectation, perhaps a unique one, was expressed directly by Shabbatai Zvi himself: the redemption of *gender*. When he was in women's company he liked to quote from Psalms 45:10, "Kings' daughters are among thy favorites; At thy right hand doth stand the queen in gold of Ophir." He would add on his own: "And you, downtrodden women! How unfortunate are you, that because of Eve your pain is so great when you give birth. What is more, you are subservient to your husbands, so you are unable to do a thing, small or great, without their approval." And on he went in this vein. "But thank God that I have come into the world to redeem you from all your sufferings, to free you, and to make you happy like your husbands—for I have come in order to annul the sin of Adam."⁵

The next common level of messianic expectation is the salvation of the collectivity. Most believers have expectations concerning at least one larger group with which they identify, usually their nation or religion. The group is believed to merit a special or even exclusive status, which will continue in the new world order under the messiah's rule; hence *only* the Catholics, or the Lutherans, or the Mormons will be saved at the End of Days. Often a king or other leader is given a special, quasi-messianic role in the future expectations. In the West, the tropes of national and religious redemptive expectations share a common source in the Bible, particularly the books of Daniel and the later prophets, and the Apocalypse of St. John for all Christian denominations. These scenarios are inculcated through sermons, exegesis, ritual, music, and especially art. Everything about Catholic worship, for example—the church building, liturgy, service, and music—appears designed to fill the believer's consciousness with the Roman messianic vision, which is, on the one hand, a memory, and on the other, an expectation.

A final level of the messianic imagination is the hope for universal redemption, particularly popular in the Renaissance. This might mean the salvation of all mankind. Some Christians believed this would happen, and rejected the common doctrine that those with incorrect beliefs would ultimately be utterly destroyed. A concept of universal salvation was common to most Jews, though, to be sure, they also reserved a special status for themselves at the End of Days. Universal salvation might literally mean the saving and redemption of the whole universe, physical as well as human. It was a common belief in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the

sins of mankind were so heinous that they had damaged the world itself, as they had in the generation of Noah's flood.⁶ In the messianic times God would come and put the entire world right again, restoring harmony to the cosmos and eliminating disease, starvation, and the ultimate physical deterioration of the earth. In certain forms of Kabbalah, particularly from the school of Rabbi Isaac Luria (d. 1572), there was even a belief that God himself would be "redeemed."⁷

Because every person who believes in the coming of a messiah has a different understanding of these expectations, the designation of an individual as a Jew, Christian, Muslim, or Sabbatean does not communicate the whole range of the person's messianic beliefs. The individual is likely to share many or all the messianic ideas taught by his or her religious group, but this still leaves room for a variety of personal scenarios. (The current best-selling book series, *Left Behind*, serves as a fine example of how one person pictures that future time.) If this is the case, however, we might wonder how a group of people ever comes together to recognize a specific person as the messiah. What has the spiritual gravity to pull disparate messianic imaginations into line behind a particular figure?

The answer, in a great many cases, is prophecy. The individual who succeeds in convincing others that he or she is in direct communication with God, and is therefore a conduit of divine information, has been a powerful force throughout history. In a remarkable number of cases prophets have come to foretell the coming or return of the messiah, so that the two roles have become deeply associated. The criteria for determining a true prophet shift constantly through different periods, institutions, and faiths. The early modern period, for all its burgeoning scientific and humanistic pursuits, was especially receptive to the messages of messianic prophets with the right qualifications.

Prophecy, as generally understood in the pre-modern world, did not just mean predicting the future. Meteorologists, stock analysts, insurance actuaries, and seismologists make a living by predicting the future, yet they are not prophets.⁸ Rather, a prophet was someone who claimed, or was claimed by others, to have divine inspiration.⁹ Often, to be sure, the contact with God or members of his spiritual retinue resulted in some special knowledge. This might be information about the future, but it could also be an exhortation to repent (as is commonly the case with biblical prophecy), intelligence about the previous incarnations of a soul, awareness about what sin a certain person had committed, or knowledge about who was in danger of in-

curing divine wrath. A particularly common sort of prophecy imparted knowledge of how properly to understand earlier prophecies—for example, how to correctly understand the Bible—a capacity called *spiritualis intellectus* among the Franciscans. But an inspired moment might not produce any knowledge content at all, leaving behind only the absolute certainty in the subject that such inspiration had happened.¹⁰

Since the time of the Hebrew Bible, prophecy has been overwhelmingly connected with the themes of sin and its punishment, salvation and redemption, and especially, the messiah. By the seventeenth century, prophecy and messianism were deeply intertwined within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A prophecy might announce the imminent coming of the messiah, reveal his identity, state when he would manifest himself, confirm the mission of a confessed messiah, or urge repentance before the Day of Judgment. Prophecy could also be a portent in itself, a sign that the messianic era was dawning, regardless of any meaningful content.

All three of the major monotheistic religions officially believe that prophecy ceased after the holy canon was complete. For Jews this means the end of the period of the Hebrew Bible, for Christians after the completion of the New Testament, and for Muslims after the passing of Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets. It is just as patent, however, that prophecy continued in a multiplicity of forms in all three faiths. Often a differentiation was made between the work of the scriptural prophets, which was “real” prophecy, and the lower levels attained by those of later generations, which might be described as inspired wisdom, dream revelations, holy spirit, or any number of further euphemisms. Only the former, presumably, requires the biblical proof of authenticity.¹¹ It is often remarkably difficult for the modern observer to determine the precise qualitative differences between these later prophetic phenomena and those of the holy books.

The nature and degrees of prophecy were a source of endless philosophical and mystical discussions in the Middle Ages. Is prophecy an imaginative faculty? A divine gift? The result of a mystical union with God? How can true and false prophecy be distinguished?¹² Among the Jews, Moses Maimonides, the great Jewish Aristotelian philosopher of the twelfth century, and Isaac Abarbanel, the late fifteenth-century Spanish commentator, are particularly well known for their views on prophecy as well as messianism.¹³ Maimonides especially is taken as an authority in these matters and is cited with great regularity in the Sabbatean literature. With the rise of Kabbalah in the thirteenth century came a new set of mystical concep-

12 The Sabbatean Prophets

tions about prophecy, especially those of the *Zohar* and Rabbi Abraham Abulafia.¹⁴

The early modern period witnessed a great flowering of spiritual inspiration in many lands. Moving away from the academic debates and secret mystical rituals typical of medieval prophetic thought, the early moderns often declared the presence of divine inspiration among them publicly. Prophecy and messianic movements tend to appear in clusters, and the early modern period witnessed some of the most prominent of these. The late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries stimulated widespread messianism and prophecy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam at the same time, a concurrence which may never have happened previously. The trend continued in various patterns through most of the seventeenth century. The reasons for this must be sought in the complex nexus of religious history and rapid change that characterized the period.

Messianism and Prophecy in the Christian Tradition

Christian messianism is often called millenarianism, referring to the New Testament prophecy of the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth in the future (Revelation 20:2–3). Christianity is saturated with messianic and apocalyptic ideas because it originated as a messianic sect of Judaism in the first century. Furthermore, Christianity is in an extended transitory state between halves of a messianic mission; and, having rejected biblical law, it is heavily concerned with doctrine. The Church Fathers Origen and Augustine attempted to suppress prophetic strains and acute Christian millenarianism, and this became doctrine; nevertheless a long series of Catholic millennial prophets came to the fore in the Middle Ages, both within the church hierarchy and at the popular level.¹⁵ Some of these had direct or indirect effects on Sabbatean ideas.

A very influential stream of prophetic millenarianism from within the church developed under the influence of the twelfth-century Calabrian abbot, Joachim of Fiore, who himself experienced divine revelations. Joachim's emphasis was on the hidden messages within the text of Scripture that would reveal sacred patterns in history to the person possessing the keys of correct interpretation. One of these secrets, and a particularly significant one for the history of prophetic interpretation, was Joachim's doctrine of the "concordance of testaments"—the idea that the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, is in fact a complex code for interpreting the New Testa-

ment and all of history. Another of Joachim's secrets was the postulation of three historical dispensations, corresponding to the three persons of the Trinity. Joachim developed new approaches to the traditional understandings of eschatological biblical prophecy and inspired a series of followers who revitalized the millennial idea in medieval Christendom.¹⁶ Many other apocalyptic thinkers became active in the following centuries and depended on prophetic inspiration of one sort or another, although their styles and purposes varied widely.¹⁷

Several events of the Renaissance period had a profound impact on Christian thought, including conceptions of prophetic messianism. In 1453 Constantinople, the center of Eastern Christendom, fell to the Ottomans. Christianity was now on the defensive, and acutely aware of the fact. Around the same time, and due in part to Christian thinkers fleeing the Levant with their books, came the rise of humanism, a revolution in European thought. The humanists stressed a concern not only with the curriculum of the humanities, but more generally with human life, history, and culture. Among their interests were the documents and ideas of both classical and Jewish antiquity. Humanistic ideas, such as those propounded by Erasmus of Rotterdam and Johannes Reuchlin, contributed to a conflict within the Catholic church between humanists and more traditional thinkers that ultimately exploded in the Protestant Reformation of 1517. The shedding of Roman authority, along with Luther's doctrine of *sola scriptura*, opened the floodgates for individual, unsupervised biblical interpretation. The same period experienced the voyages of discovery, which revealed new lands to Europeans, and the scientific revolution, which uncovered new worlds in the sky and on earth. Political and natural upheavals added to the feeling of a great impending change in the world order.¹⁸

In these circumstances, prophecy and millenarian expectations flourished. Notions of the Last World Emperor,¹⁹ the Cedar of Lebanon prophecy,²⁰ and a revealed antichrist who could be named,²¹ all of which had been of minor importance for centuries, came to the fore now. The fears and disorientation caused by the rapidly changing world of the period gave a tremendous impetus to messianic thought.

Learned, officially sanctioned prognostication flourished, as did popular prophecy. Both tended to introduce a decidedly concrete historical and usually political cast, and the accretion of a retinue around Christ consisting of potentates who would participate with him in the work of redemption. The increased specificity and political nature of early modern messianism were

mainly the result of freedom from the constraints imposed by the medieval church, combined with the humanist focus on text scholarship, and the “scientific” endeavor to remove mystery and establish certainty in all matters. The multiplication of players in the millennial drama mainly stems from the Last World Emperor tradition, but it may also owe something to Jewish influences, including importation of the belief in two messiahs—one the son of Joseph and another the son of David. This doctrine would play an enormous role in the Sabbatean movement.²²

Within the Catholic church, Dominican and Franciscan connections to prophetic eschatology had sometimes teetered on the brink of heresy, and their schools now took on even more apocalyptic coloration.²³ The most famous example of this trend was the fiery Girolamo Savonarola, a Dominican monk who became famous in Italy for his impassioned sermons about the wrath of God to be visited upon sinners in the imminent End of Days. He demanded repentance and reform of all Christians; but when he presented himself as a prophet and preached reform of the debased church, rejecting the authority of the corrupt papacy, he sealed his death sentence and was executed as a heretic in 1498. Savonarola read the Apocalypse and other biblical prophecies as a guide to his own time, believing they were being fulfilled.²⁴ Other messianic friars of the time included the *alumbrados* of Spain, who also prophesied a reformation of the church and termination to corruption in the fast approaching End Times.²⁵

Although Italy and Spain remained Catholic during the religious struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were particular hotbeds of prophetic messianism throughout the entire period.²⁶ An outpouring of the revelatory gift among all classes of Italians occurred in the early sixteenth century—a panoply of prophetic types appeared, holding forth in their respective styles on the significance of dreams, divinations, prodigies, marvels, and political and religious events (particularly the Sack of Rome in 1527 by Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor) for the immediate future of mankind.²⁷ In Rome the spirit came upon commoners as well as theologians, politicians, humanists, and artists.²⁸ Guillaume Postel (b. Normandy, 1510, d. Paris, 1581), the wild prophetic genius of sixteenth-century Veneto, loudly proclaimed that Venice would be the seat of the universal reformation.²⁹

The Iberian Peninsula, ancestral home of numerous leading Sabbateans (and their opponents), was equally saturated with prophecy. At the end of the fifteenth century, under the impact of strong united leadership, the suc-

cess of the *Reconquista*, and the expulsion of both Jews and Muslims, Spain was riding a wave of messianic excitement. The famous circle of San Juan de la Cruz and Santa Teresa de Jesús was only the tip of an iceberg. There were countless *beatas*, visionaries, dreamers, and prophets in the same period, of whom we know from inquisitional records and various writings. Most were women. Some were accepted within the church, especially under the patronage of Cardinal Ximénes de Cisneros, and even beatified; others were accused of heresy and suffered at the hands of the Inquisition.³⁰ The tide of prophecy continued throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Lucrecia de León, who was tried by the Inquisition starting in 1590 for her highly politicized revelations;³¹ Sor María de Agreda, the visionary nun who died the year of Shabbatai's public revelation;³² Isabel de Jesús, another contemporary of Shabbatai, whose autobiography is filled with strange relations between the physical and spiritual realms;³³ the sisters of the Convent of the Conception in Cáceres, whose biographies appeared in 1629 telling of their mystical revelations; Sor Francisca de la Concepción, who merited trances, revelations, prophecies, miracles, and out-of-body experiences around the same time;³⁴ and numerous others.

The Protestant Reformation became the occasion for a surge of messianic prophecy in Germany, England, Holland, France, and North America.³⁵ Sometimes the Reformation and its leaders themselves provided the motivation for messianic movements. Indeed, the very cleavage of the mighty Roman church was taken by many as a portent of the impending apocalypse—many Jews certainly saw it that way.³⁶ Martin Luther himself was considered a prophet by many Protestants, and although he rejected millenarianism, his extensive comments about the End of Days were important in fostering these impulses.³⁷ Other movements, such as the messianically charged Peasants' Revolt in Germany in the 1520s, were clearly connected to long-standing tensions, although the advent of the Reformation sparked the explosion.³⁸ Messianic prophecy became connected, through the doctrinal conflicts of the Reformation, with a variety of heresies in addition to that of chiliasm (a belief in Christ's coming thousand-year physical reign), which was officially considered a Judaizing heresy by both Catholics and most mainstream Protestants throughout the period. For example, acute messianism often called for an extreme "reform" position, namely, the return of Christians to whatever the prophet believed were the tenets of the primitive apostolic church. Messianic prophets such as Guillaume Postel, Oligier Paulli, Michael Servetus, and Isaac de la Peyrère recklessly crossed

borders between Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism in their quest to bring Christendom back to a state that would allow Christ to recognize it as his own and return. (Servetus was the only person to be condemned as a heretic in both the Catholic and Calvinist churches.)³⁹

Mainstream Protestant churches and the increasing number of nonconformist sects alike continued to believe in the imminent Second Coming throughout the seventeenth century—indeed, it is a sort of hallmark of the era. The Wars of Religion, the Thirty Years' War, and the English Revolution were all deeply connected with millenarian impulses and imbued with innumerable prophecies of the end. England was especially rich in these trends. Early in the century new vistas in prophetic interpretation were being opened by Joseph Mede at Cambridge, whose *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627) ushered in the era of historical and scientific biblical interpretation. Mede was a millenarian, but his work was authorized by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and its publication was supported by the House of Commons in 1642.⁴⁰ King James I (James VI of Scotland), after whom the famous Bible translation is named, wrote an important prophetic interpretation in this period,⁴¹ while a system closely related to Mede's was being worked out in Germany by Johann Heinrich Alsted, in his *Diatribes de mille annis apocalypticis*, also from 1627.⁴²

At the same time that these scholars worked out rational, literary approaches to prophecy, a more extreme messianic agitation exploded in seventeenth-century England among popular and political factions, especially those connected with the Civil War in mid century. The English in general demonstrated a deep belief in providence, astrology, portents, and prophecy,⁴³ and their expectations were developed further by a multitude of acute messianic and utopian sects: Ranters, Fifth Monarchists, Quakers, Diggers, and Levellers, among others.⁴⁴ But the Puritan mainstream itself was steeped in millenarian attitudes. Parliament saw itself as a new Sanhedrin (the ancient Jewish high court), and many Englishmen believed they were creating the kingdom of God.⁴⁵ The gift of prophecy poured forth everywhere,⁴⁶ bringing with it, among other things, an increased interest in the role of Jews and Judaism at the End of Days. The expectation of the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel as part of the millennial process was rife; but this might have to be preceded by their readmission into England after three and a half centuries of exile, so that they could be exposed to the true godly Christianity before their regathering. These issues elicited long, acrimonious debates.⁴⁷ Many important millenarians, such as John Dury, Samuel Hartlib,

Nathaniel Holmes, and Margaret Fell, were interested in Jewish messianic hopes and dealt directly with Jews such as Manasseh ben Israel (from Amsterdam) and the Abendana brothers.⁴⁸ These trends did not die with the Restoration, but continued for many decades.

Similar outpourings of messianic expectation were to be found on the Continent as well. The millenarian utopianists Hartlib, Comenius, and Dury were connected with England, but were based in Europe.⁴⁹ Various millenarian sects found refuge in the Netherlands, with its comparatively open religious atmosphere, but institutionalized messianic expectations could be found there almost as much as in England.⁵⁰ Rabbi Nathan Shapira of Jerusalem was showered with alms and respect when he came to Amsterdam collecting for the poor of Jerusalem and hinted that a mass Jewish conversion might be in the offing.⁵¹ A most instructive example is the case of the Collegiants, who began as a chiliastic sect and over the course of the seventeenth century become slowly secularized. At the time of the Sabbatean outbreak they were still a potent prophetic messianic group, though Spinoza was already living among them.⁵² Peter Serrarius, who played an important role in the dissemination of Sabbatean news and was deeply concerned with the movement, was also connected with the Collegiants.⁵³

French Protestant messianism tended to cross borders because of the volatile religious atmosphere. Thus Jean de Labadie (1610–1674), a highly influential messianic figure, began his life of wandering in southern France, but then his spiritual quest took him to Germany, the Netherlands, England, South America, and North America. He attracted many followers as a preacher and prophet, foretelling a peaceful utopian future. Labadie knew of the Sabbateans and spoke of them in his sermons.⁵⁴ At the end of the century the French Prophets, whose movement began among the Protestant rebels fighting the Catholic monarchy in the Cevennes mountains, crossed over to England and later visited Germany and Holland as well, exhibiting their unique prophetic style.⁵⁵ Movements of prophetic convulsionaries, connected with messianic hopes, were found among the Jansenists, especially a group in the early eighteenth century centered at the cemetery of Saint-Médard.⁵⁶ Other flowerings of prophetic messianism appeared in Germany, the seat of the Rosicrucian movement,⁵⁷ and Sweden, where Queen Christina was deeply involved in millenarian thought.⁵⁸

Within the highly charged prophetic-messianic atmosphere of early modern Christian Europe, certain themes turned up with great regularity, including the Messiah King, the New Jerusalem, and the identity of the anti-

christ. The impulse to prophesy about the messianic role of a king or ruler in the process of the Second Coming exemplifies the historical rootedness and political associations common in early modern messianism. Ancient Roman emperors regularly consulted oracles and prophets in the process of consolidating their authority.⁵⁹ The legacy of divine providence in the appropriation of royal prerogative, often supported by prophecies, was expressed in the medieval idea of the divine right of kings. An ancient legend of the Last Emperor, or Emperor of the Last Days, was even more messianically explicit, and it was applied to numerous medieval rulers.⁶⁰ Under the impact of Joachim of Fiore, Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor, was proclaimed chastiser of the church in the Last Days.⁶¹ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries almost every major European ruler was placed in a messianic role by someone.⁶² The precise course of action these sovereigns were to follow in the process of Christ's return was often vague, but the coupling of temporal royalty with messianism gives a sense of the prevailing atmosphere.

Another trend related to these messianic king prophecies was the widespread discussion of the New Jerusalem. The term does not appear as such in the Hebrew Bible, though there are many allusions to the new heavens and new earth, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem (for example, Isaiah 24 and 27). In the New Testament the New Jerusalem is used in much the same sense (Revelation 21:1–3). But the term took on a very different meaning in the early modern world, when great Christian cities were regularly called the New Jerusalem. This suggested they replaced the Jerusalem in Palestine as the spiritual center of the world, simultaneously confirming the supersession of the Jews in the messianic process.⁶³ The Florentine Republic at the time of Savonarola was called the New Jerusalem,⁶⁴ as was the prophetic Anabaptist community of Münster in the 1530s.⁶⁵ Later the name was applied to the “chosen” people and cities of the Netherlands,⁶⁶ England,⁶⁷ Hungary,⁶⁸ North America,⁶⁹ and elsewhere. (For the same reason many eastern cities in the United States are named after biblical towns such as Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Mt. Carmel, Nazareth, Jericho, and so on.) The Labadist movement set out “in quest of the New Jerusalem,”⁷⁰ and the church established by the eighteenth-century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg was called the New Jerusalem Church. The Mormons look on Utah in this way as well.

Finally, the identity of the antichrist, a popular topic throughout the Middle Ages, became almost an obsession at this time. The two most common identities conferred on the antichrist were fairly straightforward: the pope for most Protestants; and the Ottoman sultan for many Europeans of all

faiths.⁷¹ There might, of course, be multiple antichrists. The Jews were often put in this role.⁷² This sharp increase in the desire to point to a concrete antichrist, present in the world, was another expression of the belief that the End of Days was fast approaching.

Messianic Prophecies, the Sciences, and the Humanities

In the West we have been conditioned to think that science and religion generally, and science and messianic mentalities in particular, are antithetical. Andrew Dickson White's 1895 classic, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, epitomizes the influence of this assumption, whose potency has only recently begun to abate. What is certain is that no such dichotomy existed in the seventeenth century, when science and theology were intensely intertwined.

In an abstract sense, messianic prophecy and science clearly share certain common goals. They are both concerned with methods for getting beyond the surface world and understanding its underlying dynamics. They both strive to define the boundaries of the knowable. Science and some forms of prophecy attempt to plumb the future and what will happen under prescribed circumstances. Both seek to improve the human condition through knowledge. Daniel (12:4) declared that in messianic times, "Many will run to and fro and knowledge will be increased." This was widely taken to be the significance of the great geographical and scientific discoveries in early modern Europe.⁷³ Among early modern scientists messianic thinking took several forms, most of them conservative and hopeful rather than violently apocalyptic.⁷⁴ The Sabbatean movement broke out at the height of the scientific revolution, in the very *anni mirabiles* of Sir Isaac Newton's greatest discoveries. These two events can be traced to a common universe of discourse through elements of the underlying seventeenth-century mentality.

Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, what we now call science developed more or less directly out of approaches that are today considered antitheses of science: astrology into astronomy, alchemy into chemistry, prognostication into statistics, and so on. The scientific method created the shift by insisting on concretizing and testing the results of natural studies. In other fields, however, attempts at applying the scientific method met with less spectacular results. The interpretation of biblical prophecy and the related attempt to calculate the time of the Second Coming are prime examples of this trajectory.

John Napier (1550–1617) exemplifies the early modern relationship be-

tween science and messianic prophecy. Napier was one of the most distinguished mathematicians of his day, and created a lasting impact on Western science by inventing logarithms, novel formulae in trigonometry, and the current use of the decimal point.⁷⁵ “It is certain, however, that Napier regarded his work on the prophecies of the Apocalypse as his true vocation and the study of mathematics as the occupation of his leisure.”⁷⁶ Napier attempted to introduce a set of rules for prophetic interpretation which would make it universal and infallible—in short, a science.⁷⁷ This methodical and rigorous approach to scriptural prophecy failed to correctly predict the end, expected by Napier in 1700, but it was highly influential on Joseph Mede and his school, and many later scientific prophetic exegetes.⁷⁸

Henry More, the great Cambridge Platonist, and Sir Isaac Newton, arguably the most important scientist of all time, were later advocates of scientific prophetic interpretation.⁷⁹ Both followed Mede in the attempt to establish simple, universal rules for reading the prophets that would allow an infallible understanding of Scripture. These rules are closely analogous to Newton’s scientific rules for the interpretation of natural phenomena. A typical passage from Newton’s voluminous theological writings reveals his attitude.

Having searched and by the grace of God obtained after knowledg in the propheticque scriptures, I have thought my self bound to communicate it for the benefit of others. . . . For it was revealed to Daniel that the prophecies concerning the last times should be closed up and sealed untill the time of the end: but then the wise should understand, and knowledge should be increased. Dan 12.4,9,10. . . . If they are never to be understood, to what end did God reveale them? Certainly he did it for the edification of the church; and if so, then it is as certain that the church shall at length attain to the understanding thereof. I mean not all that call themselves Christians, but a remnant, a few scattered persons which God hath chosen, such as without being (blinded) led by interest, education, or humane authorities, can set themselves sincerely and earnestly to search after truth. For as Daniel hath said that the wise shall understand, so he hath said also that none of the wicked shall understand.⁸⁰

And who is wise if not Newton? It is clear that Newton saw himself as one of the chosen, those given the gift of prophetic interpretation by God in the End of Days.

Following this passage Newton offers his set of fixed rules for scriptural in-

terpretation. He apparently did see himself as a prophet, an important participant in the process by which knowledge is increased before the apocalypse.⁸¹ It is noteworthy that the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel looms large in Newton's messianic scenario, and he has a great deal to say about their place in the unfolding future.⁸² Newton's student and successor in the Lucasian Chair of Mathematics, William Whiston, followed in his mentor's path.⁸³

Newton was not the only early modern thinker to place science and scientists at the center of the messianic vision. An entire tradition of scientist-messiahs exists from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Unlike much of medieval millenarianism, which tended to focus on the apocalyptic revolution that would usher in the messianic age, scientific messianic ideas focused heavily on the utopian future life itself. Scientific discoveries, granted by God as part of the promised growth of knowledge, would make people's lives longer, happier, healthier, and more peaceful. The difference between what scholars label "utopian" thought and typical messianism is subtle; the essential question is whether a heaven-sent human agent is involved. If scientists saw themselves or some imaginary "super-scientist" in this role, which they often did, they can be considered part of a messianic tradition.

One of the most colorful precursors of modern scientific thought, Theophrastus Paracelsus von Hohenheim, who died in 1541, describes such a theoretical person, whom he calls Elias Artista—Elijah of the Arts. Elijah, of course, plays an important role in the Jewish tradition as a source of knowledge in the present and future, and the harbinger of the messiah. Paracelsus and numerous German scientists of the early modern period imagined the imminent arrival of an Elijah figure who would grant a deep understanding of natural phenomena to scientists. Paracelsus himself had been involved in the Peasants' Revolt of 1525, an affair with deep messianic overtones,⁸⁴ and constantly sought to improve the lot of the poor, particularly through science (mostly alchemy) and medicine. Paracelsus' students and readers for the next century took up the idea of an Elias Artista, enriching it with ever more detail. Its adherents included Oswald Croll and both the elder and younger Van Helmont.⁸⁵

The impact of the Elias Artista idea can be seen clearly in the rise of a related movement of scientific messianism: the Rosicrucian Enlightenment. In the second decade of the seventeenth century, two anonymous manifestos appeared in print, the *Fama Fraternitatis* and the *Confessio*, claiming to be the work of the secret fraternity of the Brothers of the Rosy Cross. Their calling,

according to the *Fama*, was to carry out the mandate for improvement of human health and happiness set forth by the mythical, mysterious founder of the fraternity, Christian Rosenkreutz. The legend of Rosenkreutz began with his early classical education, after which he set out for Jerusalem to learn more and along the way was taught the secrets of the Arab masters in Damascus, Egypt, and Fez. (Notice the place of the Muslim world as a source of wisdom in this tale.) After completing his studies, Rosenkreutz traveled widely, teaching the true workings of nature, alchemy, and medicine for the improvement of the human condition. He organized the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross among those dedicated scientists and physicians who would heal and help mankind with no expectation of reward. Rosenkreutz died, and leadership of the movement passed to other worthy men. Ultimately the secret tomb of Rosenkreutz was discovered and found to be full of scientific instruments and secret works of wisdom, indicating the beginning of a new and hopeful era.⁸⁶

Howbeit, we know after a time there will now be a general reformation, both of divine and human things, according to our desire, and the expectation of others. For it is fitting, that before the rising of the sun, there should appear and break forth Aurora, or some clearness, or divine light in the sky. And so in the mean time some few, who shall give their names, may join together, thereby to increase the number and respect of our Fraternity, and make a happy and wished for beginning of our *Philosophical Canons*, prescribed to us by our brother R.C., and be partakers with us of our treasures (which never can fail or be wasted), in all humility and love to be eased of this world's labour, and not walk so blindly in the knowledge of the wonderful works of God.⁸⁷

Christian Rosenkreutz took over some of the functions of both the traditional Elijah and Paracelsus' Elias Artista, and his society was to be part of the process of the Second Coming. Rosicrucianism was deeply committed to science on the one hand, and Reformed Christianity on the other, as agents of a scientific-messianic future.

Sir Francis Bacon, a contemporary of the Rosicrucians and foremost theoretician of the new science, saw the contemporary developments in knowledge in the same vein:

This is a thing which I cannot tell whether I may so plainly speak as truly conceive, that as all knowledge appeareth to be a plant of God's own plant-

ing, so it may seem the spreading and flourishing or at least the bearing and fructifying of this plant, by a providence of God, nay not only by a general providence but by a special prophecy, was appointed to this autumn of the world: for to my understanding it is not violent to the letter, and safe now after the event, so to interpret that place in the prophecy of Daniel where speaking of the latter times it is said, *Many shall pass to and fro, and science shall be increased*; as if the opening of the world by navigation and commerce and the further discovery of knowledge should meet in one time or age.⁸⁸

The deep relationship between millenarian and scientific mentalities in Bacon and his contemporaries, creators of the New Instauration, is well known, and it often echoes the thought of the Rosicrucians.⁸⁹ Even an explicit connection between the millenarian mentality of the Baconians and Rosicrucians and the movement of Shabbatai Zvi has been made in recent scholarship.⁹⁰

A third mythical figure of the scientific messianists, the clear progenitor of Elias Artista and Christian Rosenkreutz, was the great Hermes Trismegistus (the Thrice Blessed Hermes), whose identity had shifted from that of a mythical god to a concrete human being and scientific redeemer.⁹¹ Hermes was believed by Renaissance thinkers to be an ancient Egyptian who had taught the Greeks all their knowledge, and whose teachings were contained in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (actually a product of late antiquity). Hermes is therefore different from Elias Artista and Christian Rosenkreutz in that he was known for over a millennium before the Renaissance; yet the real impact of hermeticism in the West began only in the fifteenth century, with Ficino's translation of the Hermetic corpus from Greek into Latin. In one of these works, the *Asclepius*, Hermes' deep commitment to medicine and healing is revealed; but it also contains a sort of Egyptian "prophetic" apocalypse. Egypt, he tells Asclepius in the style of the biblical prophets, will sin and abandon its holy purpose.

Such will be the old age of the world: irreverence, disorder, disregard for everything good. When all this comes to pass, Asclepius, then the master and father, the god whose power is primary, governor of the first god [!], will look on this conduct and these willful crimes, and in an act of will—which is god's benevolence—he will take his stand against the vices and the perversion in everything, righting wrongs, washing away vice in a flood or consuming it in fire or ending it by spreading pestilential disease everywhere. Then he will restore the world to its beauty of old so that the world

itself will again seem deserving of worship and wonder, and with constant benedictions and proclamations of praise the people of that time will honor the god who makes and restores so great a work. And this will be the geniture of the world: a reformation of all good things and a restitution, most holy and most reverent, of nature itself, reordered in the course of time.⁹²

The influence of Hermetic ideas in early modern thought can hardly be overestimated, and this apocalyptic element was part and parcel of that impact. Could there be any doubt in the mind of a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century thinker that the future restoration of the world of which the Thrice Blessed Hermes spoke was occurring in his time? Many of the great scientists, philosophers, and physicians of the period were profoundly involved with hermeticism, including the influential and controversial Giordano Bruno, who was ultimately burned at the stake for heresy.⁹³

Hermes was also known as the father of alchemy, the proto-scientific practice of transforming metals, also called “the Hermetic art.” Alchemy had been practiced for over a thousand years before Shabbatai’s period, but its particular spiritual, philosophical, and gnostic dimensions raised it into unprecedented popularity at that time. Early modern alchemy sometimes focused on gaining wealth by creating gold out of base metals; but more often the transformation of metals was understood as an analogy for the transformation of the self and the world. This process is often described in terms that recall apocalyptic language: purification, putrefaction, transmutation, regeneration.⁹⁴ The emblematic representation of these activities is even more explicitly Hermetic and apocalyptic, as exemplified in John Dee and other contemporaries.⁹⁵ *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, a third Rosicrucian work connected to the original two, illustrates this connection as well.⁹⁶ In spiritual alchemy, God is seen as the Master Alchemist, creating, destroying, and creating anew all that exists. The human alchemist imitates God in seeking to destroy the impure old existence and create a pure, hopeful new one.⁹⁷

It was natural that the alchemists should have been fascinated by the Jewish mystical tradition called Kabbalah; they constantly used kabbalistic symbols and language.⁹⁸ The Jews, after all, were traditionally viewed as bearers of ancient secrets along with the Egyptians, and these were believed to be embodied in the Kabbalah.⁹⁹ It is also no coincidence that several individuals who figure prominently in the background of Sabbateanism were alche-

mists, including R. Joseph Taytatzak, R. Hayyim Vital, and Dr. Benjamin Mussaphia, and, later, the Ba'al Shem of London.¹⁰⁰

Astrology, as it was practiced in the Renaissance and early modern period, shared an essential common principle with both alchemical and apocalyptic thought: the concept of a cycle of birth, growth, decay, destruction, and rebirth.¹⁰¹ “Therefore of necessity all things shall be made anew, the heavens, the stars, this world and our bodies shall arise again,” according to the anonymous author of *De vetula* (cited in Eugenio Garin).¹⁰² Garin points out that, “As one can see, the themes of ‘newness’—of a new life, a new age, new worlds, new heavens, new earths—which would run so eloquently through the centuries of the Renaissance up till the celebrated writings of Tomaso Campanella and G. B. Vico—was originally nothing more than an astrological commonplace.”¹⁰³ This, of course, is an incomplete pedigree, for the very phrases “new heavens and new earth” and “new age” were well known to the astrologers from biblical prophecy.

The late medieval period was marked by an intensification of the influence of astrology, a trend which often reflected a messianic or apocalyptic mindset. The key figure in this growth was the French scholar and cardinal, Pierre d’Ailly (1350–1420), who pioneered a scientific scheme of astrological interpretation which would yield an infallible understanding of scriptural prophecy’s unfolding in history. His system was controversial and antithetical to the spirit of medieval attitudes about the stars,¹⁰⁴ but with the dawn of the Reformation the previous control of the authorities over astrology and portent interpretation was severely compromised in both Catholic and Protestant lands, and this type of thinking exploded. D’Ailly became a standard guide to all those interested in prophetic history, including Christopher Columbus, who avidly read and annotated the cardinal’s works.¹⁰⁵ D’Ailly’s insistence on clarity and historical concreteness in astrological prophetic interpretation was one of the elements that would influence the slow shift from astrology to astronomy in the seventeenth century. Johannes Kepler, who continued casting and interpreting horoscopes while he was working out the essential principles of modern astronomy, was part of this legacy.¹⁰⁶ So was John Dee, reputed to be the most learned man in Elizabethan England,¹⁰⁷ and numerous others.

The other obvious connection between astrology and prophetic messianism is that astrologers seek to predict the future—sometimes on matters of a strictly personal nature and sometimes on important world affairs. The sixteenth-century attempt to cast Jesus’ horoscope in order to know more

about his future as well as past activities demonstrates one direction astrology tried to take. Extremely widespread and important in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the impulse to understand not only planetary conjunctions, but also eclipses, comets, and other heavenly events as portents. Evidence can be amassed for the prophetic and more specifically messianic interpretation of almost every one of these occurrences.¹⁰⁸ Astrological interpretations of Shabbatai's name (which means Saturn) and its relationship to his personality and his mission were widely asserted among his believers, confirming the importance of this astrological background.¹⁰⁹

It was not only signs in the heavens that caused the early moderns to seek meaning in science and prophetic explanation alike. This was a period of intense fascination with marvels, monsters, strange occurrences, and peculiar phenomena of all types. The same pattern of thought found in astrology was repeated in the realm of extraordinary natural events. Investigations into such oddities as monstrous births, sea monsters, hermaphrodites, half-human-half-animal creatures, spirit possessions, and mermaids were conducted in the spirit of science, but simultaneously interpreted as portents.¹¹⁰

The Thirty Years' War, from 1618 to 1648, put a formidable damper on the hopeful messianic attitude of science over the next several decades,¹¹¹ but this spirit was slowly reviving around the time of Shabbatai Zvi among various groups, including the founders of the Royal Society (whose secretary, Henry Oldenburg, was a friend of Manasseh ben Israel's and took interest in Sabbateanism), the Hartlib-Dury-Comenius circle, and the editors of the *Kabbala denudata*, who included Henry More and Francis Mercurius van Helmont.¹¹² Newton certainly personifies this spirit in the latter part of the century.¹¹³

The relationship between bodily healing and universal healing, which was so important to the Rosicrucians, can be found again toward the end of the century in the experience of the famous Newtonian physician, Dr. George Cheyne. Despite the success of Cheyne's practice, he fell into a dissolute and unhealthy life style, his weight swelled to over 400 pounds, and he fully expected to suffer an early death, when he came in contact with the French Prophets, the band of expatriate French Protestant visionaries who appeared in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Under their influence Cheyne became a believer in the rapid approach of the New Jerusalem. He shed hundreds of pounds and expressed his belief that the repair of the world's ills in the imminent Second Coming is reflected in the microcosm of one's health.¹¹⁴

Renewed reading of the ancient skeptical texts of Sextus Empiricus, along with the many exigencies and strains of the seventeenth century, eventually acted to undermine Europeans' faith in older traditions of knowledge.¹¹⁵ But where does one look for new, reliable knowledge whose underpinnings won't be destroyed by skepticism? Richard H. Popkin points out a group of thinkers, many of whom we have already met individually, whom he calls the Third Force in seventeenth-century thought. These are people who "tend to combine elements of empirical and rationalist thought with theosophic speculations and Millenarian interpretation of Scripture. All of these elements were used to overcome the skeptical challenge."¹¹⁶ The Third Force figures, including John Dury, Samuel Hartlib, Jan Amos Comenius, William Twisse, Henry More, Lady Anne Conway, and Sir Isaac Newton, saw the development of science as a central part of the preparation necessary for the perfect world soon to come. Joseph Mede was their main guide to prophetic interpretation, and they believed skepticism could be refuted by appeal to divine inspiration, which was linked to scientific research.¹¹⁷

Scientific thought and messianic belief, then, were deeply integrated by the time Shabbatai appeared. Concrete understanding of Scripture, latter day revelations, and the discovery of the laws of nature were all part of a cohesive nexus of enlightenment. Many seventeenth-century thinkers believed that God was at last revealing the meaning of his two books, the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture, often to the same people, in preparation for the End of Days. Whether the new knowledge came from scientific research, inspired reading of the Bible, or personal revelation, it was all part of the divine message to mankind about how to prepare for a new and better world. The human sciences, such as history, philology, anthropology, geography, and even the scientific study of scriptural prophecy were part of the same divinely inspired increase in knowledge. Their particular stimulus was the voyages of discovery, but their interpretation and integration into the contemporary world of knowledge was equally connected with messianic history.

The motives for the voyages of discovery carried out by Europeans are usually seen in economic terms—the need for new trade routes and resources, or the desire to exploit the wealth of the East. There were, however, prophetic and millenarian motives as well. Columbus undertook his voyages partly with the aim of strengthening Christendom for the war on the Muslims, perhaps by bringing wealth, but also by finding an alternative route to

the East that would allow Christian armies to rout the infidel from the Holy Land. He hoped his effort would also facilitate the conversion of more heathens to Christianity, thus balancing the recent gains made by Islam, bolstering Christendom, and hastening the Second Coming. He says outright, for example, “Of the New Heaven and Earth [acc. to Isaiah 65:17] which Our Lord has made, and as St. John writes in the Apocalypse, after he had told of it by the mouth of Isaiah, He made me the *messenger* for it and showed me where to find it.”¹¹⁸

Columbus saw himself as the harbinger or messenger of a new messianic figure: King Ferdinand of Spain, whom he envisaged as King David *redivivus*.¹¹⁹ In this capacity Columbus was granted not only the gift of prophetic interpretation, the *spiritualis intellectus*, but that of prophecy itself as well. Under attack by natives, with a storm brewing and little hope of returning safely home with his crew, Columbus reports: “I fell asleep, and I heard a most merciful voice saying: ‘O fool, so slow to believe and to serve your God, the God of all! What more did He do for Moses or for his servant David?’ [. . .] I heard all this as if in a trance.”¹²⁰ Columbus’ famous signature elicited this description from a recent author: “He underscored his Mercurial vocation by habitually signing his name in its Greek etymological form, Xpo-Ferens—the bringer of the anointed one, the bearer of the Messiah.”¹²¹ Columbus, then, coming from a background with strong Franciscan influence, saw his enterprise in a deeply prophetic and messianic light; nor was he the only one.¹²²

As news of the discoveries began arriving in Europe and was slowly being absorbed, Europeans fit the tidings into their own theological and social frameworks. In part this meant relating them to biblical prophecy, a process with obvious millenarian dimensions. Map makers and intellectuals immediately began trying to understand who the inhabitants of these lands might be, based on “sacred geography”—the biblical taxonomies of Noah’s family and its dispersion.¹²³ Among the fruits born by these researches were the foundations of anthropology and religious studies, and a further impetus for the scientific biblical study that proceeded from Renaissance humanist textual analysis.

One seventeenth-century figure, an older contemporary of Shabbatai Zvi, brings together these strands vividly. Isaac de La Peyrère (1596–1676) was a Protestant from Bordeaux who may have been of *converso* background.¹²⁴ His cogitations upon the biblical text, the mass of ancient literature that became available in his time, and the origins of the American natives discovered by Columbus led La Peyrère to posit a theory of Pre-Adamism—the ex-

istence of men before Adam. This position solved several sticky problems of biblical chronology, and it appeared to La Peyrère to be the only meaningful explanation for the origin of the Indians according to their own lights. Others, including Sir Walter Raleigh, had apparently reached the same conclusion, but none had dared express this highly heretical position openly and in so much detail. Among the implications of La Peyrère's theory were the polygenetic account of human origins, the indefinite duration of the world, and, by showing that the Bible is only the history of the Jews and other Adamites rather than of all people, the rejection of literal biblical truth. For his polygenetic theory of human races and societies, La Peyrère won the dual distinction of being considered a father of modern anthropology on the one hand, and of modern racism on the other.¹²⁵ For his attempt to reconstruct the correct history of the biblical text and its audience, he was assured a place along with his contemporaries, Hobbes, Spinoza, and Simon, as a founder of biblical criticism.¹²⁶

La Peyrère's scientific and critical thought, filtered through his own ideological beliefs, led him to conclude he had achieved an objectively correct prophetic analysis of history from the Creation until his own day. The most important message he derived from his analysis was that the messiah of the Jews was about to come and rule the world, which he would do together with the King of France. His capital would be in Jerusalem, and his arrival promised redemption for all mankind.¹²⁷ La Peyrère believed that the *conversos* were central to this process, that a Jewish-Christian church should be established which would not demand beliefs abhorrent to the Jews, and that there would be a pair of messiahs, one for Jews and one for Christians.¹²⁸ This combination of scientific and millenarian mentalities was not such an oddity in the seventeenth century—La Peyrère was typical of a great many contemporaries in the general tenor of his approach, though quite unique in his specific views.¹²⁹

The many formerly unknown peoples discovered by Europeans in the age of exploration had another implication for Christians and Jews as well. Religious legends told of powerful Christian and Jewish kingdoms hidden by God in distant lands that would reappear in the apocalyptic age to fight the wars of the messiah: the Christian realm of Prester John, the Red Jews, Gog and Magog, and the Lost Ten Tribes of the Hebrews. Each of these groups had a specific role in the messianic imagination of Europeans, and it was natural that the civilizations discovered in Africa, Asia, and America would be identified with them.

Prester (Presbyter) John was a legendary Christian king who was believed

to control vast multitudes of Christians and untold wealth somewhere in the uncharted lands of India. Although the earliest stories about Prester John did not explicitly discuss his role in the Second Coming, a famous letter attributed to him that appeared in the mid-twelfth century, at a critical time in the history of the Crusades, does carry messianic connotations. In it Prester John expresses his wish to visit the Holy Land with a huge army and chastise the enemies of Christianity—a message with clear apocalyptic intent.¹³⁰ The Red Jews were a mythical horde of fanatic Christian-hating Hebrews described in German literature over many centuries. According to the stories, they would constitute the bloody legions of the antichrist in the wars preceding the Second Coming.¹³¹ Gog and Magog are the violent nations which will be the enemies of the forces of good in the cataclysmic final wars (Ezekiel 38–39). The Lost Tribes were those Jews of the Northern Kingdom of Israel who were exiled in the eighth century B.C.E. and were not found by their brethren of the Southern Tribes when they in turn were exiled in the sixth century to the same general region. In ancient times their presence was reported in various terrestrial locations, as well as behind the mythical Sabbatical River, the Sambatyon, which flowed with rocks rather than water and was supposed to prevent the discovery of the Tribes until messianic days. Their return is an integral part of Jewish messianic expectations.¹³²

Throughout the Middle Ages, when these legends were proliferating, Europeans' lack of geographical knowledge about most of the world prevented attaching any specific location to each group—all remained safely ensconced in their unknown, mythical lands. But this was changing under the impact of the voyages of discovery, when the world's geography was coming into clearer focus. Credible reports that the legendary nations had been discovered abounded. They were turning up in Africa, India, America, and the Far East. Contact was actually made between Europeans and both Jews and Christians in Abyssinia.¹³³ This was not only scientific proof that biblical prophecies had been validated, but also a powerful indication that the messianic age was nigh. What reason could God have in bringing together the known world with these remote kingdoms, if not to join forces for the apocalyptic denouement?

Renaissance Jewish and Christian thinkers were deeply focused on the new discoveries and their implications for messianic history.¹³⁴ They spoke to each other, and sometimes even evinced a willingness to ignore doctrinal differences because they were more interested in what was about to happen than what had happened in the first century.¹³⁵ In other cases, mutually in-

fluent traditions were reshaped into a dialectic. That is the case in the circular cited below that came from Jerusalem in the 1520s, reporting events that allegedly occurred in 1454. Note the juxtaposition of ideas: obscure and distant kingdoms, the warlike Lost Tribes beyond the Sambatyon river, and the subjugation of Prester John. The alleged date is the year after the fall of Constantinople.

We come to inform you, to reveal and foretell to you and all the children of Israel the good and reliable tidings, written with great truth, concerning the signs of redemption and great salvation for which all the Jewish people hope, with the help of God. Listen, for it is what we so desire! . . . In the year 1454, the second year of the fulfillment of the great, good and awesome prophecy, the sign of our redemption that was prophesied by Jeremiah . . . In that year, on the third day of the month of Nissan [early spring], there arrived here to the holy city of Jerusalem wise and respected elders from the lands of the Children of the East, and also men from the land of Babylonia, from the lands of Persia and Media, from India, from China, and from Yemen . . . which is as far from Jerusalem as the place of the Children of the East, five months' journey; and from there to our brothers, the Children of the Sambatyon River, is five months. They brought us letters from the heads of the communities in the above-mentioned places, which said, 'Our brothers and fellow members of the Covenant [i.e. circumcised people; Jews], old and young, may you walk in the path of light! We bring you good and reliable tidings and news of the signs of redemption and great salvation, that you be gladdened and strengthened. Be men! Get yourselves organized . . . Know that the Sambatyon river stopped flowing altogether in the year 1453, at the beginning of the [Jewish] year, on the very first day of the month of Tishri. Our brothers are there battling the war of blessed God, and they have a great and pious and exceedingly strong king who fights the battles of the Lord every single day with the great Christian king, Prester John of India. The great and pious king of our people captured many lands from him, and killed many thousands of his people . . . So gird yourselves and strengthen others in the name of the Lord God, for the Redeemer has been revealed, and he is about to redeem us with the help of the blessed God.¹³⁶

Many of the elements of this letter recur in various forms in further messianic writings from the early modern period, including those surrounding Shabbatai. They draw on biblical, rabbinic, and medieval material (especially the story of Eldad the Danite)¹³⁷ and Christian and Muslim elements;

but they also add the concrete geographical details from recent European voyages to construct a picture of the impending reappearance of the Lost Tribes.

The legend of the Lost Tribes was particularly powerful among Jews, whose downtrodden, stateless condition in medieval society made the legend of a mighty Jewish kingdom singularly attractive. This trend reaches its clear apex with the messianic agitation of Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, in the period between Shabbatai Zvi's first messianic self-awareness in 1648 and his public movement in 1665–66. In his capacity as a communal rabbi in the 1640s, Manasseh was approached by one Antonio de Montezinos, a *converso* recently returned to Judaism, with the following tale. On a voyage in the region now occupied by Ecuador and Columbia in Latin America, Montezinos claimed, he came in contact with a group of Jews from the Lost Tribes living in isolation from the local Indians. Manasseh thought a great deal about this, and in short order composed a treatise, *The Hope of Israel*, containing Montezinos' testimony, along with a detailed theory about how it fit the other known information about the Lost Tribes and the imminent arrival of the messiah. He reviewed the reports about Jews turning up in China and India as well as America, and put together a geographical representation of the Tribes' dispersal. In this endeavor he used Abraham Ortelius' up-to-date atlas, along with works of Wilhelm Schickard, Nicolas Trigault, Samuel Bochart, and dozens of other contemporary European sources.¹³⁸ The tenor of Manasseh's thought comes through in the following passage.

35. The shortness of time (when we believe our redemption shall appear) is confirmed by this, that the Lord has promised that he will gather the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, out of the four corners of the world, calling them *Nephussim*. Whence you may gather that for the fulfilling of that, they must be scattered through all the corners of the world; as Daniel (12:7) says: 'And when the scattering of the holy people shall have an end, all those things shall be fulfilled.' And this appears now to be done, when our synagogues are found in America.

36. To these let us add that which the same prophet speaks (Daniel 12:4), 'that knowledge shall be increased'; for then the prophecies shall be better understood, the meaning of which we can scarce attain to, till they be fulfilled. So after the Ottoman race began to flourish, we understood the prophecy of the two legs of the image of Nebuchadnezzar, which is to be overthrown by the Fifth Monarchy, which shall be in the world. So Jere-

miah, after he had handled in chapter 30 the redemption of Israel and Judah, and of the war of Gog and Magog (of which Daniel also speaks in chapter 12), when he treats of the sceptre of the Messiah, the son of David, of the ruin of the nations, of the restoration of Judah, of holy Jerusalem, and of the third Temple, adds in 30:24: ‘The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return till he hath executed it, and till he hath performed the intents of his heart; in the latter days, ye shall understand it.’ Whence follows what we have said, that the time of redemption is at hand.¹³⁹

Manasseh’s *Hope of Israel* was enormously influential in both Jewish and European thought. It became integral in the rise of the Jewish Indian theory (the common seventeenth-century belief that the American natives were the Lost Tribes),¹⁴⁰ and was debated and discussed extensively. Ultimately the story prompted Manasseh’s invitation to England, from where the Jews had been expelled in 1290; he accepted and then pleaded with Oliver Cromwell for their readmission. This mission too had a close connection with messianic aims. The famous argument of Manasseh was that God had promised the regathering of the Jews, a major step in the process of Christ’s Second Coming for millenarian Christians, from the “four corners of the earth.” For that to happen, they had first to be dispersed to the four corners of the earth. Now that Jews were found in China, India, and America, the only corner of the earth where no Jews were found, and therefore the place that was holding up the regathering of the Jews, was the place that was actually called, in its medieval Latin designation, Angle Terre, rendered (with some imprecision) as the Land at the Corner of the Earth—England.¹⁴¹

Manasseh’s *Hope of Israel* had a direct connection to the Sabbatean movement. It is well known that Manasseh, who died a decade before the movement arose, was close to people who would be very important Sabbateans, including his fellow rabbi, Isaac Aboab de Fonseca, and the wealthy leader Abraham Israel Pereira. He was also in close contact with Christian millenarians who would take great interest in Sabbateanism, such as Henry Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society, and Peter Serrarius, the influential Dutch theologian.¹⁴² The *Hope of Israel* was published in 1659 in Izmir, Shabbatai’s birthplace, by a group of Portuguese Jews who would soon embrace Sabbateanism with great enthusiasm.¹⁴³ Nobody better exemplifies the relationship between the voyages of discovery, geography, Christian chiliasm, Jewish messianism, and the Sabbatean movement than Manasseh—and Manasseh was someone to whom many, many people listened.

Unlikely as it may seem to the modern mind, it is clear that both the hu-

man and natural sciences, all in their infancy in the seventeenth century, were deeply bound up with messianic beliefs. While the expectation of an imminent apocalypse was certainly not universal in Europe, it was extremely widespread, and it had a profound influence on the thinking of the period. Shabbatai's appearance toward the end of this highly charged moment of vision and expectation could fit into many of the messianic scenarios held by his rational, scientific Christian contemporaries. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the Sabbatean movement was born and nurtured in the Ottoman Empire, under Muslim rule. The prophetic and messianic traditions in that atmosphere are crucial as well.

Prophecy and Messianism in Islam

The issues of prophecy and messianism under Islam are somewhat different from their counterparts under Christianity and Judaism. Although there is no future messianic figure in the Kor'an, a figure called Mahdi, the Right-Guided One (sometimes known as *al-Qa'im*, the Riser),¹⁴⁴ appears in the *hadiths*, the traditional teachings from the circle of Mohammed that were passed down orally and later collected. The Mahdi increasingly took on the character of a messiah over the course of centuries. In the earliest period of Islam the Mahdi appears to have been identified simply with the ruling caliph,¹⁴⁵ while slightly later traditions pointed to Jesus as the Mahdi,¹⁴⁶ and other individuals were placed in the role at various times. The messianic Mahdi plays a particularly strong role in the teachings of the Shiite Muslims, a large dissenting sect that believes the true caliphate and tradition came down through the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali, and his sons Hassan and Hussein. With the spread of the mystic Sufi brotherhoods in the late Middle Ages, much of the messianic thought in Islam shifted to their domain, producing a long line of Sufi Mahdis. Late medieval Islam had developed a whole range of possible identities for the Mahdi, each appropriate to its particular group of purveyors.

Muslim messianism, like that of the Christians, includes a cast of related characters. Most important is the *dajjal*, a sort of antichrist, who appears in ninth-century *haddith* literature. The *dajjal* will be the leader of the terrible armies of Yajuj and Majuj, equivalents of the biblical Gog and Magog, before the coming of the Mahdi. This frightening figure—corpulent, red-faced, with one bulging eye and frizzy hair—will rule over the world for some period before he will be assassinated and melt away at the hand of none other

than Jesus (who might or might not be the Mahdi). Jesus is thus an Islamic redeemer, and his act will usher in a utopian era. In some *hadiths* he is identified by name as being the Mahdi himself. It is noteworthy that the *dajjal* and his followers are generally identified as Jews.¹⁴⁷ Another group of persons are the *aktab*, the chain of hidden saints who have held spiritual sovereignty over the world since the time of the Prophet.¹⁴⁸ This role is apparently related to the Jewish tradition of thirty-six righteous Jews (*lamed-vav tzaddikim*), though the former are distributed diachronically.¹⁴⁹ Yet another figure in the process is the *ser'asker*, the conquering forerunner of the Mahdi.¹⁵⁰ The *mujaddid*, or renewer, might be associated with a reformation of the world essentially as it is;¹⁵¹ while the more generic concept of an *avatar* is often used in messianic contexts. The *sahib-kiran*, literally “master of the auspicious conjunction” (an interesting astrological concept!), was a term used to refer to the universal conqueror.¹⁵²

By the early modern period the image of Jesus as Mahdi was mainly forgotten, though there were Ottoman Muslims in Shabbatai's day who were called “Christ-lovers” (*hub-mesihi*).¹⁵³ Replacing him were several newer conceptions stimulated by intervening events. A wave of Mahdi pretenders presented themselves in Asia between 1335 and 1500, partly in connection with political changes such as the rise of the conqueror Timur (Tamerlane; d. 1405), but also through the impact of the burgeoning Sufi orders and the growing influence of the mystical philosopher Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240). One of the hallmarks of these Mahdist movements was the amalgamation of Shiite and Sufi thought, which had greater appeal to contemporaries. The central figures included Fazl Allah Hurufi (d. 1394), Muhammad b. Falah Musasa (d. 1462), and Muhammad Nurbaks (d. 1464). Nurbaks was a prophet as well as a Mahdi, and it appears that by the early modern period the combination of prophetic and Mahdist pretensions was fairly standard. Certainly these Mahdi pretenders were all attended by hosts of prognosticators and prophets.¹⁵⁴ Other people, such as Muhammad al-Zawâwî, a younger contemporary of Nurbaks, had intense visionary experiences apparently unconnected with Mahdist pretensions.¹⁵⁵

A tremendous wave of Mahdist excitement gripped the Ottoman Muslims beginning around the middle of the fifteenth century. Among the conditions stimulating this wave were the expectations from the East, mentioned above; the approach of the tenth Muslim century in 1494/5 (preceded by several heavily messianic dates, such as 1455, 1484, and 1485);¹⁵⁶ the capture of Constantinople in 1453 and other spectacular military victories

against the Christians; the gradual defeat of the Andalusian Muslims and their expulsion in 1492; the growth of Sufi orders in the Mediterranean; and the reciprocal influence of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim expectations.¹⁵⁷ When this wave was already ascending, the rise of the Safavid ruler Isma'il in 1501, also a heavily eschatological figure,¹⁵⁸ and that of the great Ottoman Sultan Suleiman in 1520, added more fuel to the fire.

The Ottoman conception of Selim and then Suleiman as the Last World Emperor competed with those of Isma'il and the Persians on the one hand, and with the messianic imperialism of the Hapsburgs on the other.¹⁵⁹ A long battle between Ottomans and Europeans, personified by Suleiman and Charles V respectively, gained even greater cosmic significance by the messianic claims of each ruler.¹⁶⁰ The expectation of a coming world ruler, and indeed the claim of kings and sultans to be that ruler, was one of the proofs that the whole Mediterranean basin shared certain essential cultural elements in the sixteenth century.¹⁶¹ Istanbul and Salonika were rife with the same kind of prophetic excitement as Rome, Venice, and Barcelona. "Living seers and prognosticators teemed in the heart of Muslim Istanbul, and prophetic wisdom that yielded clues to the apocalyptic nature of the times, and which was culled from pre-Islamic and Islamic authorities, was 'rediscovered' and reworked."¹⁶² This continuity between European and Ottoman cultures was a major factor in the spread of Sabbateanism.¹⁶³

Some of the acute messianic atmosphere in Islam died out in the seventeenth century, after repeated defeats for all sides and the deaths of one potential world ruler after another. There were, however, still important Mahdist movements close to the time of Shabbatai. One centered around Muhammad an-Niyāzī (b. 1617, Aspuzi, Turkey; d. 1694, Lemnos), a Sufi with Bektashi associations, whose status as a prophet and redeemer was confirmed by himself and many followers. An-Niyāzī is a particularly significant figure for Sabbatean history because he operated in many of the same cities (Brusa, Adrianople, Salonika) in which Shabbatai and his adherents were active. Contact between them is highly likely, and it is certain that after his conversion Shabbatai frequented some of the same dervish monasteries and prayer cells as an-Niyāzī.¹⁶⁴ Another fascinating event with ties to Shabbatai occurred a year after Shabbatai's conversion, in 1667, when a Kurdish dervish proclaimed his son to be the redeemer and formed an army to overthrow the state. The Kurdish rebels were quickly subdued by the Ottoman authorities and hauled before the sultan. They were forced to recant their rebellious claims, and the boy messiah was given the office of palace

gatekeeper—the same office given to Shabbatai. This case is instructive not only in offering the example of another messianic movement of the period—apparently a popular rather than an elite Mahdist one—but also because it shows that the sultan, not eager to create martyrs, gave Shabbatai the standard treatment for religious rebels.¹⁶⁵ Other Mahdist movements took place around the same period in Mecca and in North Africa.¹⁶⁶

Developments in sixteenth-century Muslim visionary and prophetic conceptions continued to have strong effects in the seventeenth century as well. For example, Zayn al-'Abidin al-Marsafī (d. 1562) wrote an important handbook of instructions on how to achieve a vision of the Prophet, which circulated widely for a long period.¹⁶⁷ Another aspect of the sixteenth-century fervor that did not die out, and may have in fact increased in the seventeenth century, was the messianic trialectic between Muslims, Christians, and Jews, in which each placed the other two in specific, substantial roles in its messianic scenario.¹⁶⁸ The frequency with which any one or two of these faiths appear in messianic writings of the third at the time is astonishing.

For Christians, Jews represented the ultimate antichrists—they were the people against whom Christ railed and who ultimately had him killed. Throughout the Middle Ages, the vision Christians had of Jews continued to be that of an evil mirror.¹⁶⁹ Jews became identified with demons and the devil as well as the antichrist—they were those who knew Christ and opposed him.¹⁷⁰ Muslims represented a more recent and less cosmic threat to Christianity; they were simply infidels, but their military potency and continuous menace elevated them into an existential danger to Christendom. An odd tension arose from the late fifteenth century onward, when the Ottoman military loomed large in the European imagination. The rhetoric of the Turk as antichrist became extremely widespread, while at the same time European Christians were in regular contact with the Ottomans, inviting them to participate in European wars and generally treating them like another European power. Early modern millenarian thinkers thus tended to develop concrete, detailed military scenarios of the apocalypse in which the Jews would return to the Holy Land, fight the holy wars against the Muslims with (or on behalf of) Christians, defeat the Muslims, convert to Christianity, and thereby usher in the Millennium.¹⁷¹ This view explains the strong advocacy for the return of the Jews to Palestine among seventeenth-century Protestants, and the incongruous support Rabbi Nathan Shapira received from Christian millenarians when he came collecting for the Jerusalem poor in mid-century.¹⁷²

For Muslims, the role of Christians in the messianic process is a bit more complex. Jesus is mentioned in the *hadiths* as Mahdi, as the killer of the *dajjal* and thus precursor of the Mahdi, and as a more negative image. This did not necessarily imply that the Christians would recognize the truth of Islam, for they were as much the arch-enemy in the eyes of Muslims as Muslims were in the eyes of Christians. It is, in any case, quite noteworthy that the most holy figure of Christendom plays a major part in the Islamic apocalypse. Jews, for their part, are often identified with the *dajjal* or his followers, but overall Judaism did not seem to inspire the messianic interest of Muslims the way Christianity did.

By the early modern period Jews had a long tradition of messianic thought that incorporated Christians and Muslims. Christianity is identified in rabbinic literature with Edom, one of the desert nations with whom the Children of Israel constantly fought. Islam is identified with Ishmael, brother of Isaac, another traditional enemy, but one born of the same Abrahamic stock. The Midrash says the city of Rome was founded on the day Jerusalem fell, implying a cosmic opposition of forces. There is no antichrist in Jewish lore, but the pope, representing Christianity, figures in numerous messianic scenarios as the one who will give up Christendom to the messiah. The Jewish messianic pretenders Abraham Abulafia, David ha-Reubeni, and Solomon Molkho, as well as Nathan of Gaza himself, all went to Rome on messianic missions. Although some Jews enjoyed a relatively good existence in Western Europe, those farther east were heavily oppressed and welcomed the prophesied downfall of European Christendom, particularly after the harrowing Chmielnicki massacres in Poland during the mid-seventeenth century. The attitudes toward the Ottoman Empire were even more complex. Sultan Bayezit II was viewed by many Jews as a savior of Spanish Jewry, having welcomed the Jews (or at least admitted them) when the Christians were trying to destroy and extirpate them. Jews felt they enjoyed relative peace under Islam, so the role of the Muslims in early modern Jewish apocalyptic, represented by the Ottoman sultan, varied.¹⁷³ The sultan might simply turn his turban of rulership over to the messiah when he came, or there might be a war. The way these questions played out in the Sabbatean movement is quite instructive.

Another aspect of Islamic life with a profound impact on Sabbateanism came out of the larger doctrinal context of Shiite Muslim thought.¹⁷⁴ Many Sabbateans lived among Shiites, and there is no question about how mutual influences might have occurred. These ideas could have entered Jewish

messianism earlier and come down internally, or they may have been absorbed directly from the milieu in Shabbatai's generation. One of these concepts is the Raj'a doctrine, which states that certain pious individuals will return from death before the general resurrection of mankind at the End of Days. The Mahdi (or messiah) in particular is believed to occult himself upon his ostensible death, generally in some mountains, where he stays until the time comes for his reappearance. Another relevant Shiite concept is the idea of One True Prophet and Successive Incarnation. This states that God has sent religious truth to the world through one true divine prophet, but that prophet has manifested himself in different guises and incarnations over many lands and periods. This doctrine thus eliminates many of the problems of post-canon prophecy, and opens the possibility of a line of messianic prophets who are all sent by God, and are in fact all identical.

The Shiites also hold a doctrine of Prophet and Messiah, according to which the messiah, or Mahdi, or Christ is also a godly prophet, on a level different from other prophets. Another member of the Mahdi's retinue is the *dā'i*, or propagandist. This person fills all the organizational roles connected with the Mahdi, and it was not uncommon for him to overshadow the Mahdi. It is hard to imagine a more perfect figure in this role than Nathan of Gaza. Finally, the Shiites believe in the reality of Inspiration. The imam or Mahdi is inspired not just with prophetic knowledge, but with perfect godly knowledge of all things. He therefore need not study with a master, for all knowledge mediated by humans is false. This doctrine is connected with the miracle of Mohammed's composition of the Kor'an, though he was self-professedly illiterate. Sabbateanism shares deep affinities with all these Shiite Mahdist doctrines.

Another movement among the Ottoman Muslims that cannot be denied a role in the formulation of Sabbatean ideas is that of the heretical dervishes who flourished in the centuries before Shabbatai. The dervishes expressed their piety through a total rejection of society and its values, but rather than secluding themselves, they lived in the middle of cities to make their rebuke visible. Among the outstanding characteristics of the dervishes was a profound asceticism manifested in poverty, mendicancy, itinerancy, celibacy, and self-inflicted pain. Common ascetic practices included silence, temporary seclusion, sleep deprivation, and fasting. The religious hallmark of the dervishes was antinomianism—they openly disregarded prescribed Muslim ritual practices, including prayer; transgressed shari'ah (Islamic law); and used intoxicants. They offended social sensibilities through their "elevation

of music and dance to the status of ritual practice” far beyond the Sufi level. The detractors of these orders accused them of bizarre and reprehensible sexual behavior, and there is evidence many eschewed marriage and women in general. In doctrine as well as practice the dervishes adopted extreme and heretical positions. The ecstatic dancing for which certain dervishes are known was a manifestation of their frequent direct contact with the divine. The sects had a distinct institutional framework, and their leaders were often dissenters from the religious elite.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, dervishes and Sabbateans share a very peculiar combination of tendencies—asceticism, religiously charged music and dance, possible sexual eccentricities, prophecy, and antinomian heresy. It is hardly credible that two groups living in close proximity with such an odd conjunction of traits would not have affected one another.

Despite the influences of both Christian and Muslim thought on Sabbateanism, it was still a movement whose ideology and symbolism were deeply rooted in the Jewish world. It is important to keep in mind that the lines of influence went in all direction—Jewish messianism both influenced Christianity and Islam and was influenced by them. This relationship of mutual impact becomes especially clear upon examining the history of Jewish messianic movements.

Sabbateanism, then, was born into a world saturated with messianic beliefs and prophecy. Jews, Christians, and Muslims, scholars and commoners, scientists and mystics, explorers and exegetes, physicians and philosophers, all were receptive to prophecies of messianic advent. There is a deep organic connection between the sudden influx of new facts and ideas in the sixteenth century, and the way they were worked out (militarily, economically, socially, intellectually, and religiously) in the seventeenth—it is all part of one era. While the prophetic and messianic fervor under Islam appears to have cooled somewhat in the seventeenth century, in the Christian and Jewish worlds it remained just as intense as earlier or more so. Other factors made the seventeenth century more propitious for successful messianic movements, such as the spread of cheap printing and the vastly increased sea traffic, both of which allowed news to spread quickly. The authority structure of the Jewish world had also undergone changes which, while quite subtle, made room for someone like Shabbatai to flourish and succeed.

*Messianism and Prophecy
in the Jewish Tradition*

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the messiah, and though he may be delayed I will nevertheless expect him with the coming of each new day.

Maimonides, Thirteen Principles of Faith, #12

Judaism has a long history of important prophetic and messianic movements, some of which have had an extensive influence. Nothing but some ancient writings, a line in Josephus, or a disparaging mention in the New Testament remains of the numerous messiahs in the late Second Temple period, with the exception of Jesus of Nazareth, a first-century resident of the West Bank who established the most successful Jewish messianic movement ever. A generation after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E., another important Jewish messiah arose, in the person of Simon Bar-Kosiba (Bar-Kokhba), who led an unsuccessful rebellion in 132–135 C.E. It is noteworthy that Rabbi Akiba, who counts among the heroes of the Talmud, believed Bar-Kosiba to be the true messiah. Other important Jewish messianic figures included Moses of Crete in the fifth century, Abu-Isa of Isfahan in the eighth, the Kurd David Alroy in the twelfth, and the Spanish kabbalist Abraham Abulafia in the thirteenth century.¹ These aspirants were almost always considered prophets as well, and a separate prophetic messianic literature waxed and waned in the Jewish world throughout the Middle Ages.² A scholarly debate continues over whether Jews in the East, especially the Spanish Jews (Sepharadim), were more susceptible to such movements than their Western and Ashkenazi (German and Polish) coreligionists.³ This background is important in understanding the self-image and self-fashioning of the Sabbateans.

Early Modern Jewish Messianism

The rise of early modern prophetic messianism was long associated with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and their forced conversion in Portugal in 1497, a major catastrophe for the Jewish world.⁴ While these are still considered influential events, recent scholarship has emphasized a greater variety of causes for the growth of messianism in the period, and pointed out that the trend began before the Spanish expulsion.⁵ This was a time when Jews were being expelled from most of Western Europe; yet, paradoxically, it was also an era of particularly intense intellectual and religious contact between Jews and Christians.⁶ Furthermore, this was the period when exiled Spanish Jews were invited by Sultan Bayezit II to settle in the Ottoman Empire alongside the established Jewish community there, and even more Jews came to live under Ottoman rule after Palestine fell to the Turks in 1516/7.⁷ Thus contact with other cultures and their messianic traditions was widespread.⁸

A highly significant focus of prophetic and messianic thought existed among a certain particularly secretive group of Spanish kabbalists in the decades before the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. They produced the works *Sefer ha-Meshiv* (The Book of the Responder; or *ha-Mal'akh ha-Meshiv*, The Responding Angel), and *Kaf ha-Ketoret* (Ladle of Incense), books bristling with prophecy and messianic expectation. While little was left of the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* circle after the expulsion, Rabbi Joseph Taytatzak of Salonika appears to have been associated with this group, and it is probable that certain interesting prophetic phenomena connected with him had roots in the Spanish *Sefer ha-Meshiv* thought.⁹ What is certain is that Taytatzak had close contact with Solomon Molkho, an important messianic prophet, and with many of the great Safed kabbalists.

Other prophetic and messianic trends appeared shortly after the expulsion from Spain. Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel, a foremost scholar and courtier of the expulsion generation, wrote no less than four books dedicated to messianic questions and calculations.¹⁰ Rabbi Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi, a Spanish kabbalist, wandered in Europe and the Ottoman Empire after the expulsion, writing tracts full of acute messianic prophecy. Ha-Levi expected messianic times to begin in 1524 and be fully manifested in 1530–31.¹¹ This was also the period of such mystical messianic works as *Galya Raza* (Exposition of Secrets) and *Mishreh Kittrin* (Loosening of Knots), whose titles indicate their relation to the belief in the increase of knowledge on the cusp of the messi-

anic age.¹² Another post-expulsion Sepharadi work is the Geniza Pages, found by Isaiah Tishby, containing acute messianic prophecies related in spirit to those mentioned above.¹³

In Spain itself a very significant prophetic-messianic movement in 1499–1500 among a group of converted Jews was led by the adolescent Inés of Herrera. The girl dreamed of a heavenly journey with her recently deceased mother, in which she learned that the messiah was about to appear. A considerable number of believers gathered around Inés, and other messianic prophets were inspired by her example.¹⁴ Much of the considerable messianic agitation and prophecy among Sepharadi Jews in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries connected to the Kabbalah.¹⁵

An important prophet and messianic voice from outside the Sepharadi context spoke at this time as well. This was Asher Laemmlein Reutlingen, an Ashkenazi Jew who led a sizeable movement in 1500–1502, centered in Northern Italy. Laemmlein's case is somewhat complex because in that period of deep shock over the Spanish expulsion, he was outspokenly against Sepharadi Jews. Laemmlein was also a kabbalist, but his mysticism was more in the Abulafian and Italian vein than in the Spanish Zoharic tradition.¹⁶ Italian Jews were generally active at the time in expectations of the impending messianic age, and they carried on a correspondence with their Palestinian coreligionists about news concerning the Ten Tribes and other apocalyptic matters.¹⁷

Expulsion-era prophetic messianism reached its peak in the 1520s, with the appearance of David ha-Reubeni and Solomon Molkho. Reubeni showed up in Italy in 1524–25 with an identity that has puzzled everyone, from his contemporaries to modern scholars. He claimed to be from the lost tribe of Reuben, now living in the desert of Habur, and said his brother was the king of those Jews. David did not declare himself to be a messiah, but he was widely taken as one, and he cultivated his image as a prophet and mystic. The ostensible purpose of his mission to Europe on behalf of his brother was to gain military support for a campaign against the Muslims in the Holy Land. He managed to negotiate an audience with the pope, who sent him along to the king of Portugal to evaluate the request for military assistance. Reubeni's presence in Portugal, where he was allowed to practice Judaism openly at a time when Jews had been expelled from the country, caused an enormous messianic stir among the Iberian *conversos*. Reubeni's mission in Portugal ultimately failed; he was given short shrift when he returned to Italy, and his activities were largely thwarted for a number of years.¹⁸

Among the Portuguese *conversos* whose imaginations were sparked by Reubeni was Diogo Pires, a secretary of the king, who immediately began experiencing messianic dreams. He decided he must return to his ancestral Judaism in order to pursue the matter, and sought to enlist Reubeni's help. The latter wanted nothing to do with this dangerous venture, but Pires circumcised himself, adopted the name Solomon Molkho and escaped to the Ottoman Empire. There the young man studied Jewish texts, especially Kabbalah, with such intensity that he became renowned for his wisdom and piety in only a few years. His messianic dreams continued, and the content of several of these has come down to us. Molkho brazenly betook himself to Italy, even though the Inquisition sought him as a renegade Christian, and made an enormous impression on the pope. Clement VII was taken not only by Molkho's personality, but also by two highly accurate prophecies of natural disasters, confirming the young man's status as a true prophet. After various adventures Reubeni and Molkho met up again and initiated a new joint mission, this time to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Charles was less taken by the two Jewish eschatologues and sent them both to their respective ends. Nevertheless, the images of these two men, especially Molkho, reverberated over many generations.¹⁹

A more restrained wave of messianic excitement affected certain circles of Jews, particularly those of Italy and Palestine, in the early 1570s. Various rabbis, especially Italian ones, had calculated 1575 to be the certain date of redemption.²⁰ At about the same time, Rabbi Isaac Luria, who arrived in Safed (in Palestine) around 1570, was venerated in his kabbalistic circle not only as author of the famous Lurianic doctrines of exile and redemption, but also as a messiah himself. When Luria died in 1572, having failed to manifest himself as messiah, his student, R. Hayyim Vital, inherited at least part of this mantle. Vital's messianic identity was quite complex, and it remained unresolved upon his death in 1620.²¹

The period between the death of R. Hayyim Vital and the rise of the Sabbatean movement was marked by two seemingly paradoxical trends regarding messianism. On the one hand, there was an almost complete dearth of messianic pretenders;²² but on the other hand, there was also a furious production of *literature* concerning the messianic advent in the Jewish world. Various rabbis were occupied with messianic calculations and thought;²³ outstanding among them was R. Manasseh ben Israel, whose attitudes were deeply connected to his *converso* background.

Converso Messianism

A strong connection between former *conversos* and the Sabbatean movement has come to light in the multitude of surviving documentary sources. Many persons known for certain to be of *converso* families were associates of Shabbatai and prophets of the movement.²⁴ Looking at the map of Sabbatean propagation it is immediately clear that most of the cities that were centers of Sabbatean activism before the apostasy were *converso* centers as well, such as Izmir, Istanbul, Salonika, Livorno, Amsterdam, and Venice. It is thus particularly worthwhile exploring the background and messianic proclivities of this group.

A sizeable percentage of the important Jewish population of Spain converted to Catholicism voluntarily or by force between the years 1391, when pressure to convert started to become very heavy, and 1492, when Jews who held on to their faith were expelled. Among those spiritually stout Jews who left, a large proportion went to neighboring Portugal, where they had been promised asylum. But in 1497 the king decreed their expulsion from Portugal as well. When the hapless Jews came to the harbor to embark for more tolerant shores, they were incarcerated and forcibly converted. At the time of their expulsion from Spain, there was already a national Inquisition at work rooting out *conversos* alleged to continue “Judaizing” in secret. The Portuguese Inquisition was not established until decades later, but *conversos* were forbidden to leave either country, and they were in constant fear. *Conversos* and Moriscos (descendants of Spanish Muslims) were systematically excluded from many important institutions and professions by a series of “purity of blood” statutes. Nevertheless, many *conversos* did quite well for themselves in the Iberian peninsula, studying in universities, achieving considerable wealth, and rising to important offices in the government and even the church.

Some *conversos*—probably most—had become good Catholics within one or two generations of conversion; but others clung to some residual Jewish identity with great tenacity. Absent any living Jewish tradition, there was almost no authentic practice, but a crypto-Judaism developed using the elements that could be remembered or learned. Crypto-Judaism tended to assimilate many Christian elements despite its highly anti-Catholic bias, and it was heavily biblical, since the Bible was almost the only available source of Jewish knowledge. The tradition of Jewish identity was passed down in the

family, though the Christians would hardly let a *converso* forget his ancestry in any case. Sometimes the pre-conversion family name was secretly preserved as well.

For obvious reasons, many crypto-Jews and others who had special reason to fear the Inquisition attempted to flee the Iberian Peninsula from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Of those who went to Western Europe or the Ottoman Empire, a new question of identity presented itself. One could live as a Portuguese Catholic expatriate, convert to the local majority religion, revert to one's ancestral Judaism and join a Jewish community, or live in a new home as a Catholic crypto-Jew. Some people actually took more than one of these paths, at times even simultaneously. In cities that forbade Jewish settlement—particularly Amsterdam, London, and Hamburg—groups of *converso* merchants settled under the aegis of an Iberian Catholic identity (mainly Portuguese), while creating a secret crypto-Jewish community. When the Jewish identity of these groups became exposed, the wealth of the members gave their respective cities serious reason to avoid expelling them. In the cases of the cities mentioned, an open Jewish community was then allowed to form and flourish, while in others, especially in southern France, the open secret was left to remain undisturbed for generations. The dichotomy of inward and outward identities and cross-culturalism of the *conversos* made for a very complex world.²⁵

Conversos of all varieties exhibited a particular disposition toward prophecy and messianism. The reasons for this seem to lie in their unusual circumstances. They were brought up in the heavily messianic Catholic faith of Spain and Portugal, and they also lived in a dangerous mental and existential situation that made them desperate for redemption. At the same time, *conversos* could not identify completely with either Christianity or Judaism and were not deeply rooted in the messianic traditions of either faith. This led to certain peculiarities of *converso* messianism as well, including an unusual flexibility in the variety of messianic scenarios they were prepared to entertain, and the belief in a special place for *conversos* in the unfolding of the messianic drama. The latter tendency sometimes even manifested itself in a belief that the messiah would be a *converso*—a matter of no small importance for understanding the background of post-apostasy Sabbateanism.

In some cases *conversos* participated in larger Christian or Jewish messianic movements, but in others, the movements occurred within the *converso* group, as in the one sparked by Inés of Herrera. The pattern of children and young women (Inés was about twelve at the time) prophesying and leading

messianic trends, which was so noticeable in that episode, was found repeatedly in both Jewish and non-Jewish movements. Other messianic cells appeared among the crypto-Jews at different times. There was a group in Mexico in the middle of the seventeenth century, shortly before the Sabbatean outbreak, who believed one of their members would be the messiah and would come to redeem the oppressed *conversos*. A particularly significant group of prophetic messianists was discovered by the Inquisition in Portugal in the 1530s and 1540s, whose central figure was one Luis Días, an unlettered tailor from Setúbal. His teachings became central to an enormous Portuguese millenarian movement.

Converso messianism was found not only among those who chose the path of crypto-Judaism. Even those who became sincere Catholics were deeply involved in prophetic messianic agitation. For example, the Franciscan spiritualist movement of the prophetic *alumbrados* in early sixteenth-century Spain contained a highly disproportionate number of *conversos*. This group was convinced that the Second Coming would occur in the 1520s, and the entire church would be reformed of its errors. The Bishop of Burgos, himself a converted rabbi, announced that he and his son would be in a position to lead a millenarian army at the Second Coming, because they were descendants of the House of David and thus family members of the mother of Jesus.

For our purposes the most significant trends in *converso* messianism were those that involved practicing Jews close to the time of the Sabbatean outbreak. Two fascinating and complex personalities deserve particular scrutiny: Manoel Bocarro-Rosales, and, once again, Manasseh ben Israel.²⁶

To understand Bocarro-Rosales we must return to the *converso* prophetic movement surrounding Luis Días, the unlettered tailor from Setúbal during the 1530s and 1540s. A close associate of Días was a certain shoemaker from the town of Trancoso named Gonçalo Anes, known as O Bandarra, who may or may not have had New Christian ancestors.²⁷ In any case, it was under Días's influence that Bandarra composed a group of prophetic verses, many connected with the messiah, called *trovas*. These contained both elements of traditional Portuguese millenarianism and of Jewish messianism, and they excited much interest among both Old and New Christians. When a copy reached the Inquisition, however, the author was arrested for Judaizing.

The *trovas*' popularity continued through the sixteenth century without placing an identity on their key figure, O Encoberto, the Hidden One. This

changed after 1578, when the young Portuguese King, Dom Sebastian, disappeared in the Battle of Alcazarquivir, leaving no heir. Many Portuguese, shocked and bitter at seeing their kingdom fall into the hands of the Spanish King Philip II, became convinced that Sebastian would return to fulfill the messianic role of Bandarra's Hidden One. This movement is called Sebastianism, and it was at the center of Portuguese messianism for centuries.²⁸ Portugal, then, like Spain, was infused with spiritual-political messianic impulses emanating from *converso* circles.

Manuel Bocarro Francês (b. ca. 1593, Lisbon; d. 1662, Florence), later known as Jacob Rosales, was among the most influential Sebastianist thinkers. Bocarro-Rosales was a well-known physician and scientist, whose alchemy and astronomy studies led him into prognostication. In 1624 he published a work full of Bandarrarian messianic overtones called *Anacephalaeosis de Monarchia Lusitana I* (A Summary of the Lusitanian Monarchy, vol. I). When he attempted to publish the continuation of this work, however, it fell afoul of the Inquisition and the author fled for his life. Arriving in Rome, he published his material in 1625 under the title *Small Moonlight and Starlight of the Lusitanian Monarchy*. Among other things he explained the reason for changing his name to Rosales. This name has a mystical Hebrew meaning, discovered by the author's ancestor, a kabbalist Spanish Jew of the fifteenth century. Bocarro-Rosales claimed that hidden in his name was the prediction that he would be the individual privileged to proclaim the name of the king who would restore the Portuguese royal house. These works excited much attention among the Sebastianists.²⁹

Having left Portugal, Bocarro-Rosales resumed his activities as a physician, scientist, and prognosticator in Hamburg and Livorno, reverting meanwhile to his ancestral Judaism. Indeed, he clearly kept up a secret Jewish identity in Portugal, and, as can be seen from the centrality of his kabbalist Jewish forebear, he connected this Jewish identity with his messianic prognostications. But, paradoxically, the messianic figures in these writings are the kings of Portugal!³⁰ Perhaps Bocarro-Rosales did not propose a Jewish messiah because he thought the messiah's current manifestation was only temporary, and his soul might have been from the House of David. The important point is that he brought his Sebastianist messianic proclivities into the Jewish world in the period immediately preceding the Sabbatean outbreak. Abraham Miguel Cardoso, one of the most important Sabbatean theologians, knew Bocarro-Rosales and his work, and was clearly influenced by them.³¹

Manasseh ben Israel was another *converso* messianist with great influ-

ence on the Sabbateans. He was born either in Madeira or La Rochelle and raised as a Jew from a young age in Amsterdam. His community, colleagues, and teachers were mainly former conversos as well. His informant about the Lost Tribes, Montezinos, had only recently returned to his ancestral Judaism when he spoke to Manasseh. Manasseh had the broad secular education of the *converso* elite, as well as the intensive Jewish education he received in Amsterdam. He was at home in both European Christian literature and rabbinic writings, and he acted as a conduit between the two worlds. In his role as a sort of Christians' Jew, Manasseh cultivated extensive contacts with many leading millenarians of the period, and much of the fervor later invested in Sabbateanism among these figures was undoubtedly, sometimes explicitly, connected with Manasseh's earlier influence. The *converso* background meant that Manasseh probably had early messianic proclivities.³² Manasseh's allure in the eyes of other former *conversos* led a group of them in Izmir to print his book, *Hope of Israel*, on the eve of the Sabbatean outbreak, and these same sponsors would shortly become enthusiastic Sabbateans.

Aside from these concrete connections between Sabbateanism and *converso* messianism, it is important to consider the more general relationships. Raised as Christians, *conversos* were accustomed to thinking messianically or apocalyptically—these are among the cornerstones of Christian ideas. Though many of them did not accept the messianism of Jesus, in their dialectic with Christianity they were perforce still occupied with the identity and works of the messiah. (There is ample evidence for this in the voluminous polemical literature produced by former *conversos*.) Whatever their current circumstances, then, they would have been deeply predisposed toward any well-pedigreed messianic tidings, given their long tradition of messianism. When the news of Shabbatai came, it was in many cases produced or mediated by former *conversos*, and some of the convincing evidence for the veracity of the movement came from Sabbatean prophets, among whom former *conversos* were conspicuous. Shabbatai's antinomian "strange actions" may have titillated a certain antinomian tendency in the *converso* personality. This derived from their long experience with less legally encumbered Christian practice, and from the precedence of faith over practice that developed among them during centuries when Jewish observance meant death.³³ And finally, when Shabbatai converted to Islam, though many *conversos* lost their faith in him along with the rest of the Jewish community, others were able to appreciate the ongoing mission of Shabbatai as a *converso* messiah.

Messianism and the Kabbalah

The confluence of ideas on Sabbateanism also includes those from deep within Jewish tradition. The most noted of these influences was Kabbalah, Jewish mystical lore.³⁴ Ideas and imagery of both the Spanish Kabbalah, such as the books *Zohar* and *Kanah*, and the Lurianic Kabbalah of the sixteenth century were central to the thought of the learned Sabbatean prophets. Although most of the ordinary Jews who became believers had little contact with this literature, Kabbalah was quite familiar to the small group of rabbis who became the original core of believers, and whose prestige carried the movement out to the larger Jewish world. Moreover, while Kabbalah texts were not well known in the broader Jewish community, the personalities and legends of the Safed kabbalists were quite famous.

Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Kabbalah began to overtake philosophy and talmudic scholarship as the dominant mode of Jewish spiritual thought.³⁵ Kabbalah slowly shifted from being the province of tiny, secret circles of adepts to a body of public ideas. In the sixteenth century, several developments facilitated this process. One was the printing of the *Zohar* in Italy, which put it in the hands of any scholar with the money to buy a copy. The purchasers included Christian savants, some of whom had become interested in Jewish esotericism and the possibilities of its christological interpretation. Another, more profound development was the explosion of kabbalistic thought centered in Safed in the latter part of the century. The most influential of the several schools among the Safed mystics was that of Rabbi Isaac Luria (AR"Y), who stressed man's role in the restoration of a pristine world, with related conceptions of exile, redemption, and the revolutions of the human soul. While the general outlines of this mystical philosophy undoubtedly found their way to the attention of many Jews, far more famous were legends about the supernatural wisdom of Luria and his students—a collection that was among the earliest bodies of hagiography in Judaism. In these tales Luria is represented as both prophet and messiah. The prestige accorded to Kabbalah and its adepts through this mystical flowering helped fuel an already emerging crisis in the traditional authority structure of Judaism. In the seventeenth century the cracks in the foundation of rabbinic authority would widen to the limits of its viability, under the impact of Sabbateanism on the one hand, and rationalist skepticism on the other.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the rising prestige of Kab-

balah brought about the advancement of mystics to leadership roles in the community.³⁶ Traditionally, rabbis would stand out because of their achievements in Jewish law, exegesis, or homiletics. But the authority of the kabbalist did not rest on his deep knowledge of the Talmud, Midrashim, and law codes. The wisdom of Kabbalah had more to do with a kind of spiritual talent, imagination, and, often, prophecy. Hence the popularization of Kabbalah introduced a new kind of authority. Many of the kabbalists were young—Luria, the most famous example, died at the age of thirty eight. Most were not renowned for their expertise in traditional Jewish sources. Their power in the community rested on reputation, spread through hagiography and general word of mouth, for wonder-working, healing, prognostication, imaginative exegesis of kabbalistic texts, and pure charisma. The rise of these kabbalist leaders signals a serious change in the authority structure of Jewish communities. While earlier kabbalists had been secretive about their doctrines, the explosion of interest in Kabbalah after the Spanish expulsion gave birth to a new attitude, which often put kabbalists and their works in direct competition with traditional rabbinic elites and literatures.³⁷

The impact of Kabbalah on Sabbateanism did not depend on a widespread knowledge of Lurianic doctrines. It was sufficient that large numbers of Jews accepted the reality of kabbalistic authority within Judaism and respected its representatives, a situation which definitely obtained in 1665–66. Under the circumstances it is not surprising that Nathan of Gaza, already possessed of a broad reputation as a prophet and doctor of the soul at the age of twenty-two, wielded enough power to pull up the curtain on Shabbatai Zvi without becoming a laughingstock. It similarly helps explain how Shabbatai himself, not yet forty years old when the public movement began, could be taken seriously as a messianic figure with no special credentials as a talmudist, legal expert, exegete, or sage. Shabbatai, like Nathan, had a reputation for spirituality, asceticism, prophecy, and mastery of kabbalistic writings. Such figures could hardly have been the stuff of an enormous Jewish messianic movement two centuries earlier, before the kabbalistic elite made its inroads in the structure of rabbinic authority.

Another feature of Kabbalah that helped set the stage for Sabbateanism and weakened traditional rabbinic authority was the mystics' penchant for pseudepigraphy—the falsification of a book's pedigree. While other Jewish works, especially the Midrash literature, often bore incorrect attributions, they were not usually as temporally distant from the real author or as mythical as those of the kabbalists. The *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation, an

early mystical text) is attributed to the patriarch Abraham, while the later *Bahir* (Illumination) was allegedly written by a first-century rabbi, Nehunya ben ha-Kanah, and the *Zohar* by R. Simeon bar Yohai, a second-century scholar.³⁸ Mystical messianic prophecy has its own pseudepigraphic productions, including the *Nevu'at ha-Yeled* (Prophecy of the Child), a text that turned up in the hands of Rabbi Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi in the sixteenth century, but was said to date from the fourth century.³⁹ In no case was there any really significant objection in the community to these attributions. After all, the kabbalists were a secret society with secret knowledge, which an outsider was not in a position to question. Mystical works were even given considerable influence in the formulation of *halakhah*, though this was not without its limits.⁴⁰

Though pseudepigraphy in itself may not be unusual or dangerous, kabbalistic pseudepigraphy helped condition the Jewish people to the conferral of great authority upon books nobody had ever seen before. This was not like the situation of obscure pseudepigraphic Midrashim, whose impact was strictly intellectual. It cannot even be compared to the Hermetic corpus in fifteenth-century Europe, which indeed had a great impact but was esoteric rather than practical, and was part of a traceable tradition going back to Egypt, close to two millennia earlier.

This may help explain how Nathan of Gaza, at the beginning of the Sabbatean movement, could produce the most flagrant forgeries without raising the notice of anyone except the arch-opponent of the Sabbateans, R. Jacob Sasportas. One of these books has been preserved, an apocalyptic prophecy alleged to date from the thirteenth century, which Nathan claimed to have found, “foretelling” the birth and messianic status of Shabbatai Zvi.⁴¹ Other pseudepigraphic prophecies were produced by Sabbateans at the height of the movement: for example, R. Moses Suriel, a widely regarded Sabbatean prophet at Brusa, “composed a new *Zohar* in those days, though I cannot say where this *Zohar* can be found.”⁴² As members of the new kabbalistic rabbinate, Nathan and later Suriel had the prestige to carry off this seemingly ridiculous ruse. What was patently spurious to Sasportas was obviously acceptable to the believers, among whom were some great Torah scholars. Because Jews had become accustomed to long-lost mystical or prophetic treatises appearing from nowhere and wielding very considerable authority, they did not immediately attack the forgeries of Nathan and Moses Suriel when these were presented.

The knowledge the kabbalists found in their pseudepigraphic literature

was itself beyond the realm of traditional Jewish discursive reasoning. Even when they purported to be based on exoteric sources, many kabbalistic interpretations could not possibly be known to anyone but an adept. For example, the kabbalists may speak of multiple truths existing in four parallel worlds—what is true in the World of Creation may be false in the World of Emanation or the World of Action. What is true in this age may be completely different in the messianic age. The mystical interpretation of a biblical or talmudic passage may yield numerous interpretations having nothing whatsoever to do with the simple meaning of the text. These unique views often come to the kabbalist through revelation. A particularly significant type of this esoteric knowledge derives from the kabbalistic conception of metempsychosis, especially as it was conceived by the Luria circle. According to this notion, people have multiple souls within them which have rolled over from persons of earlier ages. Only a kabbalist, exercising his prophetic gift, is able to identify to whom these souls previously belonged, and there is nobody to gainsay this knowledge. Awareness of all this required no serious familiarity with the Lurianic texts—it could all be learned from popular published hagiographies and ethical works.

Through this sort of gnostic wisdom of Kabbalah, the Sabbateans were able to make claims that might otherwise have seemed ludicrous. Kabbalah was used to support Shabbatai's "strange actions" and other abrogations of commandments or traditions in the movement. Perhaps the way the Sabbateans treated soul-roots is even more significant. Shabbatai and Nathan could claim to be *gilgulim* (reincarnations) of earlier sages, such as Rabbi Isaac Luria and his student, Rabbi Hayyim Vital, and at the same time of Rabbi Akiba, the patriarchs, and various other historical figures. (Oddly, the *gilgulim* of the myriad obscure shoemakers and candle-dippers from ancient times never seemed to turn up in more recent souls.) These doctrines could also explain how someone without a pedigree relating him by ancestry to King David, the father of the messianic line, could still claim a relationship, even an identity, with David.

A belief in latter-day prophecy in some form was obviously central to the production of the kabbalists' pseudepigraphic texts and revealed ideas. Indeed, the term Kabbalah (literally, something received) did not necessarily refer to wisdom received from the previous generation—often it meant that which was received directly from heaven. The Spanish mystical work *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, for example, was composed of texts that were "not composed by a Kabbalist or a group of Kabbalists, but were dictated by God Himself, who

was believed to have narrated, or dictated, the texts in the first person or through holy angels who reveal lofty truths to the Kabbalist.”⁴³ The circles of medieval and early modern mystics and kabbalists produced the vast majority of post-biblical Jewish prophetic claims. This tendency mushroomed with the Safed circle of the sixteenth century—a positive explosion of prophetic possession (maggidism), automatic writing, xenoglossia, meetings with the prophet Elijah, dreams, augury, and visitations of the holy spirit littered the spiritual landscape of the Galilee in that period. Thus by the time Shabbatai appeared in the later seventeenth century, the great prevalence of prophecy in his circle did not cause immediate rejection and renunciation, as it might have without the kabbalistic influence. Prophecy rather served to bolster the movement very substantially, and to associate the Sabbateans with the Luria circle in the minds of many Jews.

Once the kabbalists displaced legal reasoning, philosophy, and homiletics with texts and ideas that came through revelation, the possibility of transgressing Torah laws by appeal to the mystical supersession of tradition became more plausible. It may thus be possible to find precedents for Shabbatai’s antinomian “strange actions” in the kabbalistic tradition. The popular *Praises of the AR”I z”l*, which was well known in the seventeenth century, tells that Luria sometimes carried out mystical rituals involving forbidden sexual acts. In one instance, when a woman was in excruciating pain from a complicated childbirth, Luria told the disciples to find a man who had never seen a drop of his semen. The one man in Safed of such purity, the elderly Rabbi Moses Galante, was found and brought before the Master, who told the woman to place this man’s penis in her mouth. She did so, and immediately delivered safely.⁴⁴ Without referring to the many later accusations against the Sabbateans, I will suggest that this type of story might have opened the door to “strange acts” of a sexual nature. In one particular tale, Shabbatai’s wife, Sarah, reportedly commanded a young man to remove his boots and his pants in front of her, presumably in preparation for intimate contact. The boy screamed, his father broke in the door, and, being informed of events, cursed Shabbatai and his wife. Shabbatai remonstrated that the boy and his father had committed a grave error, because Sarah would have performed a great *Tikkun* (mystical repair) for them.⁴⁵ It is possible to find other precedents in Jewish literature for transgressions of modesty in certain situations, but the case described in *Praises of the AR”I* certainly presents a likely model for this type of behavior. It is the prophetic gift of Shabbatai and

Sarah, like that of Luria, which permits them to override Jewish law for such mystical gains.

Sabbateanism could probably not have been successful without the Kabbalah to prepare the ground. Both as a set of ideas and images that could attract learned mystics, and as a powerful body of legends, Kabbalah provided many tools needed for a successful messianic movement. Shabbatai and Nathan were clearly part of the new elite of mystics, and they took full advantage of that status to press home their message.

Jewish messianism in the early modern period was diachronically bound to the long history of Jewish messianic hopes, pretensions, and writings. It was also, however, equally integrated into the contemporary existential situation of the Jews within the early modern world. Two factors—the *converso* phenomenon and the Kabbalah—had a particularly strong influence on the shape of Jewish messianic views in Shabbatai's period; but these elements themselves arose in dialectical relationship with the historical position of the Jew in Christian and Muslim lands. While that world seemed increasingly hostile toward Jews, it was paradoxically drawing closer in the matter of messianic expectations and calculations. It is thus important to constantly observe the unfolding of Sabbateanism from both within and without the Jewish context.

It was not only surrounding conditions, however, that allowed the success of Sabbateanism. Nathan of Gaza and the other Sabbatean prophets knew how to shape and deliver the message persuasively. They avoided the pitfalls that would immediately brand their prophecy as false, sounded the traditional tones that would validate their authenticity, and held out satisfaction for the yearnings of all hearts. Nathan deftly exploited the dense messianic atmosphere of the age to accomplish this design.

*Nathan of Gaza and the Roots
of Sabbatean Prophecy*

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

—I Corinthians 14–15

The sixteenth-century thinker rediscovered and accumulated the works and ideas of his predecessors, but was not able to sort them out thoroughly. His intellectual heirs, the seventeenth-century thinkers, spent a great deal of time trying to organize and evaluate the mass of facts and ideas that had flooded the mental marketplace in the previous century. New geographical discoveries, religious outlooks, scientific findings, and political beliefs were analyzed, usually in polemical contexts, and classified for their usefulness or truth value.

One of the most important criteria for determining the usefulness or truthfulness of anything during most of this period was its antiquity. The presumption, inflated from its place in medieval religious thought, was that the ancients, being closer to the time of Adam, or at least to the classical age of prophecy, knew far more of the world's secrets than their progeny. There was no discovery—only *recovery* of knowledge lost over the centuries. (Galileo's willingness to embrace novelty as such, for example, gained him the ire of many people.) Everything was somewhere in the attic of history. This belief acted as ballast against the early modern storm of discoveries. Anyone proposing a new piece of knowledge would do well to find its proper source in the ancient world, though this became an increasingly wearisome exercise. The Rosicrucians in the early part of the seventeenth century and the Freemasons in the later years illustrate the importance of this principle.

Each claimed to be heir to an ancient secret tradition carried on by adepts throughout the generations, which preserved some great knowledge revealed to the wise men of ages past. The secrets themselves were in both cases scientific and organizational; but they also carried no small measure of mystical airs about them, and, in revealing hoary secret knowledge, incorporated a messianic valence. These were the elements that gave the movements their great appeal. It goes without saying that such a belief system, both in the medieval and early modern worlds, bred an industry in false credentials forged with guile or accepted with credulity.

Nathan of Gaza, the brilliant theologian behind the success of Sabbateanism, was a past master in the understanding of ancient wisdom and its uses in the Jewish context. He wielded a wide spectrum of tools for attaching his ideas to Jewish traditions reputed to date from the greatest antiquity, all in the service of Shabbatai Zvi's messianic mission. We will examine texts from his four earliest Sabbatean prophecies: a day-long prophetic trance, a public spirit-possession episode, the pseudepigraphic apocalypse (*The Vision of Rabbi Abraham*), and Nathan's letter to Raphael Joseph Chelebi announcing Shabbatai as messiah. Throughout, Nathan's apparently sincere prophetic calling overlays great sensitivity toward the issue of antiquity and novelty in his time.

Nathan of Gaza—Abraham Nathan ben Elisha Hayyim Ashkenazi (ca. 1643/4–1680)—was born in Jerusalem of parents who had immigrated from Poland or Germany. His father was a well-known rabbinic scholar who spent many years as an emissary collecting funds all over Europe and the Ottoman Empire for the poverty-stricken Jerusalem Jews. Nathan was a highly gifted student at the *yeshivah* of Hakham Jacob Hagiz. He married the daughter of the wealthy Samuel Lissabona of Gaza, presumably a Portuguese Jew, and in 1663 joined the family in that city. Shortly afterward he embarked on his many mystical adventures.¹

Nathan's Prophetic Vision

Nathan's first prophecy concerning Shabbatai Zvi is particularly significant because it constitutes the conversion-event of the first real Sabbatean believer, perhaps not excluding Shabbatai himself.² This prophecy, the Great Vision, occurred in February or early March of 1665, though Nathan's recollections of the experience were recorded only much later, in documents

from 1668 and 1673/4.³ Nathan asserts that he was forbidden to reveal the contents of this vision until after Shabbatai revealed himself publicly as messiah in Gaza several months later.⁴ The vision lasted for twenty-four hours and provided details about the messianic faith; but the real impact on Nathan was the experience itself—the immediacy and intensity of the moment, epitomized in the introductory phrase, “Thus saith the Lord.” These were the words so often used by the biblical prophets, and they designate this occurrence as something qualitatively different from any ordinary contemporary prophetic event. Although some of the circulated documents from before Shabbatai’s apostasy mention this prophecy, it appears that the details were intended originally just for the small audience of Palestinian rabbis around whom the movement originally coalesced. I will present several versions of the story, to point out some of the themes that occupied and influenced Nathan at that critical moment.

Nathan of Gaza, from a letter⁵ of 1673:

These things [I write] to make known unto you in faithfulness the certainty of the words of truth, the great cause and reason of the tidings which I have announced to the assembly of the congregation of Israel concerning our deliverance and the redemption of our souls. Whosoever knoweth me can truthfully testify that from my childhood unto this day not the slightest fault [of sin] could be found with me. I observed the Law in poverty, and meditated on it day and night. I never followed after the lusts of the flesh, but always added new mortifications and forms of penance with all my strength, nor did I ever derive any worldly benefit from my message. Praise be to God that there are many faithful witnesses to testify to this and to much more. I studied the Torah in purity until I was twenty years of age, and I performed the great *tikkun* which Isaac Luria prescribes for everyone who has committed great sins. Although praise be to God, I have not advertently committed any sins, nevertheless I performed it in case my soul be sullied from an earlier transmigration. When I had attained the age of twenty, I began to study the book Zohar and some of the Lurianic writings. [According to the Talmud] he who wants to purify himself receives the aid of Heaven; and thus He sent me some of His holy angels and blessed spirits [*mal’ ahav ha-kedoshim ve-nishmotav ha-tehorot*] who revealed to me many of the mysteries of the Torah. In that same year, my force having been stimulated by the visions of the angels and the blessed souls, I was undergoing a

prolonged fast [*hafsahah*] in the week before the feast of Purim. Having locked myself in a separate room in holiness and purity, and reciting the penitential prayers of the morning service with many tears, the spirit came over me, my hair stood on end and my knees shook [acc. to Dan. 5:6] and I beheld the *merkabah* [chariot; Ezekiel 1]. I saw visions of God all day long and all night, and I was vouchsafed true prophecy like any other prophet, as the voice spoke to me and began with the words: “Thus speaks the Lord.” And with the utmost clarity my heart perceived toward whom my prophecy was directed [that is, toward Shabbatai Zvi], even as Maimonides has stated that the prophets perceived in their hearts the correct interpretation of their prophecy so that they could not doubt its meaning. Until this day I never yet had so great a vision, but it remained hidden in my heart until the redeemer revealed himself in Gaza and proclaimed himself the messiah; only then did the angel permit me to proclaim what I had seen. I recognized that he was [the] true [messiah] by the signs which Isaac Luria had taught, for he [Luria] has revealed profound mysteries in the Torah and not one thing faileth of all that he has taught. And also the angel that revealed himself to me in a waking vision was a truthful one, and he revealed to me awesome mysteries.

Pinheiro Interview,⁶ 1668:

Rabbi Moses Pinheiro examined Rabbi Nathan when he was in Livorno concerning his prophecy. [He explained that] in his early life he spent all his time in talmudic study and divine service, and he knew three Orders [of the six in the Mishnah] by heart. He came to a point when a certain soul would come to speak with him, and began to teach him all the introductions to [hidden] wisdom. [Pinheiro] asked him what it was like. He answered that he would sometimes see an image like a pillar of fire standing before him with which he would speak, while other times he would see the image of a man’s face. [Pinheiro] asked him if he would know whose soul it was that spoke with him. He answered that each time he knew the spiritual identity of the soul, but he did not wish to reveal them so as not to appear arrogant. This continued for a long period, until he knew by the true wisdom [Kabbalah], all the books of Rabbi Isaac Luria of blessed memory.

One day he decided to concentrate the whole day so as to receive a revelation of the great light, and so he did. While he was wrapped in his prayer mantle and phylacteries all his senses were extinguished, though his eyes remained open. His mind was clearer than ever before, and he saw every-

thing in its order: the *merkabah* [chariot]⁷ and the face of AMIRAH [Shabbatai Zvi]. [Pinheiro] asked him how long he stayed in this state and he replied, for twenty-four hours. [Pinheiro] then asked him how things appeared—as in a dream? As if from far away or from close up? Or just like a man learning? He answered that [he saw] by the light God made on the first day, which permits a man to see from one end of the world to the other, each thing in its appropriate place in heaven; then above [heaven] in the ascending order of levels.

Baruch ben Gershon of Arezzo, *A Remembrance for the Children of Israel*⁸ (ca. 1676):

Afterwards Rabbi Nathan was told in a dream vision at night that he should carry out an extended fast [*hafsaqah*] since he was destined to see a great vision; and so he did. On Sunday, the 25th day of the month of Elul 5425⁹ he isolated himself in a room, and the sages were in an adjoining room. On Monday, following the morning service, a great vision came to him. He beheld the light which God created on the six days of Creation; he viewed from one end of the universe to the other; and he saw a scene like that which Ezekiel the prophet saw [the chariot]. And he saw the following engraved in supernal lights: “Thus saith the Lord: Behold your savior is coming, Shabbatai Zvi” etc. And he was dressed in it [!] like an angel, and he forced him to say these words. He heard a decree in the heavenly academy announcing: “In one year and a few months you will reveal and you will see the kingdom of the House of David.” He [Nathan] swore on the life of the world [that is, God] that what he said was true, and that he really had this vision.

These accounts are mainly free of complex literary accretions, and they essentially agree in content. Nathan describes himself as a highly dedicated student who sought voluntary mortifications and penances although he knew that he was in fact pure and sinless. This attitude presents an interesting contrast with many Palestinian kabbalists of the sixteenth century, such as Rabbis Joseph Karo and Hayyim Vital, who led saintly lives but were constantly tortured by the fear of minute transgressions. It offers an insight into the immense self-confidence of Nathan, the very quality that allowed him to dive head-first into the Sabbatean enterprise and convince others (including Shabbatai) to join him. Self-confidence was a quality Nathan shared with the most influential of the sixteenth-century kabbalists, Rabbi Isaac Luria,

who also appears not to have suffered from the kind of overactive conscience that might have impeded his sure-footed ascent into the heights of mystical leadership. Nathan's attachment to the Lurianic tradition is immediately obvious from these accounts. Around the age of twenty, when he embarked on the path of mystical study, Nathan noted his adherence to Lurianic ascetic practices and texts.

At this stage Nathan asserts that he had his first mystical experiences: angels and holy souls came to teach him mystical secrets. The spirits bore distinct similarities to those common in Luria's circle.¹⁰ Under the influence of these spiritual mentors, Nathan undertook an extended fast and removed himself from the society of others to prepare for a higher level of prophetic revelation. More of the subtext of Nathan's greatest prophetic experience is revealed in a closer examination of the traditions out of which both the preparations and the prophecies themselves derived. He drew on a long Jewish legacy of self-induced visions, one that was intertwined with a very similar Sufi Muslim tradition.

Nathan was influenced by writings from the school of R. Abraham Abulafia (fl. 13th c.) that circulated in early modern Palestine.¹¹ It is even possible to point out what he gained from specific texts by Abulafia and his sixteenth-century Jerusalemite student, Rabbi Judah Albotini, author of the *Ladder of Ascent (Sullam Ha-Aliyyah)*. The mystic is instructed by Abulafia and his disciples first to cleanse himself of all sin, then immerse himself deeply in study of the Torah. Bodily desires should be satisfied in a minimal manner, and fasting is appropriate. When the mystic feels he is prepared to receive a prophetic experience, he is to seclude himself in an undisturbed place, preferably at night, wearing the prayer shawl and phylacteries. For the Abulafians, the next and critical step is to combine letters of words from the Torah in numerous ways until the writing implements fall away as a result of the great mental concentration he has achieved, and the vision begins. Later, R. Hayyim Vital, Luria's chief disciple, substituted the study of a Mishnah for letter combinations.

It is noteworthy that in the Pinheiro interview Nathan specifically mentions his study of Mishnah, a point whose implications will soon be seen. Nathan does not tell us which of the vision-inducing methods he used. In his vision appears the *merkabah*, Ezekiel's chariot, which the *Zohar* describes as a symbol of the world of Sephiroth (the ten divine emanations), also related to *harkabah* (meaning combination, perhaps hinting at letter combination)—possibly an allusion to Abulafia's method.¹² On the other hand, R.

Hayyim Vital also discusses the appearance of the *merkabah* at a high stage of the mystical ascent toward prophecy.¹³ Either way, the overall technique is essentially identical—Vital’s version is derived from the Abulafian tradition with additions from German pietism and *merkabah* imagery.¹⁴

Next, according to Abulafia, “Thy whole body will be seized by an extremely strong trembling, so that thou wilt think that surely thou art about to die,” and “A feeling of terror and trembling will result so that his hair will stand on end and his limbs will tremble.”¹⁵ In al-Botini’s words, “His whole body will shake violently, *his knees will knock together* [Dan 5:6]. . . . He will ascend, unite, and cause his soul and his thoughts to adhere from step to step in these spiritual matters, as much as is possible according to his strength in adhesion and in ascension upward from the world of spheres to the world of the separated Intelligences to the hidden world of the highest Emanation.”¹⁶ Comparing these directions with Nathan’s accounts, then, it is clear that he was following Abulafia and Albotini in preparing for a prophetic experience; and that he consciously intended to have such an experience.

This prophetic vision occurred in the Land of Israel under Ottoman rule, at a time of strong Sufi influence in the empire. Abulafia’s prophetic Kabbalah had a long history in Palestine, and almost all the elements in Nathan’s practice, following Abulafia, Albotini, and Vital, were found in Sufi traditions. The Sufi mystic would adopt a regimen of fasting and ascetic behavior, enter into *halwa* (isolation), meditate intensely on the image of the Prophet or his *shaykh*, concentrate intensely on the words of the *dhikr* (articulation of the divine Name), and if successful, initiate a state of *hāl* (ecstasy). In the *hāl* he might be granted a true vision of the Prophet or other mystical insights. This Sufi technique interacted with the Abulafian method, especially in Palestine and Turkey, over many centuries. A striking connection can be made between Sufi ecstatic methods and Safed, the home of Luria, Vital and numerous other kabbalists, in the sixteenth century: a Sufi prayer cave was recently discovered there, a sort of isolation chamber designed to foment ecstatic states, which was used in the period of the Safed kabbalists.¹⁷ Self-induced Sufi visions increased dramatically in importance and frequency from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, in the exact period when a similar trend occurred in Jewish ecstatic practice. Nathan was influenced by this Sufi method, whether through the Abulafian literature that reflects Muslim influence, through sixteenth century kabbalists, or through direct local contact with Sufis.¹⁸

In both Nathan's preparations for the prophecy and the prophecy itself, the significance of Rabbi Isaac Luria and the kabbalists of sixteenth-century Palestine stands out vividly. The mortifications he practiced were not part of the Abulafian tradition, but were stressed by Safed mystics such as R. Eliezer Azikri and R. Hayyim Vital—both of special importance for Nathan. Nathan's study of Kabbalah was heavily weighted toward Lurianic works, and his concern with sins in previous incarnations was typically Lurianic. His method for inducing a prophetic state is drawn from an Abulafian tradition in which Vital participated. The signs by which Nathan recognized Shabbatai as messiah were those taught by Luria. It is even possible that the spirit which revealed itself to Nathan in his studies and in this great vision was none other than Luria, and at a later time Nathan actually believed himself to be Luria's reincarnation.¹⁹

The kabbalistic systems from which Nathan's potent prophetic tradition derived were alleged to go back to the talmudic rabbis, or to Moses, Abraham, and even Adam. In the preparations, form, and to some degree the content of his first and greatest Sabbatean prophecy, Nathan attached himself to a mystical legacy associated with the Land of Israel, and the persons of R. Abraham Abulafia (along with his students), R. Isaac Luria, and R. Hayyim Vital. The messianic significance of the Land of Israel is clear; moreover each of these three mystical teachers was perceived as a messiah. The achievement of prophecy itself in the Abulafian tradition had explicit messianic significance.²⁰ Thus the first glimmerings of public Sabbateanism were inextricably tied to a revival of prophecy.

Nathan's Prophetic Possession

If Nathan's first prophecy was a mystical event of a type well known among the adepts of Jewish and Muslim spirituality, his second vision, on the night of the Shavu'ot festival in the spring of 1665, falls into that twilight of experience at the intersection of mysticism, shamanism, magic, and theater: he was publicly possessed by an auditory *maggid*.²¹

The *maggid* is a benevolent heavenly spirit that possesses worthy kabbalists. Little evidence exists for the phenomenon of such possession before the Spanish Expulsion, though its roots have been traced through the late medieval mystical work, *Sefer ha-Tamar*, back to Muslim ideas.²² In the late fifteenth century *maggidim* appeared in the circle of mystics associated with the radically prophetic and messianic *Sefer ha-Meshiv*. Rabbi Joseph

Taytatzak, apparently a member of this circle, probably brought the concept with him when he left Spain to settle in Salonika and Istanbul—he was himself known to have had a *maggid*.²³ Rabbi Joseph Karo, the great legal scholar and author of the *Bet Yosef* and *Shulhan Arukh*, was associated with members of the Taytatzak circle. It seems Karo was still in Greece when he first experienced his own *maggid*.

Karo's *maggid* became famous through a widely disseminated epistle describing it. Meanwhile, the rabbi and several of his close associates settled in Safed, where persons close to him, including R. Moses Cordovero, appear to have experienced maggidic possessions as well.²⁴ Later in the century, when Rabbi Isaac Luria came to Safed, he too was reported to have a *maggid*; so were a number of persons described in the writing of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, the AR"Y's chief pupil.²⁵ Maggidic prophecy was co-opted and incorporated into Luria's mystical system; Vital's *Sha'ar Ru'ah ha-Kodesh* and other writings explain the nature of these spirits and methods of soliciting their presence.²⁶ They are "angelic creations whose existence is brought about by the sounds of a man's voice uttered in the course of religious devotion such as prayer or study."²⁷

Over the course of forty-five years between the death of Vital (1620) and the rise of Sabbateanism (1665), there were scattered reports of maggidic possessions occurring among kabbalists, all but one of them adherents of the Lurianic doctrine. The known cases are Rabbis Menahem Azariah of Fano, Aaron Berakhiah of Modena (a student of Fano), David Habillio, Moses Zacuto, and Samson of Ostropol. The last named was not a Lurianist, though he certainly had access to some Lurianic writings and teachers. He was also the only Ashkenazi *ba'al maggid* known in the period.²⁸ Of the others, Habillio soon became a leading Sabbatean.²⁹

The fullest and best account of Nathan's possession is given in Baruch of Arezzo's chronicle *Zikkaron Li-vne Yisra'el*:

When the holiday of Shavu'ot arrived, Rabbi Nathan called to the scholars of Gaza to study Torah with him the entire night. And it occurred that in the middle of the night a great sleep fell on R. Nathan; and he stood on his feet and walked back and forth in the room, and recited the entire tractate *Ketubot* by heart. He next told one of the scholars to sing a certain hymn, then he asked another of the scholars [to sing]. Meanwhile, all those scholars heard [!] a wonderful and very fragrant smell, as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed. They therefore investigated the neighboring

streets and houses to find out whence this fragrant odor came, but could discover nothing. Meanwhile, he [Nathan] leaped and danced in the room, shedding one piece of clothing after another until his underclothes alone remained. He then took a great leap and fell flat on the ground. When the rabbis saw this they wished to help him and to stand him up, but they found that he was like a dead man. There was present the scholar Rabbi Meir ha-Rofe, who felt his hand in the manner of the doctors and pronounced that he had no life at all. They therefore placed a cloth over his face, as is done to the deceased, far be it from us.

Presently a very low voice was heard, and they removed the cloth from his face; and behold, a voice emitted from his mouth, but his lips did not move. And he said, "Take care concerning my beloved son, my messiah Shabbatai Zvi"; and it said further, "Take care concerning my beloved son, Nathan the Prophet." In this way it became known to those sages that the source of that wonderful odor they had smelled was in the holy spiritual spark which came into Rabbi Nathan and spoke all these things.

Afterwards he rested a great rest and began to move himself. His colleagues helped him to stand up on his feet, and asked him how it had happened and what he had spoken; he replied that he didn't know anything. The sages told him everything that had happened, at which he was very amazed.³⁰

Unlike the essentially eyewitness accounts of Nathan's first prophecy, this account is embedded in an apologetic literary setting, though other reports of the possession conform with it. Some interesting details of the event and its telling deserve attention. The matter of the special odor is particularly noteworthy. In Genesis, the patriarch Isaac precedes his blessing to Jacob, who wears the clothes of Esau, by comparing his smell to that of a field which the Lord has blessed (Genesis 27:27). But the *Zohar* further associates a special odor, the fragrance of the Garden of Eden, with the prophet Elisha (*Zohar* II, 44r), and most significantly, this same fragrance is attributed to Rabbi Isaac Luria.³¹ Such an odor is noted as well in the case of an ordinary Jewish woman who was possessed at some time before these events, and who went on to offer messianic prophecies.³² Shabbatai emitted such an odor as well, and it appears again sporadically in the Sabbatean literature.

The description of Nathan's wild dancing is also worthy of attention because it serves a polemical purpose. The wording is taken from II Samuel 6:16, a passage describing King David's religious ecstasy as he danced before

the Ark of the Lord. David's wife, Michal, daughter of King Saul, who had established ideas of appropriate royal behavior, found this conduct offensive. She was particularly concerned with the fact that David disrobed, at least partially, during the performance, an act imitated by Nathan. When Michal reproached David, he answered: "Before the Lord who chose me above thy father, and above all his house, to appoint me prince over the people of the Lord, over Israel, before the Lord will I make merry" (II Samuel 6:21). Michal is ultimately punished for her criticism and David is vindicated. The author of our account is clearly responding to those who found Nathan's behavior, or his message, inappropriate. The association with King David, who was also messiah and father of the messianic line, can hardly be accidental.

Benevolent possessions similar to Nathan's were well known among Muslims and Jews. In order to understand the cultural and religious implications of Nathan's possession that gave it such significance for the movement, it is important to consider Nathan's episode in relation to the sixteenth-century maggidic experiences of Rabbi Joseph Karo—the most famous *maggid*-events in Judaism. Few Jews could have failed to notice the similarities between them.

R. Karo, who was born in Spain and left with the exiles as a child, lived and studied in Nicopolis, Istanbul, and Edirne (Adrianople), settling finally in Safed. There he wrote the *Bet Yosef* and *Shulhan Arukh* and was an active member in the circle of mystics around Rabbis Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria. He experienced possessions by a *maggid* throughout a long period of his life.³³ These possessions began on a Shavu'ot night, probably while R. Karo was still in Greece, and one event is recorded in a very famous letter by Rabbi Solomon Alkabetz:

Know that the saint [R. Karo] and I his and your humble servant, belonging to our company, agreed to stay up all night in order to banish sleep from our eyes on Shavuot. We succeeded, thank God, so that, as you will hear, we ceased not from study for even a moment. This is the order I arranged for that night. [R. Alkabetz describes the reading of portions from the Torah and prophets.] All this we did in dread and awe, with quite unbelievable melody and tunefulness. We studied the whole of the Order *Zera'im* in the Mishnah and then we studied in the way of truth [the Kabbalah].

No sooner had we studied two tractates of the Mishnah than our Creator smote us so that we heard a voice speaking out of the mouth of the saint,

may his light shine. It was a loud voice with letters clearly enunciated. All the companions heard the voice but were unable to understand what was said. It was an exceedingly pleasant voice, becoming increasingly strong. We all fell upon our faces and none of us had any spirit left in him because of our great dread and awe. The voice began to address us, saying: "Friends, choicest of the choice, peace to you, beloved companions. Happy are you and happy those that bore you. Happy are you in this world and happy in the next that you resolved to adorn Me on this night. For these many years had My head been fallen with none to comfort me . . . Behold, I am the Mishnah, the mother who chastises her children and I have come to converse with you."³⁴

Gershom Scholem took note of the parallels between the possessions of Nathan and R. Karo: "Solomon Alkabetz' description of a similar manifestation—also in the night of Pentecost—when the voice spoke through the mouth of R. Joseph Karo in the presence of many brethren, provides a perfect analogy [*maqbil*] to the case of Nathan."³⁵ Scholem did not develop the significance of the parallel, but the similarities cannot be a coincidence. R. Karo's possession by the spirit of the Mishnah was a famous event in the Jewish world. The specifics of the possessions are also too similar to occur by chance. Both took place late on Shavu'ot night, in an atmosphere of scholarly group study and music. Both experienced xenoglossia, speech in a foreign voice, which is one of the best known symptoms of possession. Both men were mystics who appear to have prepared for a spiritual experience deliberately.

Nathan had a special connection with the *maggid* of R. Karo. Nathan's father, Elisha Ashkenazi, owned part of the manuscript (perhaps an autograph) of *Maggid Mesharim*, the work in which R. Karo's experiences with his *maggid* are recorded. R. Elisha brought this part of the work to press for the first time in 1649.³⁶ R. Karo's original maggidic possession apparently occurred in Nicopolis in the first half of the sixteenth century. He had been studying with members of the circle of R. Joseph Taytatzak, an exiled Spanish kabbalist. (Others in the group included Alkabetz and the messianic prophet Solomon Molkho, whose martyrdom deeply affected R. Karo.) Taytatzak was connected to the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* circle and was well known as a *ba'al maggid*. As it happens, Elisha Ashkenazi owned a prophetic manuscript of R. Joseph Taytatzak as well: a work containing revelations Taytatzak received while still in Spain. Although Scholem questions whether Nathan

ever saw this manuscript,³⁷ it is surely from there that Nathan quotes a passage concerning the messiah so critical to his later thought: “It is furthermore found in the manuscript work of the words of the *maggid* of our teacher Rabbi Taytatzak of blessed memory that when the Sages say ‘The Son of David [the messiah] will not come until the kingdom turns to heresy,’ they refer to the Kingdom of Heaven. In the future the *Shekhinah* will dress in the clothes of an Ishmaelite.”³⁸

Nathan’s father also owned a visionary record of R. Eliezer Azikri, one of the most important authors among the Safed kabbalists; Nathan had made his own notes in the margins of this work shortly before he began to prophesy about Shabbatai.³⁹ Finally, the most famous story emanating from the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* circle was the legend of Rabbi Joseph della Reina, who tried to bring the messiah by incapacitating Satan according to prophetic instructions he had received. This tale became known through a work of Rabbi Solomon Navarro, Elisha Ashkenazi’s partner in their long fund-collecting mission through Europe as emissaries of the Palestine Jewish community.⁴⁰ Nathan thus grew up in an atmosphere steeped in these sixteenth-century remembrances.

Around the time Solomon Alkabetz reported R. Karo’s maggidic possession in the epistle quoted above, Alkabetz himself left for Palestine, and in 1536 the *maggid* told R. Karo to join his friend there. Upon his arrival in Safed, R. Karo became involved in another messianic enterprise, the attempt of R. Jacob Berab to reintroduce *semikhah*. This was the form of ordination passed down from Moses to generations of biblical leaders, the continuity of which had long been lost by R. Karo’s day. A way was found to renew the tradition, which would allow the formation of a Sanhedrin, a Jewish supreme court that was empowered to anoint the messiah. R. Karo was one of four rabbis ordained with *semikhah* before the enterprise collapsed under heavy criticism.⁴¹ He remained associated with Alkabetz, and was later active in the circles of Rabbis Moses Cordovero and Isaac Luria. Not only were *maggidim* and possessions of various types common in these groups, but the mystical theology explaining their meaning was developed there.⁴²

R. Karo’s writings are not imbued with acute messianic sentiments, but it is clear that his legacy in Jewish hagiography was permanently associated with messianic persons and enterprises: the Taytatzak circle, prophetic maggidism, the messianically charged *semikhah* controversy, and the Luria pe-

riod in Safed.⁴³ Nathan felt a deep personal tie with both R. Karo and the whole atmosphere of prophetic Kabbalah he brought to Safed.

By means of his prophetic vision and maggidic possession, Nathan inserted himself directly into an ancient and powerful tradition of prophetic messianism. That tradition had been expressed vividly in the messianically charged spirituality of sixteenth-century Safed. Safed prophecy was itself heir to traditions of apocalyptic-prophetic Kabbalah connected with Spain on the one hand, and the Land of Israel on the other. The kabbalists believed their books and ideas to derive from the talmudic rabbis, who received them in tradition from biblical figures like Moses or Adam. These associations created a profound resonance for Nathan's message, and their propaganda value was central in the rise of Sabbateanism.

In examining Nathan's thought and the emphases of the early Sabbatean movement, the desire of both for connection with the Safed legacy is striking. Numerous points have already turned up that connect Nathan's earliest Sabbatean prophecies with Safed. After the two prophetic episodes, Nathan began to perform chiromancy and physiognomy on supplicants who came to him and to offer them penitential exercises (*tikkunim*) for their souls, in precisely the manner Luria had done. He would walk in the fields and point out hidden tombs of the righteous, another practice for which Luria was well known. Though Nathan replaced the Lurianic prayer rituals with his own, it was out of a clear realization that Luria's had been so successful as to obviate the need for their further practice in the messianic age. A very important aspect of the early Sabbatean movement was that figures connected with the Luria circle became part of it. These included R. Moses Galante, grandson of the chairman of the Safed rabbinical court in Luria's time, who was later a prophet himself; R. Israel Benjamin, grandson of an early editor of Luria's writings; R. David Habillio, a leading Lurianist possessed by his own *maggid*; and most important of all, R. Samuel Vital, son of R. Hayyim Vital and his spiritual and intellectual heir, with his own messianic identity. Moreover, apparently from early on, Nathan considered himself a reincarnation of Luria.⁴⁴

It is not at all certain that many Jews in the 1660s had studied Lurianic Kabbalah, but it is absolutely certain that all over Europe, the Mediterranean basin, and the Middle East almost everyone was familiar with the hagiography concerning Karo, Luria, and the Safed mystical circle. Scholem

states that “Luria’s name was freely used because the Lurianic legend as well as the popular hagiography *Shibhey ha-’ARI* was widely known by that time, whereas Lurianic theories were still unknown to the majority of kabbalists.”⁴⁵ While modern scholarship is attuned to controversies within the coterie of Safed kabbalists (including some friction between R. Karo and the Luria circle), in the seventeenth century the image of that community was that of a harmonious monolith of righteous mystics with their eyes turned toward the future.⁴⁶

Certainly in Italy, a center of Sabbatean activity, the fame of the AR”I and his mystical abilities was well established, partly through the enthusiasm of Rabbi Menahem Azariah of Fano. A student of R. Menahem, R. Shlomieli Dreznitz was so inspired by the stories that he went to Safed in 1602 and thence wrote a series of letters describing Safed and its scholars, particularly the late Rabbi Luria (not omitting R. Karo and his *maggid*). These letters were published in R. Joseph Solomon Delmedigo’s *Ta’alumot Hokhmah* (Basel, 1629–31). Stories about Luria even reached a *converso* physician, Elijah Montalto, as he lay ill in bed. The Lurianist R. Jedidiah Galante, in Italy in 1613 as an emissary from Safed’s Jewish community, brought a group of rabbis to the sick man’s bedside and began to regale everyone with stories of the AR”I’s wonders. Montalto became agitated and finally sat up in bed and shouted at Galante that such prophecy no longer occurs, and it is all lies. Needless to say, the Lurianic mystique made better headway with less skeptical audiences.⁴⁷ Other stories of the AR”I’s greatness and events in his circle were known from the *Toledot ha-Ari*, *Shene Luhot ha-Brit*, and ethical classics like R. Eliezer Azikri’s *Sefer Haredim* and R. Elijah de Vidas’ *Reshit Hokhmah*.

Thus by the time Nathan of Gaza underwent his prophetic vision and spirit possession, the association of these particular types of prophetic experience with the Safed mystical circle of the later sixteenth century was widespread. There may have been few Lurianic kabbalists, but there were also few Jews who didn’t know about the holy AR”I and his circle, or about the *maggid* of R. Joseph Karo.

In the half century since the demise of the AR”I’s circle, the creative genius of the Safedian kabbalists was discussed and expounded, in works such as Naphtali Bacharach’s *Emek ha-Melekh* and Isaiah Horowitz’s *Shene Luhot ha-Brit*.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, Jews, Christians, and (to a degree) Muslims in Europe and the Mediterranean basin were gripped by escalating messianic expectations as the seventeenth century progressed. Yet no noteworthy Jewish

messianic pretenders appeared from Vital's passing until the rise of Shabbatai Zvi.⁴⁹ The Safed kabbalists had proffered both messianic personalities and writings thick with inherent messianic themes, fueling expectations of redemption. When the members of the circle died out, it was as if the apocalyptic dynamite had been left undetonated, but with a live cap—there remained a sort of messianic ambiance awaiting a catalyst. Indeed, many understood that the role of messiah son of Joseph had been claimed by Luria and Vital, but the greater crown, messiah son of David, remained unclaimed.⁵⁰ The prophetic and messianic tools were in place, and Nathan simply exploited them, beginning with two explosive prophecies in the Lurianic style. Messianic identities in Sabbateanism had changed, but the connection with Luria and Safed is unmistakable.

Wherever Jews heard of Nathan's prophetic experiences, therefore, they understood the meaning clearly: *the prophetic messianism of the great kabbalists had returned*. This recognition opened the door for the acceptance of Nathan's prophecies about Shabbatai Zvi as well as the radical new kabbalistic system introduced by Nathan. Finally, Nathan's possession by a *maggid* inspired an unprecedented outbreak of spirit possessions among the Sabbateans.⁵¹

The stage is now set for an examination of the two earliest Sabbatean texts by Nathan, focusing principally on Nathan's interest in past messianic figures and traditions.

The "Vision of Rabbi Abraham"

Early in Nathan's Sabbatean career, around May of 1665, he produced a short apocalypse which he claimed to have found in a jar in a cave, following a hint from spiritual sources; according to other traditions, it was given to him directly by Elijah the prophet. In some versions of the story, this work, the Vision of Rabbi Abraham, was purported to be part of a larger work called the Greater Wisdom of Solomon. Nathan himself explains that it was composed by one R. Abraham, a holy ascetic from the period of the German pietists in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Some of the salient passages are presented below, with no attempt to preserve the original flow of the complex mystical narrative.

And I, Abraham, after having been shut up for forty years grieving over the power of the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, [wondering]

how long it shall be to the end of these wonders [Daniel 12:6], when behold the voice of my beloved knocketh⁵² [saying] “Behold a son will be born to Mordecai Şevi in the year 5386 [1626] and he will be called Sabbatai Şevi. He will subdue the great dragon, and take away the strength of the piercing serpent and the strength of the crooked serpent, and he will be the true messiah. He will go forth to the war without hands [that is, without weapons] . . . A”M B”L Mose”s A”m ra”m “and he shall sit on my throne.”⁵³ . . . And behold there was a man, his size was one square cubit, his beard a cubit long and his *membrum virile* a cubit and a span.⁵⁴ . . . And now write the vision and conceal it in an earthen vessel, that it may continue many days. Know that the man of which I have spoken shall strive hard to know the faith of Heaven, and Habakkuk prophesied concerning him, “the just shall live by his faith” [Hab. 2:4] . . . Let him be well remembered the man called Isaac, by whom he will be taught the ways of serving God.⁵⁵ From the age of five to six he will make himself like unto an ox bearing the yoke and an ass bearing a burden to serve the Lord. When he is six the *Shekhinah*, which has revealed herself to us, will appear to him in a dream as a flame, and cause a burn on his private parts. Then dreams shall sorely trouble him, but he shall not tell anybody. And the sons of whoredom⁵⁶ will accost him so as to cause him to stumble, and they will smite him but he will not hearken unto them. They are the sons of Na’amah, the scourges of the children of men, who will always pursue him so as to lead him astray.⁵⁷

The text contains many matters of interest. Recent scholarship has given close attention to the passage from Habbakuk and others in which faith is central.⁵⁸ The issue of God’s feminine presence, the *Shekhinah*, burning Shabbatai’s penis at a young age, holds a wealth of Freudian and gender-based implications for understanding Shabbatai’s personality, his relations with his wives, mother, and other women, and his antinomianism.

The image of the messiah, the cubit-high man, is drawn from Midrashim, in which it is applied to Pharaoh.⁵⁹ This is but one instance of Nathan’s quasi-Gnostic Sabbatean worldview, in which good and evil, redeemer and antichrist, righteousness and sin stand not in dialectic relationship, but balanced in a sort of matrix in which neither can exist without the other, so that they are in some senses equal.⁶⁰ This view bears a certain similarity to the Muslim traditions in which Jesus, or some equally antithetical figure, paradoxically becomes the Mahdi.

The style of this apocalypse is deeply indebted to that of Solomon Molkho,

a member of the Taytatzak circle in the sixteenth century.⁶¹ It is, in fact, the imagery of a vision Molkho communicated to Taytatzak in his book *The Reed Beast (Hayyat Kaneh)*, on which Nathan draws.⁶² Aspects of the myth Nathan creates around this document also reflect the probable influence of R. Abraham b. Eliezer ha-Levi (fl. early 16th c.), who tells a remarkably similar story about the highly messianic *Prophecy of the Boy (Nevu'at ha-Yeled)*:

Behold, I have copied these prophecies from an ancient, worn and worm-eaten book, rotted from its great age. . . . I found it written there that these prophecies had been discovered in one of the ruins in the Land of Israel, in the lower Galilee, in the city of Tiberias. They were written on very old and worn pages inside a lead jar. The parts that had been copied were selected according to the decisions of the copyist at that time [of the discovery of the original manuscript]. It was further written there that anyone who reveals this secret to a stranger who is not faithful to our covenant and dedicated to our law will be trapped in the ropes of his sin.⁶³

The author afterward reveals that the wonder-child who uttered the prophecies, which are probably the writings of a late fifteenth-century Spanish author, lived in the year 475 c.e.⁶⁴ The technique of “distressing” a falsified document to give it the appearance of great age, well known among forgers,⁶⁵ was apparently practiced by Nathan as well as ha-Levi’s source. R. Abraham Cuenque, a contemporary witness, describes the Vision of R. Abraham as being “in a very ancient script and paper rotted with age.”⁶⁶ Here, then, is a connection between Nathan and yet another sixteenth-century messianic figure.

Important parallels for this sort of claim exist in Christianity as well. The most famous travelogue of the Middle Ages, the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, tells the story of an artifact in the Church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople. Long ago, an emperor had gone to bury his father, and, digging the grave, had found a body on top of which lay a great gold plate. On the plate were inscribed in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin the words, “Jesus Christ shall be born of the Virgin Mary, and I believe in Him,” with a date two thousand years before the birth of Jesus.⁶⁷ Better known today are the gold and brass plates that Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints, claimed to have found in upper New York State in the early nineteenth century, revealing the sacred history of Nephi and his descendants. This discovery was part of a larger fascination with divining and ancient wisdom that had had a long history before Smith’s day.⁶⁸ The Vision of Rabbi

Abraham, however, differed from these finds. The passage in Mandeville refers to an odd relic in a distant church that would have been nothing more than a curiosity to readers. Smith's plates were not given out for the believers to see and examine; they were written in a secret language and were probably never intended to convince learned Christian scholars. In contrast, Nathan's document, in plain Hebrew, was placed before some of the greatest rabbis of the day as visible evidence to support the reality of Shabbatai's mission.

How could such a blatant forgery have been accepted without comment by everyone including many great scholars (except for Sasportas and his friend Joseph ha-Levi, the most outspoken critics of the movement)?⁶⁹ The answer to this question necessarily addresses the larger problem of Jews and pseudepigraphy. Jewish history abounds with pseudepigraphies and forgeries from biblical to modern times. Unlike Western Christian scholarship, however, it has only a very sparse critical tradition. So, while European forgers and text critics have recently been described as opposite sides of the same coin, Judaism appears to present a separate paradigm.⁷⁰

The ostensible pedigrees of pseudepigraphic Midrashim and kabbalistic works would not last a moment under the scrutiny of any proficient philologist or historian—and perhaps they were not meant to. In many cases the attribution of authorship does not derive from the book itself, but is made by later readers. Such works usually make only a superficial attempt to imitate the historical or linguistic conditions of their alleged past. The *Zohar*, for example, is replete with characters who lived later than the putative author, R. Simeon bar Yohai (fl. 2nd century C.E.), and though it is composed in Aramaic to imitate ancient Midrash, any experienced reader can immediately see that the language is patently medieval. Perhaps the rabbinic tradition of Oral Law, given at Mt. Sinai and passed down alongside the written Bible, can help explain this attitude. The Oral Law in its final written form, the Talmud, consists mainly of statements made by authorities of the Roman period concerning their own times, and only occasionally speaks of some point as “a law given to Moses at Sinai.” The obvious complexity of this tradition may have made Judaism open to works whose substance was deemed valuable and holy, whatever their alleged pedigree. In other words, specific authorship may have been less important to Jews than it was to Christians.

Or perhaps Jews were simply uninterested in the challenges posed by textual scholarship.⁷¹ It is certainly true that humanistic pursuits were largely marginalized in Judaism. Italian Jewish thinkers like Azariah de Rossi, Eli-

jah and Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, Simone Luzzatto, and Leon Modena were never encouraged by their communities to develop the critical tools they began to exploit at an elementary level. Serious critiques of the *Zohar* by Elijah Delmedigo and Modena were either ignored or circulated in only one or two manuscripts. Indeed, among the few open enemies of the Sabbateans were Emanuel and Jacob Frances of Mantua, who had carried on the ill-fated critique of Kabbalah and suffered for it. R. Jacob Emden, a central opponent of the eighteenth-century Sabbateans, became the first important “modern” critic of kabbalistic pseudepigraphy.

Nathan did not execute his ruse in the artless spirit of traditional midrashic and kabbalistic pseudepigrapha, however. He deliberately distressed the manuscript to give it the illusion of great antiquity. He invented a myth about its discovery and vouched for its truth on public record. He wove motifs and passages from midrashic and biblical sources directly into the radically specific main message. He wrote a dry, learned kabbalistic commentary to the text. Ultimately all this craft was surely unnecessary, for his public was not given to careful philological and historical analysis. They would probably have been satisfied to know the message was prophetic without regard to its author. Even the attack of Sasportas, who was instantly aware of the forgery, does not attempt any systematic explication of the clues. Perhaps Sasportas could not and did not want to fathom the spiritual significance of these prophecies for the believers.⁷² Yet Nathan’s artifice suggests that he wanted more than just to create a successful forgery. The fabrication was certainly a bold, calculated move on his part.

If Nathan had already proved his *bona fides* as a prophet, and he was accepted as one by the group of rabbis who constituted the original core of Sabbatean believers, what was the function of the Vision of R. Abraham? For if the document was deliberately forged and presented in the way I have suggested, it cannot have been simply a product of the prophetic spirit. Either the myth was true and Nathan really found an ancient document, or he had some driving reason to take this audacious step. The most important thing the Vision did for Nathan was to offer a connection to a human mystical tradition outside his own prophecies. The action was not simply designed to engender authority for the falsified document, but was a strategy for bolstering *Nathan’s* authority by adducing the testimony of an entirely different, disinterested prophet of another era. Thus the means of discovery, the document itself, the myth attached to its origins, the style of its contents, and the names mentioned inside, all served to add a new dimension to Nathan’s pro-

phetic standing through a connection to an ancient visionary tradition. They also, of course, added another level of confirmation to the messiahship of Shabbatai Zvi.

The Letter to Raphael Joseph Chelebi

The earliest known official written announcement of Shabbatai Zvi's messianic identity and mission is a letter written by Nathan of Gaza to Raphael Joseph Chelebi, the wealthy leader of Egyptian Jewry and friend of Shabbatai.⁷³ The letter, from around September 1665, seems to have been inspired by the revelation that the messiah would manifest himself in a year and some months. It was copied and spread all over the Jewish world. Scholem points out that this letter contains two distinct elements, one kabbalistic and the other traditionally apocalyptic, which do not generally coalesce.⁷⁴ Most of the kabbalistic section concerns specific prayers and divine names, and how to modify them from the Lurianic practices. Since the kabbalistic elements are of less interest here, I will quote only a few sections from the earlier part, then most of the later part.

Beware lest you perform any of the Lurianic *kawwanoth* or read [Lurianic] devotions, homilies, or writings, since they are obscure and no living man understood [Luria's] words except R. Hayyim Vital of blessed memory. He followed the rabbi Luria's system for some years, but thereafter attained greater insight than Isaac Luria himself. He might have been the messiah if the merits of his generation had been sufficient, and if there had not been so many contrary forces caused by sin. At the present time, too, there are opposing forces, but they are merely harming themselves. They cannot oppose [the progress of the messiah] because now it is surely the last end. Do not ask how our generation has merited this. For because of the great and infinite sufferings—more than any mind can comprehend—which the Rabbi Sabbatai Şevi has suffered, it is in his power to do as he pleases with the Israelite nation, to declare them righteous or—God forbid—guilty. He can justify the greatest sinner, and even if he be [as sinful] as Jesus he may justify him. And whoever entertains any doubts about him, though he be the most righteous man in the world, he [the messiah] may punish him with great afflictions. . . .

And now I shall disclose the course of events. A year and a few months from today, he [Sabbatai] will take the dominion from the Turkish king

without war, for by [the power of] the hymns and praises which he shall utter, all nations shall submit to his rule. He will take the Turkish king alone to the countries which he will conquer, and all the kings shall be tributary unto him, but only the Turkish king will be his servant. There will be no slaughter among the uncircumcised [that is, Christians], except in the Ashkenazi lands [that is, Poland.] The ingathering of the exiles will not yet take place at that time, though the Jews shall have great honor, each in his place. Also the Temple will not yet be rebuilt, but the aforementioned rabbi [Sabbatai Sevi] will discover the exact site of the altar as well as the ashes of the red heifer, and he will perform sacrifices. This will continue for four or five years. Thereafter the aforementioned rabbi will proceed to the river Sambatyon, leaving his kingdom in the charge of the Turkish king [who would act as the messiah's viceroy or Great Vizier] and charging him [especially] with regard to the Jews. But after three months he [the Grand Turk] will be seduced by his councillors and will rebel. Then there will be a great tribulation [the messianic woes] and Scripture shall be fulfilled [Zech. 13:9]: "and I will try them as gold is tried, and I will refine them as silver is refined," and none will be saved from these tribulations except those dwelling in this place [Gaza] which is the ruler's residence, even as Hebron was unto David. The name [of the city] expresses its nature, for its name is [in Hebrew] 'Azzah ["the strong one"], and with the advent of redemption, strength will spread and the people [of Gaza] will act in this strength. King Solomon [in his time] wished to do the same . . . but he did not succeed, for the time had not yet come. In our time, however, this will be fulfilled in the dominion of Gaza. . . . At the end of this period the signs foretold in the *Zohar* will come to pass. . . . At that time the aforementioned rabbi will return from the river Sambatyon together with his predestined mate, the daughter of Moses. It will be known that today it was fifteen years since Moses was resuscitated and that [today] the aforementioned rabbi's predestined wife, whose name is Rebekah, was thirteen years old. His present wife will be the handmaid. . . . In the same year he will return from the river Sambatyon, mounted on a celestial lion; his bridle will be a seven-headed serpent and "fire out of his mouth devoured." At this sight all the nations and all the kings shall bow before him to the ground.⁷⁵

Among the many elements to consider here, one central issue is the use of certain rhetorical devices by Nathan. The first is the very tricky matter of explaining why he is eliminating the Lurianic liturgical traditions in favor of

his own. He must make the switch while still remaining in the Lurianic camp, where his heart as well as those of many would-be believers clearly lay. The method he uses is very similar to a strategy of the hagiographical *Toledoth ha-AR"l*. In that work, the apologist must explain why the world-famous luminaries of Safed such as R. Joseph Karo, R. Moses Cordovero, R. Abraham and R. Moses Galante, and R. Moses Alsheikh, were nevertheless inferior to the young Luria, who showed up in Safed only in 1570 at age thirty-six and died two years later. The author of *Toledoth ha-AR"l* uses a story in each case to show that these great elder scholars were indeed extremely holy and exalted, but God simply had not put their souls in the same league as that of the almost superhuman AR"l. It is in fact the AR"l himself who is able to explain, for example, why Alsheikh's soul was not destined for Kabbalah study when the latter begs to join Luria's circle. R. Moses Galante comes to him in search of a *tikkun* for his soul. In the case of Cordovero, the older rabbi as much as turns his mantle of leadership over to Luria.⁷⁶

The tables are now turned. Luria was a great and holy person, and his practices were necessary in the pre-messianic world; but in the messianic world they are superseded and even dangerous. He could hardly have been expected to know what would later be revealed to the apocalyptically illuminated Nathan.⁷⁷ The exaltation of the place of R. Hayyim Vital is especially interesting. The *Toledoth ha-AR"l* and Vital's own Book of Visions bear witness to a very complex relationship between Luria and Vital—Luria sometimes extols Vital in the highest terms, while at other times it appears Vital can never reach his teacher's spiritual level.⁷⁸ Ultimately, though, Nathan's judgment of Vital's superiority may have been a judicious move at a time when the enlistment of R. Samuel Vital, heir and son of R. Hayyim Vital, was so important to the success of Sabbateanism.⁷⁹ For this reason and others, the mention of Vital's messianic attributes is critical to the implications of the letter.

A further matter connected with Luria and Vital, and the failure of messianism in their time (and in all previous times), is the profound difference between their era and Shabbatai's. While no adequate explanation is given here, Nathan insists that in the past figures with genuine *potential* to be the messiah were thwarted by the bad deeds or disbelief of their generation; but the present generation, sinful as it might be, cannot be cheated of the messianic advent. One might again be reminded of an incident from the *Toledoth ha-AR"l*, in which Luria suddenly tells the disciples during the service wel-

coming the Sabbath that they can bring the messianic era if they will come with him immediately to Jerusalem. They hesitate, and the opportunity is lost.⁸⁰ A century earlier, the story of R. Joseph della Reina, from the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* circle, also told of a failed messianic moment. Della Reina had Samael (Satan) fettered and readied for oblivion when he made the fatal mistake of agreeing to let Samael have a last smoke. Samael requested incense, which gave him the strength to break his bonds and wreak havoc in the world, lengthening rather than shortening the wait for the messiah.⁸¹ Another instance was the failure of the messianic pretender Asher Laemlein. R. David Gans recounts the comment of his teacher, R. Eliezer Treves: “He said, ‘It was no empty matter, for he offered signs and wonders.’ And he added, ‘Perhaps it was the fault of our sins, which prevented him [from manifesting himself as messiah].’”⁸² This concept of the potential messiah appears again toward the end of the letter, when King Solomon is painted as a leader who wished to bring final redemption to his people but was not permitted because the time had not yet arrived. While the idea of a *potential* messiah or messianic situation was not a novelty of the early modern era in its general outlines (it also had a long history in Islam), it resonated especially strongly and presented certain specific features in this period.

The next issue is the matter of Shabbatai’s power of absolute judgment, and his ability to save “even” Jesus from his punishments.⁸³ The corollary is that every Jew must have faith in Shabbatai and his powers, even when he shows no signs or wonders. It is clear from this and many other places in Nathan’s writing that Christianity, with its conceptions of faith *in* the messiah, the deified savior, the suffering servant, and the antinomian apocalyptic utopia, exercised a profound effect on the young kabbalist.⁸⁴ Nathan clearly saw something of burning importance about Jesus and his salvation by Shabbatai, or he would certainly have avoided such a sensitive subject altogether.

With this the kabbalistic section of the letter ends and the “apocalyptic” section begins. The style is partly that of traditional Jewish apocalyptic,⁸⁵ but there are several uniquely tailored elements here that indicate Nathan’s engagement with contemporary conditions. The one that stands out immediately is the role of the sultan after Shabbatai’s messianic manifestation. The Jews had many reasons to appreciate the Ottomans, who had welcomed them after the Spanish expulsion, when most of Europe wished to be rid of them. The surprisingly mild treatment of Shabbatai and his followers, which was taken as a miracle by many, indicates the level of tolerance enjoyed by

Jews in the empire. So while Nathan's messianic scenario imagined the sultan in a subservient capacity, he was not unempowered. He alone among the subjugated world leaders was to become Shabbatai's viceroy, with the attendant privileges. It is only when Shabbatai crosses the Sambatyon and leaves him alone that the sultan cannot resist the inducement to rebel. This could be an oblique reference to the weak character of Sultan Mehmet IV and the supremacy of his own Grand Vizier, Koprülü, in political affairs.

The Christian world is also spared military destruction in the messianic unfolding. While this is clearly part of a miraculous scenario wherein rulers are subjugated by the prayers of the messiah, the script returns from the purely mystical to decree physical annihilation upon the perpetrators of the 1648 Chmielnicki massacres. The period between the Spanish expulsion and the rise of Sabbateanism witnessed a radical change in the European political stance toward Jews. Mercantilism rose above religious scruples, and the Jews were welcomed to many Western European lands from which they had earlier been expelled or to which they had never been admitted, such as the important communities of Amsterdam, London, Hamburg, and Livorno.⁸⁶ Thus it would have seemed inappropriate for the Jewish messiah to mete out brutal treatment to the relatively benign leaders and peoples of those Christian lands. In fine, Nathan's stance toward Muslims and Christians in messianic times is not precisely that of traditional Jewish apocalyptic; it rather reflects both heavy mystical elements and a keen awareness of contemporary political propriety.

While the Sambatyon River is indeed a standard element in Jewish apocalyptic, Nathan again introduces several original elements. In traditional narratives the Lost Tribes would generally leave their habitation beyond the Sambatyon to participate in the wars preceding redemption, whereas here the messiah himself travels to the other side of the Sambatyon. It is this very act that unleashes the evil powers and precipitates the messianic wars; they occur in his absence, with no clear indication as to who the combatants are. The element of Moses' daughter is also novel. It gave Shabbatai the legitimacy of the first Jewish redeemer, Moses (mentioned also in the Vision of R. Abraham), and it denigrated Shabbatai's present wife, Sarah. Another geographic element of importance is the central place of Gaza as the holy capital of the messiah, "even as Hebron was unto David," the original messiah. This is of particular interest because Gaza was not Shabbatai's home but Nathan's, again indicating Nathan's centrality in the messianic scenario; and because there was a genuine question about whether Gaza is really part of

the Land of Israel. Much of the legitimacy of Nathan's prophetic renewal was based on its appearance in the Holy Land.

A final point of the letter bears mention. The image of the king riding a lion with a snake as the rein is noted by Scholem to derive from various rabbinic legends, especially one concerning Nebuchadnezzar, the destroyer of Jerusalem.⁸⁷ In the Vision of R. Abraham the image of the messiah was presented in terms the Midrash uses for Pharaoh, another great enemy of the Jews. The notion of the messiah being cast in the likeness of these legendary enemies of the Jewish people, as well as the rehabilitation of the traditionally shunned Jesus, are more evidence of Nathan's quasi-Gnostic equalization of good and evil powers. As Scholem notes, in Nathan's theology "Nothing and nobody is irrevocably lost, and everything will ultimately be saved and reinstated in holiness."⁸⁸

With that in mind, we can attempt to piece together the overall meaning of Nathan's early prophecies. A common exoteric thread may be found that binds together these two prophetic events and two prophetic writings that might guide us to an understanding of the greatest Sabbatean prophet.

Nathan's Relationship to Past Messianic Prophets

At the beginning of the Sabbatean movement Nathan faced a certain conundrum: on the one hand he was absolutely convinced by the truth of his own prophecies, but on the other hand, he lacked the ability to call forth a sign or wonder, which would have been the traditional way of substantiating his claim to be a true prophet. Maimonides presents the most widely accepted picture in Judaism of the prophet and his vocation,⁸⁹ and Nathan makes clear that he fits all the characteristics called for there: he has been meticulously careful with the law, is a highly learned and upstanding person, and has prepared himself for prophecy. He describes his prophetic vision in Maimonides' terms: "When they prophesy their limbs quiver, their physical strength fails, their thoughts are confused."⁹⁰ He even quotes Maimonides on prophecy. But Maimonides also says the following:

The prophet may prophesy only for his own benefit, to broaden his heart and add to his knowledge . . . And it is also possible he will be sent to one of the nations of the earth, or to the people of a particular city or kingdom, to prepare them and inform them of what they should do, or to admonish them about some evil deed they commit. And when [God] sends him, he

82 The Sabbatean Prophets

gives him a sign or wonder, so that the nation will know that God really sent him.

The continuation of Maimonides' passage presented the hint of a solution to Nathan's problem.

Not everyone who performs a sign or wonder should be believed to be a prophet, but only a man about whom we know that from the very beginning he was worthy of prophecy. In his wisdom and his deeds he must be superior to all his contemporaries, and he walks in the ways of prophecy in holiness and separation [from physical pleasure]. Afterwards he will come and perform a sign or wonder and say that God sent him. It is a commandment to heed him, as it is written, "And you shall heed him." [Deut. 18:15]⁹¹

For Nathan, the crucial point in Maimonides' discussion of prophecy was the great rationalist's disdain for signs and wonders as confirmation of a prophetic calling, developed further in the following chapter.

Our teacher Moses was not believed in by Israel because of the signs he performed, for anyone who believes on the basis of signs will remain with doubts in his heart because the sign might be done through magic or sorcery. . . . The prophecies of our teacher Moses were not based on signs, with some intention that we compare his signs with the signs of the others; rather, we saw it with our own eyes and heard it with our own ears just as he heard it [at Mount Sinai].⁹²

Maimonides is perfectly clear in all cases that a sign or wonder is called for—his only caveat is that the sign is not necessarily sufficient proof that someone is a prophet.⁹³ He emphasizes this point very heavily as part of his larger rationalist, anti-magic program. Nathan, however, makes a subtle but critical recalibration of this principle by insisting that since signs and wonders can prove nothing, it is heresy for the people to demand them of himself or Shabbatai.⁹⁴ This point was made easier by Maimonides' much more unequivocal comment about the messiah: "Do not think that the king messiah must perform signs or wonders and create novelties in the world, or resuscitate the dead or anything of that sort, for it is not so."⁹⁵ Nathan inconspicuously merges Maimonides' attitudes toward confirmatory miracles for the prophet and the messiah into one.

Nevertheless, Nathan had a difficult period between the time of his first

public prophecy on Shavu'ot night 1665 and the wave of popular miracle stories that exploded, unsolicited, the following winter. He must have had real doubt about whether his prophetic status would be accepted in wider circles, especially among nonwitnesses, without a sign or wonder. Much of what happened in that period, the time of the four prophetic episodes, is made clearer in the light of this problem.

For one, the dramatic style of Nathan's Shavu'ot night spirit possession incident is better understood in this context. Through the public performance of this vision among a group of important rabbis, Nathan could bring others under the spell of his intense prophetic experience. And if real miracles were lacking in Nathan's arsenal, he did undergo the physical manifestations of a trance state, causing R. Meir ha-Rofe to pronounce him dead. The shock of this development, closely followed by the foreign voice issuing from Nathan's throat, might in itself be accounted a sign or wonder. Indeed, in a later narrative about a similar incident, the writer comments that one can lie about anything, but nobody can falsify the stopping of their heartbeat. In the same vein, it is possible that the physical evidence of the antiquity of the Vision of Abraham, and the story of its location by means of a prophetic communication, could constitute another "sign" of Nathan's true prophecy.

What may have been Nathan's most powerful tool of conviction, however, was the systematic attempt to locate himself in the direct line of prophetic-messianic tradition from R. Isaac Luria and the Safed kabbalistic circle. For the particular scholars in Gaza whom Nathan had to win over first, the association of Nathan with this great and partially unfulfilled legacy may well have been more important than physical signs and wonders.

This brings up a second aspect of Nathan's activity during this period and in his later career: his deep commitment to the rehabilitation of "failed" messiahs in Jewish history. Jews have never known what to do with their past messianic hopefuls, especially those who genuinely stirred the hearts of masses of Jews in their times. Figures such as Simon bar-Kosiba (bar-Kokhba), David Alroy, R. Abraham Abulafia, Asher Laemlein, Solomon Molkho, R. Isaac Luria, and R. Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, have created deep ambivalence among many Jews. Even Jesus seems to have left certain mixed feelings. On the one hand, claims for the messiahship of these figures were not realized. If they made or accepted such claims, they must have been frauds, fools, or delusional madmen. At the same time, though, many of them were important scholars, leaders, authors, and mystics, who seemed to have dedicated their lives to foster the good of their people. The

choices were, then, to vilify them, to celebrate them, to ignore them, or to leave them in a state of legendary limbo without classifying their status. With regard to each of them some Jews took each of these paths, but the last path, the state of indecision, was particularly common.⁹⁶

The most significant references and associations in Nathan's thought concern the last major messianic prophets before his time, the AR"l and R. Hayyim Vital. He also involves R. Joseph Karo, Solomon Molkho, Joseph della Reina, Abraham Abulafia, Bar Kokhba,⁹⁷ Jesus, David, Solomon, and Moses. What could such associations do for him, and what could he do for them? Is Nathan's case different from any other messianic account in dialogue with earlier messianic accounts?

To begin with, Nathan clearly wanted to rehabilitate the entire line of failed messiahs; in other words, he sought to remove them from their historical state of limbo and invest them with distinctly positive images. It goes without saying that he also wished to associate himself and Shabbatai with the "successful" messiahs, Moses, David, and Solomon. Perhaps most important, he wanted to latch on to the still potent and unresolved messianic legacy of Luria and Vital. It was specifically the Lurianic emphasis on metempsychosis, especially its complex gnosis of soul roots (whose details could only be known to an inspired prophet like Luria, Nathan, or Shabbatai) that presented the greatest tool for rehabilitating earlier messiahs: the idea of a perennial messianic soul. This was not an entirely novel concept, and it was long known in Islam. But because souls are made up of *numerous* "sparks" from earlier souls, according to the Lurianic system,⁹⁸ any number of individuals in each generation might have the soul-sparks of the messiah and thus be messiahs *in potentia*. One thus did not have to be descended directly from King David or from the tribes of Joseph to qualify. Hence there are no failed messiahs—there is only the failure of the messianic soul to manifest its full evolution in any given individual containing one of its sparks. This is usually conceived as a result of the failure of the generation to repent.

By associating himself and Shabbatai with failed messiahs and unfulfilled movements, then, Nathan was not undercutting his own legitimacy but enhancing it. An example of this can be found in a fragment of an apocalypse connected with the Vision of R. Abraham, called *The Greater Wisdom of Solomon*:

It is found written in the *Greater Wisdom of Solomon*, which was located by the prophet Nathan, may he be preserved, as follows: "The true redeemer is

Shabbatai Zvi . . . And the prophet Nathan wrote that [Simon] bar-Kosiba had a holy soul [identical with] that of our Master [Shabbatai], may God preserve him; and he was the king messiah. This was the reason that [the talmudic sage] Rabbi Akiba would carry his gear.⁹⁹

After this follows an abstruse kabbalistic explanation about levels of holiness that Shabbatai had achieved and bar-Kosiba had not, which caused the latter to die rather than live out his messianic destiny.¹⁰⁰ In the continuation of the passage quoted above concerning the needlessness of signs on the part of the messiah, Maimonides himself says:

For behold! Rabbi Akiba was a great sage from among the sages of the Mishnah, and he would carry the gear of the king bar-Kosiba; and he would say about him that he was the king messiah. It was believed by him and all the wise men of his age that he [bar-Kosiba] was the king messiah, until he was killed in sin. As soon as he died they understood that he wasn't.¹⁰¹

The difference is, of course, that for Maimonides the death of the pretender proved he was not the messiah; whereas Nathan, using Lurianic kabbalistic ideas, could claim that bar-Kosiba really *was* the messiah and restore him to glory.

The case of Jesus is of course the most complex and was undoubtedly the most dangerous for Nathan to attempt. Scholem gives a full account of the way Lurianic *topoi* were employed by Nathan in explaining how Jesus, whom the Talmud damned to eternal hell, could and would be redeemed through Shabbatai.¹⁰² A remarkable parallel to the Sabbateans' bid for the redemption of Jesus occurred in the eighteenth-century Hasidic movement. By that time, Shabbatai had joined Jesus in the ranks of the most evil and unsalvageable Jewish souls. In an early manuscript of the *Shivhe ha-Besht*, the hagiographical account of the life of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, a detail is recorded that was erased in the later published version. The Ba'al Shem Tov attempted to mystically "repair" the soul of Shabbatai Zvi because Shabbatai "had a spark of the messiah in him, but the Evil One ensnared him, mercy upon us."¹⁰³ In this way the next great charismatic leader in Judaism after Shabbatai attempted to do for Shabbatai what Shabbatai attempted to do for Jesus.

All the same, how much could association with past messianic figures really work to the advantage of Nathan and Shabbatai? The answers to this question have a great deal to do with Nathan's deep grounding in seventeenth-century conditions. His deliberate association with a long line of

messiahs and messianic prophets is related to the emphasis of seventeenth-century thought, in the throes of radical change, on the comfort of ancient tradition. It was one thing to be a prophet, but it was something else again to be a prophet perceived as heir to the legacy of a long line of older messianic prophets, whose messages were credible. By rehabilitating a whole lineage of equivocal figures, Nathan created a continuous chain that carried his tradition back through the Middle Ages, the period of failed messiahs, to the ancient successful messiahs and prophets of the Bible. Like the Rosicrucians or the Freemasons, then, the Sabbateans began their rise to widespread acceptance with a claim to the legacy of an ancient mystical tradition.

Another dimension of this effort, connected with the first, was the tendency among early modern Christian polemicists to ridicule the Jews for their credulity in following a whole series of false messiahs. The literature of that endeavor is spread around Christendom, but it was particularly marked in German lands.¹⁰⁴ Controversialists such as Antonius Margaritha, Johannes à Lent, and Sebastian Münster, among many others, argued that the Jews should finally profess Christianity because they had fallen prey so many times to charlatans and madmen claiming to be the messiah. What response could a Jew make to such a charge? By rehabilitating the whole line of Jewish messianic pretenders, Nathan theoretically made it possible to claim, at least among other Jews, that the Christians were wrong—these men were not impostors, but genuine potential messiahs whom God ultimately chose not to call. It is ironic but hardly unexpected that Shabbatai himself soon topped the Christians' list of false messiahs.

The case of Jesus is of course much more complex. Obviously, many Christians would have taken his "rehabilitation" by Jews as a step in the right direction. But a reevaluation of Jesus' status was occurring in the Christian world at the same time. The Protestant wish to return to primitive apostolic Christianity, in connection with humanist learning, inspired a surge of investigation about first-century Judaism. Scholars like Michael Servetus, and later John Lightfoot, Sir Isaac Newton, and numerous others, were thinking and writing about Jesus as a Jewish figure. They based this new understanding on a close reading of the Gospels, new attention to Josephus, and the discovery of the Talmud as a key source on the early Christian context.¹⁰⁵ Thus Jesus was being "rehabilitated" as a Jewish messiah by Christians at the same time Nathan was doing the same from the Jewish side. It is hard to say whether the known mediators between the Christian world and early Sabbateanism, such as former *conversos* or European merchants, were aware of the particulars of this Christian scholarship,

but the general ideas were widespread. Certainly the valuation of Jesus would have been an attractive element to certain *conversos*.

A third context for Nathan's approach to previous messiahs, especially Jesus, was the universality of Nathan's redemption scenario. As Scholem points out,

One has to realize the significance—for seventeenth-century Jewish minds—of the doctrine of an eschatological restoration of Jesus to his people and to his “holy root” in order to grasp the full extent of Nathan's boldness. . . . There is something impressive about the messianic *élan* of Nathan's refusal to acknowledge that the “lost souls” of Jewish history were irrevocably lost. This idea of Nathan's was—actually or implicitly—only part of an even more radical conception: nothing and nobody is irrevocably lost, and everything will ultimately be saved and reinstated in holiness.¹⁰⁶

The redemption of everything and everyone under the coming messiah is indeed radical in Judaism, but it is an almost precise parallel to an equally radical and heretical development in European Christian thought of the same period. The concept of universal redemption was a type of messianic scenario that began to have a significant following in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because of the combination of millenarian excitement and disintegrating ecclesiastical control over exegesis. Catholicism, Lutheranism, and especially Calvinism had very distinct ideas about who would be redeemed and resurrected at the time of the Second Coming and who would not. Unbelievers really had no hope if they refused to convert, and the prospects for the wrong sorts of Christians were even worse. Therefore, when sixteenth-century characters like Guillaume Postel proposed the concept of a *restitutio omnium* and its corollary, *concordia mundi*, it was considered sheer fantasy and madness.¹⁰⁷

By the middle of the seventeenth century, however, the idea that everything could be restored and all people could be saved had developed a considerable following. This is the philosophy at the root of Bacon's “Great Instauration,” the Hartlib circle, the Czech Brethren, and many others.¹⁰⁸ Certainly the most interesting development for our purposes was in the circle of scholars who created the *Kabbala denudata* (Sulzbach, 1679–84), a great compendium of Latinized Kabbalah treatises and essays about the meaning of Jewish mysticism. The members of this group, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Francis Mercurius von Helmont, and (to a degree) Henry More, were particularly interested in the concepts of universal redemption and restoration that they managed to extract from Lurianic Kabbalah.¹⁰⁹

Anyone familiar with the highly complex and particularistic Lurianic worldview might find this interpretation a bit baffling. But these thinkers latched on to the idea of *tikkun* and the centrality of human action at the heart of Luria's ideas about the process of redemption. For them, as for other believers in universal redemption, progress toward the world's salvation would be through human scientific pursuits inspired by God's gift of understanding at the end of time. It turns out, then, that at roughly the same time, treading completely separate paths through the thought of Rabbi Isaac Luria (a "failed" messiah), both Nathan of Gaza and a cadre of European Christian thinkers independently arrived at their expectations for universal salvation in the impending last days. Surely this cannot be a matter of complete coincidence.

Nathan of Gaza was deeply concerned with the past. He appears constantly preoccupied not only with the powerful and living legacy of Luria and Vital, but with the entire panorama of prophetic messianism in earlier times. His four earliest prophetic expressions in our possession allow us a glimpse of both his mystical proclivities and his concern with the place of himself and Shabbatai in history. Like so many other seventeenth-century figures, he was deeply absorbed by the questions of continuity and change, and he actively sought to connect his quite radical movement with familiar traditions going back through the Middle Ages into antiquity. The case of Nathan, like that of the similarly revolutionary R. Isaac Luria a century earlier, offers a window into the subtle Jewish navigation between a traditional past and the introduction of radical innovations at the cusp of the Enlightenment. Scholars have long studied such phenomena in the European world, especially among scientists and philosophers such as Nathan's contemporary co-religionist, Baruch Spinoza. Though the signs are less blatant, the Sabbateans belong to the same world.

Nathan and Shabbatai were successful in convincing an important circle of rabbis and leaders about the reality of their message. In the next stage of the movement, from fall of 1665 through summer of 1666, Nathan, Shabbatai and their early followers brought most of the Jewish world to believe that Shabbatai could be the long-awaited Jewish redeemer. At this point they lost complete control of the Sabbatean message, and Sabbatean prophecy shifted from the province of a learned elite to that of ordinary Jews. The impact of lay prophecy can hardly be underestimated; and, like Nathan's prophecy, it was deeply linked to its age.

*From Mystical Vision to
Prophetic Eruption*

It cannot be posited that the diffusion of complex mystical theories within certain cloistered circles may sufficiently explain a mass movement.

—Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 184

In December of 1665 Shabbatai Zvi took his leave of Nathan of Gaza, the principal Sabbatean prophet and architect of the movement, and set sail for Turkey to pursue his messianic mission. The two would not see each other again until after Shabbatai's apostasy. While Nathan remained in Gaza and wrote prophetically inspired Sabbatean treatises, Shabbatai traveled through the Levant playing his role to the hilt. He arrived in his home town, Izmir, and was relatively quiet for some months until a new wave of euphoria struck him, and he again began announcing his mission stridently in public. During these travels and sojourn in Izmir, over a period of several weeks, an immense outbreak of Sabbatean prophecies by ordinary Jews of all classes occurred, more or less along the path that Shabbatai and his retinue traveled.¹ The particulars of this outbreak were almost unique in Jewish history up to that time, yet there were certain precedents, and they were closely related to contemporaneous phenomena in other cultures. Within the Sabbatean movement the mass prophecies of the winter of 1665–66 served functions critical to the spread of the faith. The development of Sabbatean prophecy also owed much to Sarah, Shabbatai's third wife, and Abraham Miguel Cardoso, the second great theologian of the movement.

Sarah, Wife of the Messiah

Shabbatai Zvi stood under the marriage canopy at least five times in his life—four with women and once with a Torah scroll. The latter stunt got him

excommunicated, and his first two human marriages were annulled when he failed to consummate them. His third wife, Sarah, to whom he was married during the height of the movement, was a most unusual prophetess with a unique history. By all accounts she had been lost or kidnapped during the Chmielnicki uprisings of 1648–49, when so much of Polish Jewry was devastated, and was raised by Christians. When she approached adulthood she found her way back to the Jewish community, where she was noted for three traits: her beauty, her unchaste reputation, and her prophetic claim that she would marry the messiah. The discrepancies in the order and events of this tale probably derive partly from Sarah's own variations in the retelling.

One report about her origins comes from the anti-Sabbatean agitator R. Jacob Sasportas, who claims he had known her around 1656 when she arrived in Amsterdam:

Before [Shabbatai's] conversion she would write to her women friends promising them favors, and signing herself "The *Matrona* Queen Rebecca." I myself had been acquainted with her in the city of Amsterdam (may God preserve it!) when she arrived from the Polish expulsion about fourteen years ago, a heartless [that is, fatuous] young lady who would claim in her madness that she would wed the king messiah. Everyone laughed at her. She went to the city of Livorno, where she behaved promiscuously with everyone, as was reported to me by the sage Rabbi Joseph ha-Levi (long may he live!). And since she would make ridiculous statements [about marrying the messiah], and she was beautiful, it was conveyed to Shabbatai Zvi, who was then in Egypt with Raphael Joseph, the warden over the Alexandria harbor. [Shabbatai] revealed some of his secrets to him, including the fact that he was the king messiah and that this woman in Livorno was his [heavenly ordained] mate. He sent for her and married her, and she was his third wife.²

A second version of her story was recounted by Baruch of Arezzo.

In the land of Ashkenaz [Germany/Poland] lived a Jewish man to whom was born a woman child. While she was still small the Gentiles came, took her by force and converted her. They gave her over to a certain very wealthy Gentile woman who had but one son. When this son and the [adopted] daughter grew up she wished to marry them to each other and give them all her money, property, and belongings.

It happened one night, on the eve of the day they were to go to their

house of worship for the wedding before the city magistrate, as is their wont, that the father of the girl, who had died about two years previously, came to her in a dream. He said to her, "Woe to you and woe to your soul! What have you done?" Upon hearing her father's voice, the girl broke out in cries and weeping, saying "Father! Father! What can I do if I am in their power and they do not permit me to go where I wish?" Replied the father, "Listen to me now. Wear this leather cloak which I am giving you and go to the graveyard this night. Sit there and the Lord will be your confidence; he will not let your foot be caught." And this is what she did. Early in the morning the people of the city came to bury a certain Jew there, and the community saw the girl in the same cloak. Upon it was written in clear script, "This will be the wife of the Messiah."

They immediately took the girl and sent her from one place to the next and from one city to another, through Venice, until she was brought to Livorno. She remained there a long time until a ship came through headed for Egypt. While she was there she prophesied about the future and all her statements came true. It came to pass that when the great sage Rabbi Isaac ha-Levi Valle (long may he live!) heard these things, he too went to speak with her. He asked her to reveal to him the [spiritual] roots of his soul and other things which may not be written, and she answered him according to what he wished to know. He knew for certain that her answers were correct and true. The woman who owned the house said to the above-mentioned sage, in the presence of the girl, "I am aware of the claim made by this girl that she will be the wife of the Messiah." The girl said nothing.

Now the people of Livorno sent her to Egypt, to the hand of the great and exalted noble Rabbi Raphael Joseph, the *chelebi* in Egypt, treasurer to the king. He received her with great honor and told her that he wished to marry her to a friend of his, and he would give her much money. She declined, saying that she must go to Jerusalem where her proper and appropriate mate was to be found. Therewith he sent her to Jerusalem with a straight and reliable Jew. When they reached the city she saw our master (may he be raised up!), upon which she said to the Jew who was with her, "Do you see that sage there among the sages? He is the one destined for me."

Our master lifted his eyes and saw the girl. He said to the sages who were with him, "That girl coming toward us is my proper spouse . . ." The wedding was made, but he did not consummate it until after he placed the pure turban [of Islam] on his head. She bore him a son and a daughter, as will be told, God willing.³

Another detailed account comes from Leib ben Oyzer, the beadle of the Amsterdam Ashkenazi congregation, who was acquainted with Sarah's brother.

There was a certain rabbi, R. Meir, who practiced in Poland (I don't know the name of the community) before the Polish decrees [i.e. disasters, of 1648–49]. At the time of the decrees he lost his young daughter and knew not to where she disappeared. She had in fact been taken to a convent where she was schooled in impurity. Now it occurred to this girl,⁴ who sat many years in the nunnery, that her late father, the aforementioned R. Meir, came to her at night and said to her: "Come, daughter, you must leave this convent with me!" He grabbed her in the middle of her body and took her through the window, bringing her to the community (though I don't know which community this was) and setting her down in the cemetery. He told her, "My daughter, stand here in this cemetery. Tomorrow morning a body will be brought here for burial, upon which the people will find you and dress you and send you further along. For you must journey to Jerusalem, where there is a man named Shabbatai Zvi who will marry you—he is the messiah. Now in the holy community of Amsterdam you have a brother named Samuel who will help you." The girl was left standing in the graveyard.

The following day a great crowd came to the cemetery to bury someone, and there they found the girl standing naked with only a coat on her. They asked her who she was and she recounted the whole event, how her late father had come to her and removed her from the nuns through the window. Indeed, the signs were still discernable on her flesh: five blue finger marks from the two sides of her body [left by her father] when he took her away. Something everyone saw with their own eyes is truth; for all my life I have spoken with a great many people who saw this on the girl—the blue marks remained on her flesh always. And every place she went the women saw it on her flesh, causing universal astonishment.

Thus she traveled through all the Ashkenazi lands; in each place they passed her along, from one community to another. She was also here in Amsterdam with her brother Samuel, for which reason they called him Samuel Messiah—for Shabbatai Zvi became his brother-in-law. From here, Amsterdam, she was sent to Turkey until she arrived in Egypt, where Shabbatai Zvi came out to meet her. And he married her in Egypt. It is true, and everyone testifies, that everywhere the girl went she said that she would marry the messiah, and his name is Shabbatai Zvi; and that she had come

from a convent. Yet, what could she have known of Shabbatai Zvi? This caused a great furor, and when letters later came from Shabbatai Zvi everyone believed that [Shabbatai's messiahship] was for real, for it had been immediately before that the episode of the girl occurred, and all had seen the marks on her flesh. Shabbatai Zvi believed the story to be true and knew the girl was coming from these lands, so he came out to meet her, a truly wondrous thing.⁵

Finally, a short note containing other rumored details is found in the Hebraist Johannes Braun's book *Bigdei Kehuna, De vestitutu sacerdotum Hebraeorum* (Amsterdam, 1698).

All the world, I suppose, knows the tasteless tale which the Jews, who believe any story, still relate as true history. A few years ago, the wife of that new impostor, Sabbathi Zebi, got the coat of skins that Eve made almost six thousand years ago. Embroidered with many names of saints and patriarchs and adorned with letters of gold, it was by a stupendous miracle lowered down from heaven in a field to which she was led naked by the spirit of her father who had been a Jew while she herself only knew she was born a Christian. Whether that heavenly garment was kept undamaged in a chest by the new bride of the new messiah . . . and to what use it has been put today, I own I do not know.⁶

These stories present Sarah prophesying in several matters and contexts. The first source of her prophecy, at least in some versions, is the dream in which her deceased father appears to her, giving her instructions to return to the Jewish people. In Arezzo's account there is a specific prophetic datum, one that is not given to the girl directly, but rather appears on her coat when she is found by the Jews: Sarah is destined to marry the messiah. In Leib ben Oyzer's account the message is communicated to her directly in the dream, with the addition of the messiah's name—Shabbatai Zvi. This would make her the first person outside of Shabbatai and his immediate circle to name him as the messiah. The specificity becomes a central point in Leib's narrative: Shabbatai's messianic claims were believed in Ashkenaz *because* he was already identified as the messiah in Sarah's prophecy. His acceptance as the messiah depended entirely on prophetic revelation. Thus, while in some versions of the story the dream was a supernatural phenomenon that did not carry any prophetic message, in others it was the source of essential knowledge. .

Whether or not the dream was the source of Sarah's prophecy, all accounts agree that she told anyone who would listen that she was destined to marry the messiah. This prophecy became self-fulfilling as the rumors about Sarah reached Shabbatai, and perhaps rumors of Shabbatai's earliest messianic claims from 1648 reached Sarah. For whatever reason—indeed, her selection of Shabbatai was itself a prophetic manifestation—Sarah wedded the would-be messiah a year before he made any public claim to the title. Shabbatai's acceptability as messiah must have been enhanced by his marriage to the girl who said she would wed the messiah, even if Sarah had not earlier named him explicitly.

Sarah's prophetic powers were not limited to this matter, however. In Arezzo's tale Sarah prophesied while in Livorno, and her predictions came true. Rabbi Isaac ha-Levi Valle, attracted by this success, came to her with the express purpose of using her as an oracle. The tradition of inspired lay women acting as oracles was popular in ancient Judaism, but we have little record of it since then until it resurfaced a generation before Shabbatai's day within that hotbed of Sabbatean antecedents, the circle of Rabbi Hayyim Vital.

A number of such oracles, strongly related to Vital's messianic status, appears in Vital's *Book of Visions*.⁷ The most important of these occurrences took place when the daughter of R. Raphael Anau of Damascus, where Vital then lived, was possessed by an oracular spirit. Vital was called and found that the spirit belonged to a deceased sage who claimed to have come explicitly to teach him. Vital interrogated the spirit and reported what it said at length. After the spirit departed, the girl continued to prophesy, and Vital continued to report her words.⁸ Similar events occurred with other young women elsewhere in the *Book of Visions*. In Sarah's case, Valle pleads that she reveal the roots of his soul, a request with meaning almost exclusively in the world of Lurianic psychology. Valle asks about other matters, presumably of a secret mystical nature, and is satisfied that the answers are all true.

The willingness of important personages to heed prophecies by young women is an issue with many dimensions. On the most basic level it was apparently founded on a belief that this source of divine communication was less fallible than others. This was an era when prophecy was valued as a reliable source of knowledge amid the shifting sands of Renaissance and Baroque learning. Yet one could not be indiscriminate, for divinatory insight could have as its source either genuine inspiration from holy origins, false or mixed inspiration from satanic sources, or disingenuousness on the part of a cunning medium.⁹ Adolescent girls might be channeling messages from the

forces of evil, but a whole literature existed for discerning this, and proud male thinkers believed they could differentiate.¹⁰ As for guile, it was assumed that young women did not have the knowledge or craft to deceive educated men deliberately, so that possibility could be eliminated in their case. This, of course, was often a misjudgment. For example, Lucrecia de León, a young Spanish prophetic of Vital's period, had extensive knowledge and art, which she used in a divinatory context to manipulate men.¹¹ This is the background for Sarah's success as a prophetic, both as an oracle for Valle and as the harbinger of the messiah Shabbatai Zvi.

Sarah herself presents a panoply of images and symbols that appear to bear on her role as wife of the messiah. Many of these cluster around the poles of Christianity and sexuality. Sarah was Jewish, but she was raised in a convent. She must therefore have known a fair amount about Christianity and relatively little about Judaism. This makes her, in a sense, an *Ashkenazi conversa*—a Jew with a Christian background and undoubtedly a complicated religious identity. One of the most widely discussed “signs” of her story's authenticity was the appearance of blue hand marks where her father held her while flying her away from the convent to the graveyard. This is obviously a form of stigmata, a Christian style of ecstatic expression brought into a Jewish context.

Sasportas and most others report on Sarah's loose morals. One source actually claims Shabbatai married her on account of her reputation as a prostitute, to fulfill the prophecy of Hosea (1:2), “Take unto thee a wife of whoredoms.”¹² Other sources avoid or deny these claims and make efforts to prove her virginity. The noun used by Leib to refer to Sarah is in fact “virgin,” the unambiguous *betulah*, rather than *almah* (young woman), which gave rise to the virgin-birth doctrine. The Dutch minister Thomas Coenen, an eyewitness in Izmir, says “Whether or not she was a virgin was a matter of debate among people . . . She traveled the land with no companions but those she found along the way.”¹³ But de la Croix reports that she was accompanied on her travels by a pair of matrons—a ploy, according to Scholem, “to counteract rumors of Sarah's licentiousness by providing her with two chaperones.”¹⁴ The same could be true of Arezzo's statement that Raphael Joseph sent her to Jerusalem “with a straight and reliable Jew.” After Sarah and Shabbatai were married, they did not consummate the union until God commanded Shabbatai to do so in a prophecy. The following morning, according to Coenen, the bloodied sheet was shown to a waiting crowd in the traditional proof of Sarah's virginity.¹⁵

The images of the virgin and the prostitute are two sides of the same coin.

They reflect the polarized, archetypal male notions of female sexuality, and their ubiquitousness in literature composed by males says a great deal about how men see the world. In marrying Sarah, Shabbatai Zvi in a sense marries into Christianity—or perhaps even marries the Virgin Mary. It can hardly be an accident that de la Croix gives her name as Meriam (Mary) rather than Sarah or Rebecca.¹⁶ For Christians Mary is the archetypal virgin; but the author of *Toledoth Yeshu*, a widely read Jewish parody of Jesus' life, describes a different scenario: "In the month of Nisan, after the Passover holiday, in the middle of the night on a Saturday night, Joseph had risen to learn at the house of study. The aforementioned evil man [the lecherous neighbor, John] came in after him, found Mary, and slept with her. She thought it was her husband; and she became pregnant from him."¹⁷ Although she had been duped, Mary was nevertheless abandoned by her husband and shamed by the courts—she was treated as a whore, and her son was a *mamzer*, a bastard, who is essentially irredeemable in Jewish law. So, from a Jewish perspective, Mary, from whose model Sarah/Miriam is drawn in these accounts, might be both virgin and prostitute.

The other association given to Sarah is with Eve. Sarah is found in a field or a graveyard naked as on the day of creation, with only a coat over her—a coat that had belonged to Eve on the one hand, and that stated that its bearer was to be the wife of the messiah on the other. In the Jewish tradition, the acrostic of the Hebrew name Adam (AD" M) stands for Adam/David/Messiah, indicating the identity or relationship between these souls.¹⁸ So the spiritual descendant of Eve would indeed be destined to marry the messiah. Eve was created in the ultimate virginal state, never conceived or born out of a human union. Yet she was seduced by the snake, and the Midrash avers that this is to be taken literally. The snake, possessed at the time by Samael (Satan), plotted to kill Adam and take Eve as his mate—a scheme that was at least partially successful.¹⁹ Thus Eve too takes on both virginal and meretricious qualities, which Sarah inherited, according to the preserved accounts.

Nathan and Shabbatai had a fascination with the new world order of messianic times and its ability to reach back into history to redeem the unredeemable. Using the Lurianic concept of *tikkun*, cosmic repair, Sabbatean theology imagined the realignment of all forces in the universe to the new messianic reality. Evil and good would ultimately enter a dialectic that nullifies both, leaving only the will of the messiah to prevail.²⁰ Sarah now fits into this new paradigm. She is both prostitute and virgin, Christian and Jew. She is Eve (mother of all people), Sarah/Rebecca (mothers of all Jews),²¹

and Mary/Meriam (mother of Christ and Christianity). Her *tikkun* is ordained through her own prophecy and that of Shabbatai: she would be the wife of the messiah.

The role of Sarah, an early female Sabbatean prophet from the Ashkenazi milieu, contrasts sharply with the roles of the Sepharadi women in the household of Abraham Miguel Cardoso. Nevertheless, the question of women prophets' degree of agency remains central in this highly unusual context.²²

Abraham Miguel Cardoso

Next to Nathan, and often in competition with him, Abraham Miguel Cardoso was the most important theologian of Sabbateanism. Cardoso was a Spanish *converso*. He was born in Rio Seco, Spain, in 1626, studied medicine and scholastic theology at the University of Salamanca, and lived for a time in Madrid with his brother Isaac, who was also a physician. The two Cardosos escaped from Spain in 1648 and reverted to their ancestral Judaism in the freer lands of Western Europe. Abraham stayed for some time in Italy, where he not only continued his medical studies with great success, but also mastered much of rabbinic knowledge in a short time, a tremendous intellectual feat. He became a well-respected physician and head of a large family (he had several wives), but Cardoso's dissatisfaction with establishment rabbinic theology and accusations of heresy made against him caused him to move around a great deal. At the time of the Sabbatean outbreak he had left Livorno and Venice, spent time in Egypt (where he studied Kabbalah), and settled in Tripoli.²³

Cardoso was an astounding spiritual personality. His background in Catholic life, systematic theology, Spanish culture, and rabbinic thought all combined with religious curiosity and an extremely fertile imagination to make him one of the most interesting figures in Jewish intellectual history.²⁴ While the details of his messianic doctrine, especially after Shabbatai's conversion, have deservedly received much attention, our concern is with the more concrete prophetic events in his circle before and during the height of the Sabbatean movement in 1665–66. An excerpt from Cardoso's letter of 1668 to his brother Isaac (perhaps meant as a circular letter, in fact)²⁵ gives the flavor of the atmosphere in the Cardoso household.

You should know that nine years ago [1659], when I was living in the city of Livorno, depressed, abused and in terrible suffering, a light was revealed

in my house about fifteen times, and I could not understand its nature or significance. Afterward I came to this city [Tripoli] and in the year 5424 [1664] I was informed from the heavens that in the year 5425 [1665], a little over five years hence [from the time the light appeared], the king messiah would be revealed. Afterwards I said, “Perhaps it was a dream, and I have found a path to wisdom—for the words of the *Zohar* will have failed if the messiah is not revealed in 5425!” . . . [Here Cardoso explains his reading of the *Zohar* that proves this.] And so it was—he was revealed at the feast of Shavu’ot in the year 5425.

Furthermore, one night when my head rested on the bed and my thoughts and visions roiled, something great occurred to me which I cannot reveal or explain. In the morning I told it to my household, clarifying only that it was a dream. I explained to them that one of my [two] wives was pregnant and would bear a male child; and he would give the light of the king messiah, but then fall ill within ten days and die. The son was born, and on the very same day, the news arrived in this city that the king messiah was revealed. The son who had been born indeed died afterward.

In the month of Shevat in the year 5426 [early spring 1666] a great light began to appear in the last watch [before dawn] and was revealed to the sister of my wife Judith, [saying] that God heard my prayers and would send what was due. Now, this woman often saw amazing visions whose interpretation I alone merited to understand; and in all this there was no audible speech. I asked the blessed One that he tell me who [the messiah] would be, what his nature and powers are; and I also prayed to be given a public sign and wonder—that I be healed, and that the whole congregation come to celebrate. That same night a miracle was done for me, for I had been suffering from a very bad disease in my eyes, called cataracts, and in the morning I found myself with no cloudiness or darkness. For three days I had [a?] great vision. I asked a further sign for her [the sister-in-law] that her hand and foot be straightened,²⁶ in order that all would believe that the light was revealed from the holy side and not by a shade or false spirit, for there were those in my household who laughed at the whole matter. The hand and foot were indeed straightened. And she saw the great bright light while awake before dawn, so [bright] that she thought it was actually day. It [the spirit] did not want to complete my remedy because its intention was only to inform me of its nature, and not others.

After this it began to be revealed to my wife Judith, and I commanded her to say such-and-such, upon which it revealed itself in the form of a man. It

spoke many times, cloaked in the bright, pure light, but it said little. It is still with us today—for though it already performed its mission, when something new is to befall us it comes and reports.

Do not analyze why the visions came to these women; for this was perforce how it had to be, and when the time comes you will know this deep secret. [And?] I had wonders from heaven and earth.

In the month of Adar of the year 5426 [early spring 1666] I was told that a sign would be given in the heavens, which would be a great star as big as the full moon, in order to strengthen my faith concerning the messiah of which they came to inform me. They showed us the star that was destined to appear, and I told nobody about it, so I would see whether it would come about or not in the end. On the fifteenth day²⁷ of the Omer 5426, the fifteenth of May [1666], on Sabbath, half an hour after sunrise, the star was revealed in the east, big as the sun and distant from it by ten cubits to the right. Three Jews saw it from this household, and others from outside . . .

Another time I said before Him, may He be blessed . . . : If these things are from you to your servant without any doubt, may it be Your will that a clear answer be given me about that which I ask in my heart—that you inform me who is destined to rule. Immediately I heard that Shabbatai Zvi (may his glory be raised up!) is destined to rule.

Also, one day when I was at the table in deep thought, trying to interpret three visions I had that night, my daughter Rachel, who was three years old [came] and told me very clear things, filling in that which was in my heart and the meaning of the visions. When I asked her, “Who told you this?” she laughed and said “Do you not see, father, the man who is on your head? Look! Look! He is telling me!” With that she ran away out of the room, and afterward remembered nothing of what she had said . . .

It was also two years ago that it was told me that the king messiah was destined to wear the clothes of a *converso* [anūs], because of which the Jews would not recognize him; and in fine, that he was destined to be a *converso* like me.²⁸

The letter communicates the main features of prophecy in Cardoso’s household—the prophesying women, the man with the gift of interpretation, the emphasis on astronomical and medical portents, the deep *converso* influence, and the revelation of Shabbatai Zvi as messiah.

The frequency and variety of visions in Cardoso’s circle have no parallel. While Cardoso himself did receive revelations in visions and dreams, it ap-

pears the bulk of prophetic phenomena in his home was granted to women—his wives, daughters, and other female relatives. He was aware of this and explicitly warned the reader not to try to fathom it. At the same time, however, Cardoso remained at the center as the interpreter, and in some obscure sense the precipitator, of this spiritual activity. The only known precedent in Jewish society since antiquity was the circle of R. Hayyim Vital in Damascus. In both cases the women’s visions center on the concerns of the dominant male figure, yet he needs them to channel divine messages. Both Cardoso and Vital saw their respective female visionaries simply as conduits of messages rather than significant spiritual figures in themselves—witness the anonymity of important women in both instances. In the case of Vital, a major mystical informant is called “the daughter of R. Raphael Anau”—her identity is established only through her relationship to an important male. Cardoso also received important prophetic input from a woman, his sister-in-law, who is never named, but is identified in terms of her relationship to himself. Even when channeling a spirit, this individual does not speak—she literally is allowed no voice.²⁹

The phrasing of some passages indicates Cardoso may have seen himself in the role of the messianic harbinger, on the model of Isaiah as understood in the *Christian* tradition. This is suggested by his prophecy of the birth of his own male child, who would bear the light of the messiah. The prediction strikes a note remarkably similar to the prophecy in Isaiah 9:5: “For a child is born unto us, A son is given unto us, And the government is upon his shoulder; And his name is called Pele-joez-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-shalom.” In Jewish exegesis this is not generally taken to refer to the messiah, but Christian tradition takes it exactly that way, and this seems to be one model for Cardoso’s vision. Shabbatai Zvi himself made an almost identical announcement—that he would soon have a son who would not live—at the height of the movement in Izmir.³⁰ Both episodes may be related to the story told in the *Prophecy of the Child*, in which a son is born to a rabbi, begins speaking right out of the womb, gives some cryptic hints about the coming of the messiah, and dies. In any case Cardoso ultimately developed a whole messianic persona himself, so the prophetic role may have been only part of a larger identity-fashioning.

An interesting feature of prophecies from Cardoso’s household is the importance of astronomic portents, especially those centering on the moon. Astrological thought had a major impact on Sabbatean theology, though

here the particular interest was Shabbatai's connection to Saturn, called Shabbatai in Hebrew.³¹ The issues in this letter, at least, show Cardoso to be less concerned with learned kabbalistic astrology than with a traditional interpretation of heavenly portents. Prognostication based on celestial events was very widespread in the seventeenth century. In this lore, new stars were a fairly straightforward symbol of the birth of the messiah. The most famous example is of course that of Jesus, whose birth became known to the wise men of the east by the appearance of a new star (Matt. 2:2, 9–10). It is not farfetched at all to assume this passage influenced Cardoso.

The matter of Cardoso's Christian upbringing and *converso* background, then, is of no small consequence in his thought.³² However, it could hardly have prepared us for his claim that the messiah was destined to be a *converso* like himself! Though it is true that Cardoso was writing after the fact, when Shabbatai had already converted to Islam (though he claims to have known prophetically that this would happen long before), it is still far from an obvious thought. *Converso* messianists had a long history of placing themselves in important positions among the expected messiah's retinue and of expecting a messiah who would himself be a *converso*.³³ This must certainly be part of the context for Cardoso's unexpected statement. It may also be related to the diffusion of "Jewish Christians and Christian Jews" in the period.³⁴

A great deal more could be said about Cardoso, based both on this document and others from his earliest period, but this is enough to understand his uniqueness and significance as an early Sabbatean prophet. If we take his word for it, he would have been only the second person (after Sarah) outside Shabbatai Zvi's immediate circle to recognize Shabbatai as the future messiah. Cardoso was an important figure in Tripoli, with ties to Italy and Spain, so his influence was undoubtedly felt around the Mediterranean basin.

Early Sabbatean Revelations: Shabbatai's Visit to the Cadi and Its Aftermath

Nathan of Gaza dramatically introduced the world to Shabbatai Zvi as the messiah through a series of spectacular prophecies, but he also demanded that no sign or wonder be asked of himself or Shabbatai. This proviso might have dampened the chances of acceptability, despite Nathan's best efforts, but in the event, it was ignored.³⁵ Rather than insisting on signs and won-

ders from Nathan and Shabbatai, the people supplied their own apparent miracles. The very prophecy of Nathan was itself a divine sign. Over the autumn and winter of 1665, as Shabbatai made his way through the Levant and into Izmir, a trail of further revelatory wonders followed him. Before dealing with the famous explosion of lay possessions, it will be instructive to look at Thomas Coenen's eyewitness description of visions that followed upon Shabbatai's visit to the *cadi* in Izmir. This is clearly not an isolated phenomenon—we have evidence from elsewhere of visions and miracles occurring in connection with the messianic awakening, including sightings of the prophet Elijah³⁶—but it offers a model of the pattern.

Before he was called before the Grand Vizier and jailed, Shabbatai had two run-ins with Muslim judges, or *cadis*. The first was in Jerusalem, at the very beginning of the movement, when it appears he was denounced by opposing rabbis. At this time he was freed, apparently in exchange for a large bribe, and it was considered a miracle or sign that he was not severely punished.³⁷ But later, after his arrival in Izmir in early winter of 1666, Shabbatai confidently marched to the *cadi* of his own volition with a large group of Jews. Inside he slandered several of his detractors, who denounced him in turn. The *cadi* took bribes from both sides and sent all parties on their way, apparently not interested in the matter of this strange Jew. The believers again turned the event into a miracle, and it is indeed unexpected that a Jew approaching the *cadi* in this way would not be punished severely. Here is how Coenen describes the miraculous and visionary reverberations of this episode.

In order that the rest of the Jewish nation also be among the deluded, they spread the tale of the event according to the beliefs of the group that accompanied him [and waited outside]. This is what they said: After the king entered the house of the *cadi* and did not find him in his chamber, [Shabbatai] sat on the chair of the *cadi*. When the *cadi* entered his room, [Shabbatai] did not even rise to honor the judge. What is more, out of disdain he even stepped with his foot on the *cadi*'s cloak. And more: when this hero spoke and pronounced words with his lips, flame shot from his mouth and almost set the *cadi*'s beard afire, as well as the whole room. Finally, a pillar of fire descended between him and the *cadi*. The *cadi* was frightened, and out of alarm was forced to call to his people who were with him, "Take this man away from me, for I tremble with fear." Some say he even added, "This is no man, but an angel." The upshot of all these ridiculous tales is that if you

would ask a member of his retinue who accompanied him, “What deed did you observe him do, and what wonder did he perform that causes you to adhere [to him] with such jealousy?” he would answer, “Is not the fire he displayed a miraculous occurrence? Is it not enough of a wonder that the whole episode ended with no damage or expense?” The truth, of course, is quite the opposite.³⁸

The image of the pillar of fire is of particular interest because it has a long career. One source is in Exodus 13:21–22, where a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night led the Children of Israel in the desert; and Exodus 14:19–20, where the same pillar separated the Israelites from the pursuing Egyptians. (The image of the *cadi* expelling Shabbatai out of fear also appears to imitate the story of Moses before Pharaoh.) But there were more proximate associations as well. Pillars, especially pillars of fire, played an important role in the Lurianic messianic context.³⁹ According to Baruch of Arezzo, a pillar of fire appeared on the sail of the ship bearing Shabbatai Zvi to Istanbul, signaling its rescue from a fierce storm and miraculous instant transport to the desired port.⁴⁰ Nathan describes seeing such a pillar in his first Sabbatean prophecy, according to the Pinheiro interview. The Sabbatean Daniel Israel, nephew of Cardoso, produced pillars of fire as a prodigy to attract believers to Shabbatai at the end of the seventeenth century.⁴¹ The pillar of fire image turns up elsewhere in Sabbatean literature as well.

So far, then, we have an incident that shows how signs and wonders could be created from a mundane incident at the will of the believers. But this was just the beginning, for in the wake of Shabbatai’s visit to the *cadi* came a spate of visionary experiences.

Following the original fire [from Shabbatai’s mouth] and pillar of fire, new revelations resembling these began. On almost every street corner people told of seeing pillars of fire. One claimed to have seen a pillar of fire in the light of day, another that he saw it at night, and a third that the entire moon appeared to him as if on fire. A fourth dared to claim that he saw the heavens open up, and within them was a pillar of fire in which was embedded the image of a man whose appearance resembled that of the sage Shabbatai, with a crown on his head. A fifth saw a star plummet from the sky into the sea, and after a short while it was raised back from the sea to the heaven. Innumerable other vacuous stories circulated, all exactly as true as the first vision. In any case, it is certain that all these false visions made these unfortunate people mad at the same time. And although everything I tell here

seems strange and bizarre, don't be too surprised, for the sages privileged to sit at the side of the messiah came upon the idea of basing these events on biblical passages. They misappropriated the words of the prophet Joel, Chapter 2 [3], in giving a self-serving interpretation to passages 30–31 [3–4], “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, Blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.”⁴²

These visions certainly conform to the preponderance of astronomical and astrological messianic portents of the day. But what is most striking about this visionary outbreak is the very obvious *mimetic* quality in the diffusion of these episodes. The story of pillars of fire starts at the very highest level, describing an unwitnessed scene involving Shabbatai himself. The same vision now appears among the common people as a theme and variations: pillars of fire in the day, in the night, on the moon, in the ocean, in the sky, with Shabbatai's image in them, and so on. It is as obvious to Coenen as it is to the modern reader that all this inspiration, whether honest or feigned, is modeled on the tale of the *cadi* incident. Coenen adds an interesting dimension to our understanding of the movement's dynamics with his comment about the Sabbatean theologians' interpretation of Joel. While there is nothing profound or even unusual about this exegesis in reference to signs and portents, here it additionally indicates a sort of dialectic between elite and popular prophetic culture. The story about Shabbatai and the fire was presumably fashioned by the upper echelon of believers; it was then imitated by common people, and the resulting visionary outbreak was given theological grounding by Shabbatai's ideologues.

The Lay Sabbatean Prophets and the Possession Outbreak

The biblical passage that Coenen said the Sabbateans quoted to support the claim of visionaries, Joel 3:3–4, was preceded by another, even more relevant to the greater outbreak to come: “I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 3:1).⁴³ This was precisely what happened in Aleppo, Izmir, Portoferraio, and other Ottoman communities at the height of the Sabbatean movement. One account is given in a letter by the believer R. Raphael Supino to his former teacher, R. Jacob Sasportas, shortly before Passover in the spring of 1666.

The spirit of prophets and prophetesses has been established outside the Land [of Israel], and they are numerous as far away as the island of Porto-ferraio,⁴⁴ sixty miles distant from here. I saw with my eyes a young student in particular on Rosh Hodesh of this past Adar [around March 1666.] He recited biblical passages, and while speaking he lost use of his limbs and was almost without pulse. Then he said, “Shabbatai Zvi is our king and our savior, the righteous teacher crowned with the most high crown. He will rule over all the land and the hosts of heaven. And Nathan the prophet teaches salvation to Israel,” and many similar things. He repeated the passages of redemption and salvation, praise, and the like, with prostrations, sometimes crying and sometimes laughing. Once an evil man stood before him and beat him. And when he returned to his senses, he remembered nothing. A person may lie about all things, but with a pulse nobody can deceive.⁴⁵

A second account comes from Baruch of Arezzo and features an informative list of the prophets.

After this, prophecy came upon many men, women and children in Izmir, Constantinople, Aleppo, and elsewhere. [The common reference in most Jewish sources is to Constantinople, not Istanbul.] The same message came from all of them. They would bear witness and declare “Shabbatai Zvi is the Messiah of the God of Jacob!” Now this is the manner of the prophecy which came during those days. A deep sleep would come upon [the prophets] and they would fall upon the ground like dead people with no breath remaining in them. About a half hour later breath would come from their mouths though their lips would not move, and they would recite passages of song and passages of comfort. They would all declare, “Shabbatai Zvi is the Messiah of the God of Jacob.” Afterward they would rise back to their feet knowing not what they had said or done.

In the city of Izmir over 150 prophets prophesied; among whom were these who blasphemed [pronounced divine Names]: the wife of our master [Shabbatai; that is, Sarah], the wife of Jacob Peña, the wife of Vana, the wife of Jacob Serrano, the wife of Jacob Benveniste, the wife of Jacob Capua, the sage Daniel Finti [Pinto], Joseph ha-Levi, Solomon the son of Rabbi Daniel Valencin, Joshua Morletto, Samuel Bomuano [Bon Homme], Moses Shefami, Elijah Bonseneor, and a certain orphan. And these are the names of the prophets of Aleppo: R. Isaiah ha-Kohen, Moses Galante, Daniel Pinto, the wife of Yomtov Laniado, the wife of Rabbi Nissim Mizrahi, the

daughter of Rabbi Abraham Tammon [Simhon],⁴⁶ and others to the number of twenty prophets and prophetesses.⁴⁷

An interesting testimony to the popular prophecies, accompanied by an analysis of their place in the development of the movement, comes from Coenen, who witnessed the events in Izmir.

Matters were indeed going well for the lord [Shabbatai] here. He even let his imagination run to the possibility that he would soon enter his imagined rulership [of the Ottoman Empire]. His power daily grew over his enemies. Only this was lacking: the eyes of the world were not yet sufficiently opened to understand who and what he was. So, to inform everyone of his qualities, he needed the help of prophecies.

And indeed, to this end, a great number of prophets were revealed at that time, women and men, youths and young ladies, even children. These claimed and even demonstrated publicly that the spirit of prophecy rested on them. It is incredible how far the Jews believed in this, though nothing came out of these imagined prophecies except wild rantings and meaningless talk. In the end all anyone heard was calls of “Long live the Hakham Shabbatai Zvi, our messiah; it is already accepted in heaven and on earth; behold, he has also merited to receive the crown.” In the same manner as the miracles mentioned above [the fiery pillar], they also schemed to make these prophecies conform to the Holy Scripture. When the Jews saw the great number of people of all genders and walks of life who entered into the prophetic vocation, they said wholeheartedly—and I heard this with my own ears more than once—that the time had come for the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28–29 [Joel 3:1–2]). There God says through the mouth of the prophet, “And it shall be afterward I shall pour my spirit into all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy.”⁴⁸

Another report from a Christian contemporary speaks of a prophecy in Istanbul that is not known from other sources. The early date is noteworthy—this event purportedly occurred before Shabbatai left the Land of Israel in autumn of 1665. The details supplied suggest that the author may have been poorly informed about the movement, though his report of the prophecy seems complete. The visionary is again a woman.

While he [Shabbatai] was staying in that City [Jerusalem] it so happened that a Spinster from Galata,⁴⁹ prompted by the Demon or encouraged by the same Sabatai Levi [!], told her Parents that an Angel had revealed him-

self to her, covered in admirable Splendor, holding in his hand a flaming sword, and that he had told her that the true Messiah had come and that very soon he would appear on the shores of the Jordan . . . Among other things, people kept saying that it was an absolute truth that every day several children would fall into an ecstasy and in that state would say extraordinary things about him and affirm that he was the true Messiah, sent by God.⁵⁰

A report appearing in a Dutch broadsheet for businessmen gives a general picture of the prophetic outbreak. While the details of the possessions themselves resemble other reports, certain details to do with the Jews' expectations of the messianic future add a new dimension.

At that time [winter 1665–66] there appeared—some say by the workings of the devil—more than two hundred prophets and prophetesses upon whom there fell a mighty trembling so that they swooned. In this state they exclaimed that Shabbatai Zvi was the messiah and king of Israel who would lead his people safely to the Holy Land, and that ships of Tarshish, that is, with Dutch crews, would come to transport them. Thereafter their spirits returned unto them, but they remembered nothing of what they had spoken, much to the amazement of our Christians who see and hear this every day. Even little children of four years and less recited psalms in Hebrew.⁵¹

The report by Paul Rycaut, the English consul in Izmir, who was absent at the time of these events but had access to many eyewitnesses, gives the standard picture of the possessions, but adds several details and an analysis of causes.

But howsoever it fell out, Pennia [Samuel Peña]⁵² in short time becomes a convert, and preaches up Sabatai for the Son of God, and deliverer of the Jews: and not only he, but his whole family; his daughters prophesie, and fall into strange extasies; and not only his own house, but four hundred men and women prophesie of the growing kingdom of Sabatai, and young infants who could yet scarce stammer out a syllable to their mothers, repeat and pronounce plainly the name of Sabatai the Messiah, and Son of God. For thus far had God permitted the Devil to delude this people, that their very children were for a time possessed, and voices heard to sound from their stomachs, and intrails: those of riper years fell first into a trance, foamed at the mouth, and recounted the future prosperity, and deliverance of the Israelites, their visions of the Lyon of Judah, and the triumphs of

Sabatai, all which were certainly true, being effects of Diabolical delusions: as the Jews themselves since have confessed unto me.⁵³

The first two accounts are by Jewish Sabbateans, the last four by more or less hostile Christian witnesses to the movement. Nevertheless, certain facts and themes arise from all these accounts (constituting only part of the extant records concerning popular Sabbatean prophecy) that bear examination.

A first question might be, where and when did the prophecies take place? It appears that they started in Safed, a very fitting location, where ten prophets and ten prophetesses had appeared by early fall of 1665, according to one reliable report.⁵⁴ Aleppo was the site of the next outbreak, where twenty prophets and twenty prophetesses are reported at about the same time; a less reliable report tells of 400 prophets there, while others list different numbers.⁵⁵ (Note that although the precisely equal numbers of men and women in these reports are certainly fanciful, the Arezzo list indicates that this may indeed have been the overall balance.) There followed the great outpouring in Izmir and other locations in Turkey and Greece in winter of 1665–66. It is likely that the prophetess of Galata (in Istanbul) mentioned above was not active before Shabbatai left Jerusalem, but rather that the reporter conflated accounts, and she was actually part of the prophetic wave the following winter. It appears that very diverse locations had prophets, a point illustrated by the famous visionary of Portoferraio on Elba. This figure is notable also for the fact that he was prophesying in the spring of 1666, proving that the popular prophecies did not begin and end over the course of just a few weeks in the winter.

The identity of the prophets is telling. To begin with, most of those mentioned in the Arezzo list have Sephardic names, indicating that they were descendants of Spanish or Portuguese immigrants, not native Jews (Romaniotes). Some of them were Portuguese former *conversos* whose names can be traced from other documents, including the important Peña family.⁵⁶ In Izmir there were six women and eight men, in Aleppo three women and three men named. All the reports emphasize that numerous women and children became prophets along with the men. The lists from Arezzo do not tell us much about age, but we might surmise that the daughters of various figures mentioned were not yet married, and therefore in their teens or younger. Note that these women, like Cardoso's sister-in-law and Vital's "daughter of R. Raphael Anau," do not have independent identi-

ties—all of them, including Sarah, are identified only by the names of their husbands or fathers. The educational backgrounds of the prophets span the spectrum, from the women and children with hardly any education to important rabbis, like Daniel Pinto and Moses Galante.⁵⁷ This is one of our first indications that the easy distinction of elite versus popular culture must be reevaluated.

Little information is given about the settings in which these events took place, though we will learn more from the Peña case. It is unclear whether groups of prophets actually went into their ecstasies together or whether each person experienced it independently. We do not know of any preparations that these visionaries made to induce prophetic experiences, but severe penitential exercises were widely performed at the time, including intense fasting and self-flagellation. Something important about the form, or “genre” of the prophecies is known: they were almost all *spirit possessions*, following a standard pattern. The visionary would convulse and faint away, a short while later a voice would issue from his or her throat pronouncing the messiahship of Shabbatai, then the person would faint again and wake up remembering nothing. This places the “popular” Sabbatean prophets into a rich nexus of contemporary phenomena.

The case of the popular Sabbatean prophets is treated by Scholem with as much seriousness and detail as all other aspects of the movement, and he mentions all the relevant contemporary parallels, yet he leaves them hanging as a sort of odd appendage to the movement. Indeed, no author succeeds in integrating these events organically into the Sabbatean movement or seventeenth century life. They are conceived as parallel to contemporary prophetic phenomena in the strict sense—that is, they occur at the same time but have no connection. Yet even this interpretation fails because the contemporary parallels occur in Europe and not at all in the Ottoman Empire. The visions are labeled as a common religious or psychological phenomenon, and thus packaged, are left taped clumsily to the side of the “real” Sabbateanism, a mystical movement driven by heretical theology. But this outbreak was exceedingly important to the movement and was by its nature closely intertwined with the rest of Sabbatean history. At the same time, it was part and parcel of the contemporary Ottoman and European scene.

The relationship between these prophetic possessions and Nathan of Gaza’s Shavu’ot night possession can hardly be missed. The form of possession and the stages of the physical event are virtually identical. We have al-

ready come across the phenomenon of mimesis with reference to the visions of pillars of fire and revelations of Elijah upon Shabbatai's arrival in Izmir. We know that the pillars of fire were first described in the stories of Shabbatai's visit to the *cadi* and were subsequently picked up by ordinary Jews, who began to see such pillars everywhere, adding their own embellishments. These possession events follow precisely the same pattern. We can trace the trail of mimesis from a leading Sabbatean rabbi, Nathan of Gaza, to the revered emissaries, Daniel Pinto and Moses Galante. Galante had been explicitly invited to Gaza by Nathan,⁵⁸ where he was either an eyewitness to the Shavu'ot night event or at least spoke extensively with Nathan and many people who were there. Galante then traveled to Aleppo, whence he and Pinto, an Aleppan rabbi, had gone to see Nathan in Gaza. Both became Sabbatean prophets in September of 1665.⁵⁹ This sparked off the mass prophecies in Aleppo. The two rabbis proceeded to Izmir at around the time letters containing tales of Nathan's Shavu'ot night prophecy and other Ur-events of the movement in Palestine were arriving. Prophecy erupted in Izmir immediately afterward. We are thus not dealing with a spontaneous outbreak of visionary possessions, but a mass mimesis whose source was itself mimetic—Nathan mimed the possession of R. Joseph Karo.

Nathan, however, was not the only model of inspired possession. It is likely that stories circulated orally about R. Hayyim Vital and his female oracles in Damascus a generation earlier. The most important of these concerned the daughter of R. Raphael Anau, whose relationship with Vital began with her possession by the spirit of a dead Torah sage. Other precedents, such as the prophetesses from the *converso* circle of Inés of Herrera and María Gómez, may have been known through tales passed among Sepharadi Jews. A more local model was the Sufis, whose meditative practices were aimed at inducing inspired trance states. Perhaps even more compelling in that context are the Bektashi dervishes, who were numerous in the Ottoman Empire at this time. Their trances and possession states were achieved publicly by adepts who were by no means all scholars. In addition, belief in possession by jinn, evil spirits, survived among the popular classes in the Levant.⁶⁰ While it is doubtful that any of these sources had the impact of Nathan's explicitly Sabbatean possession, any or all of them may have influenced specific prophetic events.

A much broader possession model is well known from Europe and its colonies. Four groups in particular were known for visionary episodes similar to those found among the Sabbateans: the Quakers, the French Camisard prophets, the convulsionaries of Saint-Médard, and the Spanish *beatas*.

The parallels with the Quakers were already recognized by contemporaries. In a Polish pamphlet of 1666 Shabbatai is actually called a “Quaker Jew”; and in another pamphlet a portrait of Shabbatai appears next to one of the “Quaker Jesus,” James Nayler.⁶¹ Coenen, in trying to figure out the source of the spiritual outpouring, says: “Perhaps one should say it was surface appearances mixed with a lot of fraud. It would be easier to imagine that there was something artificial in it all, like the Quakers of England.”⁶² Certainly the physical manifestations of Quaker prophecies were similar to Sabbatean episodes.

At meetings after long silence, sometimes one, sometimes more, fell into a great and dreadful shaking and trembling in their whole bodies, and all their joynts, with such risings and swellings in their bellies and bowels, sending forth such shriekings, yellings, howlings and roarings, as not only affrighted the spectators, but caused the dogs to bark, the swine to cry, and the cattel to run about.⁶³

Such bouts were often followed by prophetic or pious pronouncements.

Another important similarity between Sabbateans and Quakers was the proclivity of women to prophesy in both movements.⁶⁴ Specific social and religious conditions in seventeenth century England made it possible for women to take on the role of prophets. Many of these conditions, including shifting gender, political, intellectual, and religious structures of authority, obtained in Jewish society as well, creating a similarly conducive atmosphere for female prophecy.⁶⁵ The most significant similarity, of course, was that these clusters of prophetic possessions both took place in the context of acute messianic movements. For both Quakers and Sabbateans, the appearance of prophecy among ordinary persons served as a confirmatory miracle, a portent of the coming End as foretold by the prophet Joel.

Various attempts have been made to trace some direct connection between the Sabbateans and Quakers. It is well known from contemporary sources that Shabbatai's father was a factor for English merchants, and one report states that these merchants were Quakers. More interesting is the known presence of Quaker missionaries in Izmir, Istanbul, and Jerusalem during 1657–58, shortly before the Sabbatean outbreak. The party of three men (all apparently from Ireland) and three women missionaries included veterans of dangerous missions to New England and Spain. They passed through Livorno at the end of July and beginning of August, where they visited the synagogue and met with Jews who appeared to be interested in their message. It is noteworthy that the Jews of Livorno were mostly former

conversos and their descendants, so many were probably raised as Catholics. From Livorno some of the missionaries traveled through Greece while others went directly to Izmir, where they met up again. One of them reported that “The sound [of our] coming is gone through this town among Turks and Jews and all.” Around May or June of 1658 the missionary Mary Fisher was granted an audience with Sultan Mehmet IV, before whom she testified with a message from God. Mehmet listened politely to her, then dismissed her kindly. The previous year another missionary, George Robinson, had succeeded in making his way through great perils to Jerusalem, where he also delivered the Quaker message.⁶⁶ Nathan of Gaza would have been a yeshiva student in Jerusalem in his teens at the time.

These Quaker missionaries carried piles of pamphlets and books everywhere they went. Traveling to Italy and Turkey, they were certainly well supplied with their most potent tool for the conversion of the Jews, a Hebrew translation of a Quaker pamphlet by Margaret Askew Fell (Fox), entitled *A Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham Among the Jews*. The Hebrew translation had been completed shortly before the trip, apparently by a Portuguese Jew of Amsterdam by the name of Barukh d’Espinosa, or Benedict Spinoza.⁶⁷ Correspondence indicates that Margaret Fell knew Mary Fisher personally, so there was a direct connection between the two Quaker prophetesses.⁶⁸ It is interesting that a son of Portuguese *conversos*, and none less than the great heretic Spinoza, may have contributed to a link between the Quakers and the Sabbatean prophets.

Despite some similarities in the physical manifestation of prophecy, and possible links between these two visionary groups, there were also important differences. Quaker prophets, both male and female, were active participants in the movement. They both experienced prophecies and spread the theology of the holy spirit. Mary Fisher walked 500 miles alone through an unknown land in order to deliver her message before the sultan. In other words, the Quaker prophets’ activity was characterized by a strong degree of *agency*, whatever the gender issues affecting women’s place in the movement. The lay Sabbatean prophets, on the other hand, although not completely devoid of agency, appear mainly passive. The divine message of Shabbatai’s messiahship came through them, but they were not propagandists. With only one or two exceptions, they did not learn or teach theology. Thus their role in the movement was quite different.

Another correspondence exists between the Sabbateans and two later French movements: the Camisard prophets, active in the Cévennes moun-

tains in France, and later in England and Western Europe during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; and the Jansenist convulsionaries at the cemetery of Saint-Médard in the 1730s.⁶⁹ Ronald A. Knox points out that while ecstasies and convulsions were a passing and ultimately unimportant phase for the Quakers, the Camisards and Saint-Médard convulsionaries “find their characteristic expression, and almost their *raison d’être*, in physical contortions which outquake the Quakers.” Was there a connection between the Huguenot Camisards and the Jansenist convulsionaries? Nothing conscious, he suggests, but “It is more credible that the two tendencies had a common origin in the belief, endemic among enthusiasts, that the end of the world was now shortly to be expected, and that an invasion of the miraculous was a suitable, perhaps an inevitable, prelude.”⁷⁰

Against the background of the Camisard uprising after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, a tremendous movement of “positive” spirit possessions took place among the Huguenots. Fascinating evidence indicates that the technique of prophecy was deliberately taught and spread. A certain M. du Serre, owner of a glass factory, gathered a group of about fifteen children of both sexes from among the local peasantry, instructed them in fasting and other preparatory techniques, then showed them how to achieve four levels of prophecy.⁷¹ Both the physical symptoms and prodigies displayed by the French prophets (as they became known in England) are strikingly similar to the Sabbatean cases. Here is a report from 1707:

J. P. was for a long time under violent agitations, and labored greatly with struggles in his throat and organs of speech, almost as if he were choking, and uttered some inarticulate sounds. Here the Spirit threw him violently upon the floor, where he lay stretched out as dead, without motion or breathing. After some time, there came a trembling motion into every part of him at once, his feet, legs, arms and shoulders; after which there appeared some breathing, which grew still louder and stronger in him.⁷²

After this the man began to utter his prophecy. Like the Sabbateans, the Camisard prophets included many women, and especially children. Again, their presumed ignorance gave feats of knowledge the quality of prodigies. “Without any education they preached an exalted piety and quoted Scripture texts aptly enough. They talked sometimes in languages they could not have known.”⁷³ The French Prophets were part of a religious movement,

and particularly in exile many did preach as well as experience possessions, so their level of agency may be considered closer to the model of early Quaker prophecy than that of most lay Sabbatean prophets.

In the Saint-Médard case, involving Jansenist Catholics, miraculous knowledge was supplemented by unnatural physical exploits—falling from great heights or touching fire without being injured, surviving “death-dealing” sword thrusts, and the like. The background of the case was the strong Jansenist rejection of the papal bull *Unigenitus*, which prompted the Abbé Étémare to attack the Church in general and begin a bout of millenarian prophesying from the Book of Revelation. The more proximate spark for the wave of convulsionary prophecies occurred when an admirer erected a monument over the grave of the saintly Jansenist, François de Pâris, and supplicants began to flock there for miraculous cures.⁷⁴ One such person, a paralyzed girl, fell into convulsions as she was cured, and not long afterward the multitudes in line at the cemetery were struck by convulsions as well.

Men [were] falling like epileptics, others swallowing pebbles, glass, and even live coals, women walking feet in air . . . You hear nothing but groaning, singing, shrieking, whistling, declaiming, prophesying, caterwauling . . . Women and girls, who played a great part in these exhibitions, excelled in capers, in somersaults, in feats of suppleness. Some of them twirled round on their feet with the lightning quickness of dervishes; others turned head over heels, or stood on their hands in such a way that their heels almost touched their shoulders . . . There were nearly a hundred, of all ages and sexes.⁷⁵

These episodes were often followed by amnesia. The symptoms of possession, while certainly more physically violent than those of the Sabbateans, share much of the same general pattern. The witness’s comparison of the twirling women with dervishes, a concept that has turned into a cliché in English, is quite significant at this time and points to a genuine affinity in the physiology of trance states. The role of women and children is of course important. Equally material for our purposes is that these events, like the Camisard possessions, occurred in the rarefied religious atmosphere of penitence and messianic excitement. In the case of the Saint-Médard convulsions, we can add the influence of proximity to dead saints. These convulsionaries were not active propagandists for Jansenism in most cases, but ordinary persons gripped by the spirit for a short time and then left the way

they had been (or perhaps cured of an illness). Nevertheless, the witnesses do state that they were heard to be “declaiming and prophesying” in their trances.

A final case for comparison with the Sabbatean prophetesses is that of Spanish spiritual women, both nuns and lay *beatas*, who prophesied in large numbers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. (Similar phenomena occurred in France, Germany, Italy and elsewhere, yet the records for Spain are particularly rich.) This is especially important because so many of the Sabbateans were of Spanish and Portuguese background. The late medieval and early modern periods were rife with apparition sightings and miraculous spiritual phenomena in Spain in general.⁷⁶ The prophetic movement of *conversas* around 1500 was part of this trend, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries numerous *conversos* continued to be found in the ranks of Iberian seers.⁷⁷ Early modern visionaries were actually carrying on a legacy from medieval Christendom,⁷⁸ but the shifting tides of ideas and authority left deep marks on them as well. The Iberian Peninsula was affected particularly deeply by these changes, and it went from being a land almost free of visionary excitement in the Middle Ages to becoming a center of such activity.⁷⁹

The possessing spirit was usually purported to be the Holy Spirit of God Himself. Mother Juana de la Cruz, an early sixteenth-century Franciscan abbess, whose patrons included Emperor Charles V, explains that

He [the Holy Spirit] asked the heavenly Father’s permission to come to speak in this voice. In which voice He did not come so concealed that they would not clearly recognize that it was He, the true God, inasmuch as He spoke in an audible voice, as when the musician plays, it is not his own voice that sounds, but the voice of the flute or trumpet by means of the breath that he blows through it. Thus, with Him supplying the breath of His mouth, she spoke through His grace and power.⁸⁰

By such explanations the visions of women were legitimated, and the suspicion of their artifice was allayed. Women like Mother Juana almost always aligned themselves with powerful male clerics, often their confessors, so as to maintain a profile of subservience while preserving agency. It was always touch and go, even with the greatest of Spanish women visionaries, whether the male protector would prove powerful enough to send his protégée into the dizzy heights of sainthood, or whether she would fall into

the hands of the Inquisition.⁸¹ Sabbatean women were mainly spared from this sort of exposure as frauds because they were in the midst of a community as enthusiastic as they were.

One *beata* of Ávila, an intense ascetic who joined the Dominicans in her youth, was known from an early age as a seer. She was believed to be in almost constant relation with God.

Trances were frequent in which she lay as one dead, with arms outstretched and stiffened in the form of a cross, and on emerging from them she edified her hearers with wondrous accounts of her heavenly experiences. Although ignorant of Scripture she was said to be equal to the most learned theologians. . . . Sometimes she asserted that Christ was with her, sometimes that she herself was Christ or that she was the bride of Christ. Often she held conversations with the Virgin in which she spoke for both.⁸²

Such visions, trances, and possessions were common throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries among Spanish spirituals, mainly women, but occasionally men as well. Some wrote pietistic tracts, a number of which became quite influential. The mechanism of these visionary states was usually the practice of *recojimiento*, abstraction of the faculties in a state of fasting, self-mortification, and isolation.⁸³ One can hardly avoid the conclusion that these practices were strongly influenced by the techniques of Sufis and perhaps kabbalists—yet they were performed by the ignorant and learned alike. The Spanish visionaries constituted yet another early modern prophetic group with physical symptoms resembling those of the Sabbatean lay prophets, extensive participation of women and children, and other common features.

Were these parallel cases of prophetic possession simply coincidental? There are cultures around the globe in which trances and possessions with almost identical symptoms are part of everyday life and have been for many centuries. Sometimes the subjects are purported to be prophets, but usually not.⁸⁴ Even within the European and Mediterranean spheres it is disingenuous to compare ecstatic Sabbatean possession symptoms only to those of prophetic groups. The enormous explosion of spirit possession cases in early modern Europe consisted mainly of *demonic* possessions.⁸⁵ Many of these were connected with witchcraft. The symptoms were almost indistinguishable from those of the prophets with whom we are dealing—performance of seemingly impossible physical and mental feats; fainting into apparent death;

xenoglossia; amnesia; even prophecy.⁸⁶ It is clear that the style of Sabbatean prophecy fits a very widespread contemporary trend with precedents in various world religions; but we have little to go on concerning any causal connection between these phenomena.

To understand the relation between Sabbatean lay prophecy and related phenomena, the theory of *universal mimesis*, as explicated by Jean-Michel Oughourlian, is extremely valuable. Oughourlian points out that imitation, or mimesis, is the most basic and essential part of human nature. It is that which allows human learning and continuity, to the point that the self is defined in terms of the mimetic relationship with others. “It is mimesis, and that alone, that makes one human, that constitutes the self, and that makes possible one’s entry into the sphere of language. This means that from the very start psychological actuality is to be found *between* individuals.”⁸⁷ Not only behaviors, but even *desires* are developed mimetically. This is the case, for example, with “adorcism,” the deliberate invocation of a possession—the opposite of exorcism.⁸⁸ While Oughourlian goes beyond the dictates of his own theory in analyzing possession, his essential concept of universal mimesis is directly applicable to Sabbatean prophecy.

The provenance of dramatic possession prophecies in Sabbateanism is perfectly clear. Nathan of Gaza is the key. Nathan learned the technique of invoking a *maggid* from R. Joseph Karo, who appears to have learned it from R. Joseph Tayatzak’s circle, which had a long secret tradition of such concepts from Spain, ultimately connected with Sufi methods. Nathan’s technique appears to have been absorbed mimetically by R. Moses Galante and R. Daniel Pinto, who traveled through Palestine to Aleppo and Izmir as Sabbatean prophets and propagandists. Shabbatai and Sarah themselves, who also knew firsthand of the Shavuo’t night possession, may have been conduits of information on this same route. Subsequently, incidents of prophetic possession spread from there to other towns in Greece and Turkey.

And yet the proclivity of ordinary Jews to express messianic agitation in this particular mode suggests an earlier awareness or even a predisposition toward it. As we know from contemporary copycat crimes, mimesis does not demand any more contact between the original actors and those imitating them than a rumor, a story, a news article. In such merchant centers as Aleppo and Izmir, filled with Europeans, it is hardly credible that news of the Quakers, various Italian and French ecstasies, and other European prophetic groups would not have reached the ears of the Jews. It is even more certain that these Sepharadi exiles and escaped *conversos*, whose culture was

Iberian through and through, knew a great deal about similar phenomena among *beatas* and nuns in Spain and Portugal. In their own environs they had the model of the Sufis and dervishes. Even if they had not seen such possessions and visions in person, they could hardly have helped knowing about them. For this reason it is probable that the model of Nathan struck a particular chord.

The mimetic model helps explain other seeming discrepancies as well. Why would Sabbatean visionaries act so much like bewitched Europeans or New Englanders who suffered from *demonic* possession? Why would the possession style, which was known from the New Testament but had been largely dormant in the medieval West, suddenly reassert itself? How were these possession cases related to the “normative” cases in other world cultures? If one understands all these relationships in terms of mimetic behavior, one no longer needs to seek holistic adoption practices or concrete human chains of influence. They can be found on occasion, to be sure; for example, Tituba and John Indian create a direct tie between African and Caribbean witchcraft and possession traditions, and the Salem outbreak. This indeed exemplifies how the age of discovery and colonialism brought such traditions into the Western conscience. Concrete causal chains like this, however, are not necessary. Once the idiom and style of possession are heard of in any venue or context, whether positive or negative, demonic or prophetic, the raw material for mimesis exists. Nor should possession be taken as an isolated category with clearly defined borders. Careful delineations between possessions, trances, ecstasies, and visions, as well as the common differentiation between learned and popular culture, lose most of their meaning in the mimetic scheme. Even the usual gender wisdom tends to break down. The traditional theories of possession fail miserably in the Sabbatean case. Indeed, any fragments or assortment of behaviors can be learned, copied, recombined, or refigured once the mimetic models are presented.⁸⁹ Two case studies of popular Sabbatean prophets will serve to support this claim and show why lay prophets were central to the success of Sabbateanism.

Prophecy in the Household of Hayyim Peña

Hayyim Peña, a wealthy merchant and former *converso* living in Izmir, was one of the most outspoken opponents of Shabbatai in the winter of 1665–66, when Shabbatai was staying in the city. He was a prominent member

of the Portuguese synagogue, which was known as the center of anti-Sabbatean agitation. On Friday night of 11 December 1665, just before sunset, following a sharp exchange between Peña and a crowd of believers, his house was attacked and he might have been stoned had not the hour of the Sabbath arrived and caused the mob to disperse. The following day, Sabbath, Shabbatai was in a manic state and still furious with Peña. He sent a message demanding Peña be expelled from his synagogue, and when this demand was rejected, Shabbatai stormed down to the place at the head of a mob of believers. He found himself locked out. Flouting numerous precepts of Jewish law, Shabbatai procured an ax and proceeded to demolish the synagogue doors until the frightened congregation allowed him in. The mob immediately sought Peña, who probably saved his life by escaping out of a window just in time. Shabbatai proceeded to lead the congregation in his own strange, improvised service, which had the paradoxical effect of improving his support in the community. In the end, even Peña became a true believer, in connection with the episode described below.⁹⁰

The most reliable account of this and the following events is provided by Coenen, the Dutch pastor who was present in Izmir at the time. The version below, by Leib ben Oyzer, the beadle of the Amsterdam Ashkenazi community, relies on Coenen and other sources to produce a report that is essentially factual, but Leib explains the significance of the events he relates with great poignance. He begins by speaking generally of the prophetic outbreak in Izmir.

This is one of the most amazing of the supernatural events that occurred in those days that caused deep belief in Shabbatai Zvi. In the year 5426 of the Creation, in the month of Tevet, it occurred all over—in Izmir, which is Smyrna, Constantinople, Adrianople and Salonika—that hundreds and thousands of prophets arose. There were women and men, youths and maidens, even young children, all of whom prophesied in Hebrew or the language of the *Zohar* [Aramaic], but none of whom knew a single letter of Hebrew, and certainly not the Zoharic language!

This is how it occurred. They would fall to the ground like one afflicted with epilepsy, foaming at the mouth and twitching, and would speak kabbalistic secrets in Hebrew on many matters. The sense of all of them, each in his unique language, was this: Shabbatai Zvi is our lord, king and messiah; his kingship is revealed in heaven and on earth and he has received the crown of kingship from heaven. One said it in one way and another in a dif-

ferent way, but the essence of their words was always that Shabbatai Zvi is messiah and king of all the earth, and he will redeem us speedily from our exile.

One heard nothing but that this man has become a prophet, and this woman has become a prophetess, and here sprang up a coterie of prophets; these prophesied thus and those prophesied thus. But the upshot of all of them was that Shabbatai is the messiah and our righteous redeemer.

So far Leib's account differs little from other descriptions. The emphasis on women and children prophesying alongside men, the physical symptoms, the miraculous knowledge, and the geographic distribution (with the addition of Adrianople)—all tally with what we already know of the outbreaks. Leib is equally clear about the banality of the prophecies' content. It is his opening sentence that will be especially important here, along with what follows below: the prophetic possession of the Peña daughters.

Now, a person is likely to think that all this was simply deception—that certain persons pretended to be prophets. But it is not so! You must believe it really was this way. Look at the case of the abovementioned Hayyim Pakhina [Peña], whom Shabbatai Zvi hounded so intensely in the synagogue with the intent of killing him, because he was an unbeliever, as I recounted. Afterwards he [Peña] had made his peace with Shabbatai Zvi and believed in him out of fear. This is what occurred, and it is the unadulterated truth.

This Hayyim Peña came home to find a great crowd of people there. He did not know what had happened to provoke all these people to congregate before the door of his house. He asked, "What is it that causes so many people to gather at the door?" The people told him that his two daughters had become prophetesses and prophesied like the other prophets. When this Hayyim entered his house he saw that his daughters shook and convulsed and uttered great things. They claimed to see the Hakham Shabbatai Zvi sitting on his throne in heaven with the crown of kingship on his head, and many other things. And when they finished speaking they called several times in sequence, "Crown! Crown!"

When the father, Hayyim Peña, saw his daughters at this, he was shocked and very taken aback. He didn't know what to say, since he was among the sharpest opponents of Shabbatai Zvi and had made peace with him only out of fear, though in his heart he did not believe in him at all. Now all this occurred, and he was stunned and depressed. When the news got out every-

one was anxious to hear the prophecies of his daughters, despite the fact that there were many prophets aside from them. For everyone wanted to determine if it was true that the daughters of Hayyim Peña were prophesying about Shabbatai Zvi, since they all knew that he was a stubborn man who opposed Shabbatai Zvi—but his daughters were now prophesying concerning Shabbatai Zvi!

This caused a big tumult in Izmir and was considered a great wonder; and it was indeed a great wonder. There were those at the time who said that Shabbatai Zvi declared a few days previously to the same Hayyim Peña that his daughters must remove their mourning clothing (which they wore for the death of their mother) and don their best clothes, which they did. When his daughters expected to prophesy they would put away their mourning garments and wear their fancy clothes, in which they would prophesy. In short, everyone saw and heard this, and it shocked and amazed them.

The girls' prophecy was not in itself unusual in the atmosphere of Jewish Izmir of that winter. The particular amazement was that these prophetesses were daughters of a great anti-Sabbatean activist. Leib continues with a reflection on the effects of the prophetic wave.

Because so many prophets and prophetesses arose in all the cities of Turkey, everyone believed wholeheartedly that the End of Days had come. For since the day the Holy Temple was destroyed prophecy was taken from the Jews; and now so many prophets appeared at once in all the holy congregations of Turkey—it could only be that the time for redemption had come.

Therefore, beloved [reader], don't be amazed that everyone believed in Shabbatai Zvi during those days and erred after him, and that only afterward it was discovered that the whole thing was emptiness and nothingness. From this episode you can see what was going on here. These were indeed miraculous occurrences and wonders, the like of which had never happened since the day the world was created. How could one not believe in him? And if you want to say they were undoubtedly false prophets, as he [Shabbatai] proved it [by his later conversion], let me ask you this: How could it have been known that their prophecy was false?

I now want to write the truth, and you can rely and rest assured that I have invented nothing from my heart. I heard these things from the great men of the world who saw it with their own eyes and heard it with their ears. I, the author, do not go about believing anything until I hear it or see it myself; or when I hear it from the mouths of men of truth who would not

utter a false word for all the wealth in the world. I must hear things from several people and find their words in agreement. [He goes on to tell the story of R. Moses Saravel, or Suriel, discussed below.]⁹¹

The wonder of Sabbatean prophecy was much more persuasive than the theory of Luria's kabbalistic influence in bringing Jews to believe. The inner circle of rabbis who learned of Nathan's prophecies (or personally witnessed them) were persuaded of their authenticity by the medium of their delivery, to the extent that they did not call for any further confirmatory wonders or miracles. In other words, they did not dispense with the need for some wonder or sign to assure them that this was real prophecy. Rather, the combination of the seemingly unfalsifiable histrionics of the events, the deeply traditional idiom in which the noetic content was delivered, Nathan's unimpeachable credentials, and the manifold parallels between Nathan and the Safed kabbalists served as enough of a sign for these early believers. A similar dynamic was at work on a mass scale with the outbreak of popular prophecy. The enormous magnitude of the outbreak, not seen since biblical times; the seemingly impossible physical and mental feats of the prophets; the close resemblance between their ecstasies and that of Nathan—these in themselves constituted a confirmatory miracle. At the same time, mass prophecy was a portent, a sign from heaven that God was about to shift the destiny of the world.

In the history of the movement, it was the prophecies that made the masses of Jews into believers. Therefore they must move in our perception from being a curious appendage, a funny bit of excitement on the sidelines of the big story, to the center of the narrative. The restoration of prophecy with Nathan, Sarah's prediction that she would marry the messiah, the great visions in the home of Cardoso, the outbreak of apparitions in Izmir, and now, the culminating train of mass prophecy—who indeed could see all this and remain aloof?

Leib gives the most detailed and explicit analysis of the way mass prophecies fostered belief in the messiahship of Shabbatai. Several other texts confirm this viewpoint. Raphael Supino, for example, writing to R. Jacob Sasportas, describes the dead faint of the Portoferraio prophet and comments "A person may lie about all things, but with a pulse nobody can deceive." In other words, the same physical symptom seen in the case of Nathan, the drop of pulse and breathing to a level undetectable by touch (a phenomenon found among yogis and entranced persons) was a confirmatory miracle. The prophet's subsequent naming of Shabbatai Zvi as the

messiah must therefore be from a divine source. Coenen states explicitly that the Jewish leaders understood these mass prophecies as the fulfillment of the passage in Joel that “Your sons and daughters shall prophesy.” These contemporary witnesses should be taken with the utmost seriousness when they tell us explicitly that the spectacle of prophecy caused belief in Shabbatai.

Knowing the mimetic and general historical background of the mass prophecies can help in understanding the proclivity toward these idioms and behaviors in the acute Sabbatean context, but it does not tell us why any given individual turned into a prophet. This is a deeply personal matter. At its center lies a personality crisis within each man or woman that makes escape from the current situation seductive enough to send that person over the edge into a new identity, regardless of the risk of possible stigma, embarrassment, or loss of self. In the modern world, usually at adolescence, persons with this amount of internal dissonance typically turn to drug use over the short or long term. Prophetic trance or possession offers a chance to literally become a different person, and often it raises someone with little social leverage (adolescents and children, poor persons, women and students) to a position, or at least perception, of power. With this said, enough is known about the Peña daughters to surmise some of the conditions surrounding their excursion into prophecy. They do not appear to be essentially different from other popular Sabbatean prophets, but more information is available about them, probably because of their unique social status in the community.

To begin with, they were presumably adolescent girls, old enough to prophesy independently of any “coaching” from their parents (which was often the situation with younger child prophets), but not yet married and gone from the house. This is a typical age at which women tended to make their way into prophesy, possession, or witch accusations. Like the daughters of Raphael Anau and the sister-in-law of Abraham Cardoso, the Peña girls remain nameless in the accounts, again indicating the authors’ belief that they had no agency—they were merely conduits of God’s prophetic message. The family, like most Jewish families in Izmir, was of Portuguese *converso* stock, though we do not know whether the father or the daughters were actually raised in the Iberian Peninsula. Still, the *converso* background suggests some familiarity with Iberian culture, including Christian influences. The household was a prominent one in the community.

Something of the personality of Hayyim Peña comes through in the docu-

ments. He was certainly tenacious in his beliefs, and tough enough to continue carrying on polemics with the Sabbateans even when that had become dangerous. From the point of view of his daughters his stance must have made things very difficult. They would have been ostracized for their father's beliefs and prevented from participating in the messianic excitement that gripped the city. (This situation actually put them in a better position to garner attention and power later, as it turned out.) The daughters were in mourning from the recent loss of their mother, so that their emotional state was already quite vulnerable. All around them people were fasting, confessing sins, and practicing intense self-flagellation. Into this electric atmosphere, as Leib and Coenen recount,⁹² came Shabbatai Zvi himself, who stood as a counterpoint to the girls' own father—a second authority or father image in conflict with the first. Shabbatai told them to remove their mourning clothes, that is, to participate in the ferment going on around them instead of grieving in isolation. When the girls were ready to prophesy, the festive clothes were donned and the mourning was put aside, along with Hayyim Peña's dominion in his home.

While nothing is said about the mother appearing in the daughters' visions, one is perforce reminded of an earlier messianic agitation among the *conversos*, around 1500, in which Inés of Herrera figured most prominently. Inés was also an adolescent who had recently lost her mother, and it was the mother herself who led Inés on her visionary travels through heaven in preparation for the messiah's arrival.⁹³

In addition to the confirmatory value of all the mass prophecies, that of the Peña girls enjoyed a special miraculous quality by appearing in the very household of Shabbatai's nemesis in Izmir. Peña himself, who had every reason to be skeptical, was nonetheless converted into a believer after watching his own daughters in ecstasy—a fact affirmed by a number of reliable sources. Mass prophecy was indeed a powerful force in gaining believers.

The Prophecies of Moses Suriel

Immediately following the case of the Peña daughters, Leib ben Oyzer tells the story of another famous prophet. He was a young rabbi from Brusa living in Istanbul, Moses Suriel (or Surviel or Saravel), who also captured much public attention. Whereas the special notice paid to the Peñas had to do with their position in the community, Suriel made an impression because

of the quality and content of his prophecies. Coenen, Leib's source for much of this information, opens with the following description.

Into this situation entered another wave of mad prophecy in Istanbul, which had calmed somewhat after he [Shabbatai] left for Izmir, beginning from the day of his incarceration or a few days after. Like the prophesying in Izmir, the intent of all the prophets was to exalt his name. One of these false prophets was Moses Serviel [Saravel; Suriel], a man honored in Istanbul even more than Nathan of Gaza; for it was said and believed of him that he had such spiritual enlightenment that it was in his power to reveal the good and evil deeds performed throughout the life of every person appearing before him, even the transgressions they had committed.⁹⁴

Leib and the French informant de la Croix add many details.

You should know that in those days a prophet arose in Constantinople by the name of R. Moses Saravel from the holy congregation of Brussa. He was a great prophet and all considered him to be a true prophet. He used to say that the soul of R. Simeon bar Yohai [purported author of the *Zohar*] was reincarnated in him, and he composed a new *Zohar* in those days, though I cannot say where this *Zohar* can be found. He could tell anyone the good and evil deeds which the person had performed that day, and could say to that person, "For this transgression you have repented but on this you have not." To each he would give penances [*ein tikkun*] for his sins, an amazing feat—people were forced to confess. This R. Moses became famous, as you must have understood, and he became even better known than Nathan the Prophet. Every night grandees and rabbis gathered by the hundreds to him. They would hear the glories of God from him and sit around him singing the songs and praises of Shabbatai Zvi, strumming lutes and playing other musical instruments. In the midst of all this R. Moses would begin to dance like a lad, and in the middle of dancing he would fall to the ground like one in the grip of epilepsy, may God preserve us. He would twitch for a moment, then begin to speak, and they would place a handkerchief over his face. He spoke clearly, in the language of R. Simeon bar Yohai—the Targumic [Aramaic] language—and reveal innumerable secrets, all in the language of the *Zohar*, though not a word of what he said is found in the *Zohar*. He also claimed to be from the soul of R. Simeon bar Yohai.⁹⁵ Two scribes sat by him, furiously copying everything he said, but the gist of all his utterances was that Shabbatai Zvi is our king messiah, the righteous re-

deemer, he and none other. He would immediately rise from the ground, wash, and bow to the *Shekhinah* [heavenly presence.] In those days this occurred every day and night—that is, in 24 hours he would fall thus and prophesy four times.

This R. Moses knew how to tell each person the roots of his soul and what soul he possesses. All of this R. Moses Saravel's prophecies were found to be reliable. And just as he could predict the future, so too could he tell what was inside someone. I spoke to great [wise] men of the world, who testified that this prophet, R. Moses, had told them the sins of their youth which they had indeed committed, and he gave them penances [*tikkun*]. Behold, these are most wondrous things in which every man must perforce believe, for there is a solid basis to it.

In short, there were more than 800 prophets and spirits in Constantinople, and in Adrianople there were also several hundred—in fact there were prophets like this everywhere. Some were extremely holy, and some were admixed with the evil husks [*kelippot*], chaff and dross from the Other Side.⁹⁶

De la Croix, the French author whose information came from an eyewitness, reports almost identical details. The people of Istanbul, he says, turned feigned possessions into new prodigies, stimulating the mass penitential movement.

They enticed a young man from Brussa to Constantinople, whose name was Moyses Suriel, a scholar of the Kabbalah. In order to cover up his game he would conjure up sham spirits, which he made to both speak and respond. They replied that to punish his disbelief, a spirit greater and more powerful than the others would take possession of his body and tell surprising things *which would bring about the conversion of many* and make a great reputation for him. The next morning, upon hearing singing and the playing of instruments he fell into a Pythonian fit. He fell to the ground foaming at his mouth, and a voice issued from him with such rapidity that the scribes could hardly follow. When his spirit returned to him after this simulated ecstasy, they showed him the text of what he had said in his trance, but he pretended not to understand his own words because of the excellence of their style and the depth of their wisdom. He began every day at the same hour, which attracted many spectators *and turned many people to Shabbatai Zvi*, for all his utterances ended with the words: “Repent ye, for our salvation is at hand, and ye shall behold Shabbatai Zvi, the Messiah, the Son of

David and our righteous redeemer, crowned on earth even as we have seen him crowned in heaven with the triple crown.” Every day his house was filled with people and he instructed them and gave them rules of virtue [Scholem: penances.] By way of confirming his message he pointed to a comet that had appeared in those days, and explained that the same sign had appeared in the sky at the time of the exodus from Egypt, and that now Jacob’s dream was fulfilled as the angels of God descended from heaven and incarnated themselves in human bodies, and the earth was full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.⁹⁷

These texts present a panoply of useful and interesting information about the manner, function, and reception of Suriel’s prophecies. To begin with, Suriel’s extremely close imitation of Nathan of Gaza is striking. Scholem points it out without further comment,⁹⁸ but this mimesis is highly significant. The authors actually compare Suriel with Nathan—they were clearly aware of the similarity. Suriel began the prophetic process with musical background (both instrumental and vocal) and dancing just as Nathan did. The physical symptoms of his prophetic possession were exactly like those of Nathan in almost every detail.⁹⁹ The similarities, however, go far beyond his possession episodes. Suriel composed a new *Zohar* under heavenly inspiration just as Nathan discovered ancient mystical treatises at the prompting of celestial informants. Suriel was possessed of an exalted mystic’s soul, that of R. Simeon bar Yohai, while Nathan’s soul apparently came from R. Isaac Luria. Suriel, like Nathan (following Luria), was able to reveal the soul-roots of others and their past sins, and to give them the appropriate penances (*tikkunim*). In short, Suriel modeled himself thoroughly on Nathan in an exemplary case of mimetic behavior.

The precise regularity of Suriel’s prophecies adds an important dimension to their quality of sacred theater. Not only were the performances public, but the audience could find out exactly when the show times were and attend accordingly. An interesting precedent for this sort of precision-timed ecstasy is the case of a sixteenth-century Spanish *beata*, Sor María of Santo Domingo. “Not only was she said to be enraptured on request but her ecstasies even marked the canonical hours: she was said to have been enraptured in the morning at the hour of prime rather than matins so as to accommodate the schedule of a certain lady.”¹⁰⁰ The theatricality of the possession, including music and dance, a sudden trance, xenoglossia, the scribes writing away furiously at his high-speed utterances, the subsequent bow to the

Shekhinah, and the amnesia—all came together to create an extremely influential communal event. De la Croix, a Christian, declares that these performances convinced many to believe in Shabbatai.

Several elements in Suriel's prophecies further tie them to the larger prophetic background. De la Croix refers to Suriel's possessions as Pythonian fits, suggesting an association not with contemporary enthusiastic movements, but with the Delphic oracle of classical antiquity.¹⁰¹ De la Croix also states that Suriel offered a prophetic interpretation of a comet that had recently appeared. He records a somewhat convoluted version of this exposition, connecting the patriarch Jacob and his dream about the ladder to heaven, the exodus from Egypt, and the comet that Suriel claimed had previously appeared during the exodus. Once again it seems that this heavenly portent was interpreted less in a kabbalistic vein than in a Jewish version of the widespread early modern method of prognostication through heavenly omens.

The matter of the “new *Zohar*” is especially significant. Many of the innovations introduced by Shabbatai and his theologians were attributed to the New Torah of the messianic age, a concept taught by the Talmud and Midrash.¹⁰² The kabbalists regarded the *Zohar* as a central part of the Torah, so the appearance of a new *Zohar* for the messianic era was not inconceivable. The Vision of Rabbi Abraham and other detailed prophecies were certainly regarded as part of this larger New Torah. Some striking parallels to this development can be found in the Christian world. The English polymath John Dee, at the end of the sixteenth century, was convinced that the natural world was deteriorating so rapidly that only the imminent messianic age could redeem it. He sought to know the divine secrets of nature through his conversations with angels, and was granted certain knowledge through “a new exegetical tool: the true cabala of nature.” Using it, Dee would be able to decipher the rapidly disintegrating Book of Nature and accurately interpret the eschatological signs embedded there.”¹⁰³ In this case, like that of the Sabbateans, a new Kabbalah was granted by heaven on the eve of the messianic age in order to help the elect know God's will. Shortly after Shabbatai's period, the German messianist Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651–1689) understood the impending apocalyptic age through his own poetic prophecies, the *Kühlsalter*. This was a rewriting of the Book of Psalms for the Fifth Monarchy in the Third Age, the time of the Second Coming. Kuhlmann believed the words and engravings of this new revelation held the secrets of the messianic era then beginning. The *Kühlsalter* itself was shot through with con-

cepts and images from Christian Kabbalah.¹⁰⁴ These examples indicate yet again how closely related were the patterns of Sabbatean prophecy to the contemporary European and Mediterranean context of messianic expectation.

The flood of Sabbatean prophecy from 1664 to 1666 is important for a number of reasons. First, at least two Sabbatean figures, Sarah and Cardoso, claimed to have known about Shabbatai's messianic status through prophecies occurring before Shavu'ot of 1665. They were both deeply influential and succeeded in convincing many contemporaries of their veracity. Second, the widespread appearance of prophecy in the Ottoman Empire in the winter of 1665–66 was above all the effect of *mimesis*, rooted mainly in the model of Nathan of Gaza, with the likely influence of various European and Ottoman precedents. The resemblances between lay and learned prophecy, prophetic possession and diabolic possessions of the period, and Sabbatean possessions with others found around the world suggest a much broader network of mimetic effects. A third conclusion is that prophecies were not a mere side effect of some more essential Sabbatean belief system based on Kabbalah. Contemporary witnesses tell us that people believed in Shabbatai largely because of these prophecies. Nathan's original prophetic revelations convinced an important group of rabbis to believe, and some of these figures brought the message of the renewal of prophecy to the wider Jewish world, where Nathan's possessions were both credited and imitated. This dynamic closely resembles patterns found among the English Quakers, the French prophets, and other millenarian groups. Prophecy, then, in all its manifestations, was right at the center of Sabbatean belief during the height of the movement.

Opponents and Observers Respond

[They are] only such Matters as are consistent with Hypocrisy, Delusion, good Guessing, subtle Scrutinies, underhand Intelligence, forelaid Contrivance and Artifice, the Warmth of a Delirious and Enthusiastic Imagination, or, at most, the Power and Activity of Evil Spirits, whose Agency, no doubt, must be necessary to the working of those Signs and Wonders, which, if it were possible, would deceive the very Elect.

—Eubulus, *Censura Temporum* 1, 4 [1708]: 116, on the French prophets¹

At the height of the fervor, most Jews either became followers or were open to the likelihood that Shabbatai was really the messiah. Among the stalwart dissenters who rejected him, by far the most outspoken was Hakham Jacob Sasportas of Hamburg. Sasportas preserved a large cache of letters written by himself and many correspondents from the height of the movement, and their authenticity is verifiable. These documents, collected as the *Zizat Novel Zvi* (Withering of the Flower of Zvi), are not only a central source on the unfolding of Sabbateanism, but also a window into the world of an unbeliever who put his life in danger to oppose Shabbatai. Sasportas' reactions to the Sabbatean prophets reveal a great deal both about his personal attitudes and about the larger state of religious turmoil in the mid-seventeenth century. An examination of the many reports on the movement appearing among European Christians serves to highlight even more of this turmoil. While the majority of surviving Christian documents were composed after Shabbatai's apostasy and are highly deprecatory, many earlier ones display neutrality and even enthusiasm for the unfolding events. In this literature it is not the Sabbatean prophets that take center stage, but rather the way developments in the East were both reported and fabricated to fit Christian prophetic ideas.

Unfortunately, few Muslim records remain dealing with Sabbatean events

as they occurred in 1665–66. Many Ottoman archives were destroyed, but even personal correspondence and preserved works from the period make only vague, scattered references to Shabbatai. The Ottomanist Jane Hathaway has described this as an apparent conspiracy of silence whose cause is unclear.² Perhaps the movement was simply not important enough to the Muslims to deserve comment. It is therefore difficult to say anything meaningful about Ottoman responses.

Hakham Jacob Sasportas and Sabbatean Prophecy

Hakham Jacob Sasportas' strong views on rabbinic authority, including his mode of reaction to Sabbateanism, probably had deep roots in his personal and family background. The Sasportas (Saporta or da Porta) family were direct descendants of a famous medieval rabbi, Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides), who had emigrated from Aragon (Spain) to North Africa at the end of the thirteenth century. The family produced a series of important rabbinic scholars, but was also deeply involved in Moroccan political affairs, serving as diplomats from at least the early sixteenth century. Jacob Sasportas was born in Oran in 1610 and was apparently a brilliant student, for he sat on the Tlemcen rabbinical court at the age of eighteen. In 1634 he was promoted to chief judge at the court, whose jurisdiction was quite extensive. In 1647 he was implicated in some sort of embezzlement scandal and jailed by the king. He managed to secure his release after a period of very trying incarceration, after which he immediately made his way to Europe. The rest of his long career was spent almost entirely in the communities of former *conversos* in Western Europe: Amsterdam, London, Hamburg, and Livorno. At the time the news of Shabbatai broke, Sasportas had recently abandoned his position as chief rabbi in London to flee the great plague of 1665, and had settled in Hamburg. Having no official position there, he was free to dedicate much of his time to Sabbatean polemics.³

Sasportas' personality has been the subject of considerable scholarly discussion. There is no doubt that he was a prickly character—he managed to fall out with almost every rabbi and communal leader he encountered, and even with his own students on more than one occasion. There is, however, a common thread throughout his acerbic writings: an extreme sensitivity regarding the honor of rabbis and the rabbinic tradition. Certainly this attitude was partly a function of his frustration at being forced to abandon a highly prestigious rabbinic post in 1647, only to begin again at the bottom of the

ladder in Europe. And the Western Sepharadi Diaspora, the communities of former *conversos*, was not a good milieu for anyone sensitive about the respect of rabbinic tradition. Numerous heretics and deniers of talmudic authority—figures like Benedict Spinoza, Juan de Prado, and Uriel da Costa—came from these communities. Furthermore, these outspoken dissenters were only the most vociferous members of a strong anti-rabbinic stream. The local rabbis routinely turned a blind eye to certain of their congregants' habitual offenses (particularly those concerning the conduct of business); they seemed as concerned with communal politics and image as they were with rabbinic learning.⁴

Sasportas came from a very traditional Jewish environment where respect for rabbinic authority was absolute, and the rabbis' scholarly level was impressive. Even given the community's high expectations, Sasportas had been a great figure there, so it had to be galling for him to come to Amsterdam, where he was subordinate to rabbis far inferior to him in talmudic prowess. The combination of his personal experiences and his frustration with the weakening of rabbinic authority in Western Europe led Sasportas to conduct one campaign after another in defense of the Oral Law (the talmudic tradition) and rabbinic authority. While the bitterness of an *ad hominem* approach permeates many of these, Sasportas was clearly sincere about his defense of Judaism against the winds of heresy. His sensitivity to these issues stands out in his attack on the Sabbateans. He was at first thrilled at the news coming from the East, but quickly discovered the heterodox character of Nathan and Shabbatai's ideas and thereafter assailed them unsparingly.⁵

Sasportas was not in Gaza to witness Nathan's Shavu'ot night possession, but Nathan's early written prophecies, the letter to Raphael Joseph and the Vision of R. Abraham (or a related document), did come into his hands. He recorded the letter to Raphael Joseph with his own marginal comments, then sent off his responses in two epistles to his former colleagues, the enthusiastic rabbis of Amsterdam. At first he appeared open to the possibility of Nathan and Shabbatai being what they claimed, but his questions quickly developed into clear opposition as he dissected the implications of Nathan's epistle. With each subsequent letter from the East and each challenging response from his colleagues or students, Sasportas unleashed a new assault. These exchanges constitute the bulk of *Zizat Novel Zvi*.

Sasportas was first and foremost interested in challenging Nathan's qualifications as a prophet. The only sufficient confirmation of the renewal of prophecy for Sasportas would be either the performance of a miracle or the

realization of the predicted events. In either case, the local rabbinic court (Bet Din) would have to testify to the truth of the occurrence—it was not enough to have letters by private individuals like the ones that had been arriving from Turkey and Palestine.

Before the Amsterdam rabbis Sasportas pretended to be a fellow believer with only a few questions. Early reports had stated that at Nathan's command, as a confirmatory miracle, great stones had fallen from the sky and destroyed a church. But Sasportas knew this was a spurious private account and that the Jerusalem rabbinate refused to confirm Nathan's prophetic status. Sasportas' flowery Hebrew style, replete with biblical and rabbinic allusions, is very difficult to translate, but his intention comes through clearly.

The man of God gave [*natan* = Nathan] signs and wonders and performed great awesome acts to confirm his prophecy, saying "If I am a man of God, let boulders fall from the sky to ruin and destroy the house of the prideful [Christians]." This sign and wonder came true, the prediction of future events that occurred at the appointed time. If so, who could see his [Nathan's] good deeds and his propriety, confirmed by the words he uttered that were validated by coming to pass, and not hearken to his messages that he spoke in the name of his God? [Who would not] receive him as a true prophet and believe completely that peace and truth will come in his day? And if his early prophecies were confirmed, my heart is gladdened and my honor rejoices that in their time his later prophecies too will be fulfilled.

However, where there is joy there must also be trembling and great fear. It is rather astonishing that the sages of the Land of Israel (may it be rebuilt speedily in our days!) have sinned against him [Nathan] and not believed in this man of God, nor trusted in the salvation of this messiah. By their failure to believe in prophecy they have become liable for the penalty of death at the hands of heaven! . . . Have these sages somehow failed to see the conditions of prophecy fulfilled by this prophet, with his signs and wonders, and to believe in the prophet of God as Scripture commands? . . . Why would they have forfeited their lives to stray from the straight path, and endangered themselves through their betrayal of him, God forbid?⁶

In another letter he is even more explicit: "If the prophecy is validated in the way the law requires, with a sign and wonder as stated in Scripture, then I will accept anything this confirmed prophet says as absolute truth."⁷ Later, when more reports of miracles had arrived, he suggests to R. Raphael Supino that Nathan was doing tricks with secret names of God, which

should not be confused with holy prophecy.⁸ Furthermore, Sasportas says this can not be true prophecy because it is taking place in Gaza, which is technically outside the borders of the Land of Israel, the only place prophecy might really occur.⁹

Nathan had demanded belief in himself and Shabbatai with no signs or wonders. The rabbis in Gaza accepted the circumstances of Nathan's prophecies and their basis in mystical tradition as sufficient wonders and signs to validate them. Common people almost immediately began spotting miracles in every direction and reporting them in circular letters. None of this would do for Sasportas, who demanded a genuine miracle approved by a major Bet Din. The fact that this should have been considered unreasonable suggests the degree to which the framework and function of rabbinic authority had indeed decayed in that age.

Another approach Sasportas took was to question the specific prophetic role Nathan had carved out for himself. For example, what was the relationship between the prophet and the messiah? In order for Shabbatai to evaluate the prophecies of Nathan, after all, Shabbatai must himself be a prophet of equal standing.

I could not believe what was being suggested, that the sages of the Land of Israel would accept [Shabbatai] as messiah, king and shoot from the trunk of Jesse, based on the statements of a prophet and not on his own statements. For as the spirit rests on the prophet who professes it, it must surely rest on *The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of his Lord*¹⁰ [i.e. the messiah, Shabbatai], *the spirit of counsel and might*¹¹ to consider this man a prophet; so there should be no difference between the two of them [in their level of prophecy]. The necessary signs [for knowing who is a prophet] are enumerated by Isaiah, a true prophet, in Chapter 11. We must examine whether they agree with [Nathan's] powers and spiritual activities.¹²

Furthermore, it is not clear to Sasportas what the role of such a prophet is at all; only Elijah is expected to come as the harbinger of the messiah. "What I said is true—the coming of the messiah requires no prophet, and after he comes it will not be any matter for amazement, for it is written 'I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh' [Joel 3:1]."¹³

Nathan's revelations, then, did not conform to the legal guidelines of Scripture and Talmud, but Sasportas also questions whether they are in accord with the *Zohar*: "Why should we believe him to be a prophet and teacher of redemption if his redemption and comforting have not yet been

fulfilled? We have also not seen the blossoms of his messiah, nor have the wonderful blooms and flowers of God sprouted in the courtyards of our Lord as they are foretold by the holy man of God, Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai [purported author of the *Zohar*] and others.”¹⁴ He further notes that the order of matters predicted by Nathan differs from that of the *Zohar*, and that Nathan misunderstood the words of the AR”I.¹⁵

Sasportas was also fond of pointing out things about which Nathan failed to prophesy, and about which his prophecy failed or could not be confirmed. For example, he discusses the wild earliest reports coming from the East according to which Jewish armies were appearing out of Africa and India and advancing on the Turks. “He has not prophesied about them and their memory has been lost from his mouth. . . . And were it not for these earlier letters this prophet would have no basis for his claim to be a true prophet *that announceth peace, the harbinger of good tidings*.”¹⁶ Note that this is another explicit testimony of a contemporary that the success of the movement was squarely based on prophetic reports.

Sasportas likewise scoffs at Nathan’s ability to identify the anonymous grave sites of holy men: “Who is there to confirm that these are their graves? And what sign has he given for it? Have those buried testified for themselves, coming back to life and rising up on their legs to confirm his claims, or anything of the sort? And even if he is correct about them and their names, this is not sufficient to confirm he is a true prophet—for more than this was claimed of the AR”I z”l and his students!”¹⁷

Sasportas especially delighted in catching Nathan feigning he had prophetic knowledge about his correspondents, which he needed to offer appropriate penances (*tikkunim*).

We were also told that Nathan of Gaza had collected a great deal of money from those who came to him; for anyone wishing a *tikkun* for their soul could purchase atonement from him. He would thus redeem the person’s soul from purgatory with a spiritual penance that would be revealed to him. I myself saw some of these penances that he sent to certain persons here and in Amsterdam at the request of Rabbi Shalom ben Joseph z”l. One of these was to Rabbi Abraham Nahar, written thus on a small note: “Abraham Nahar, because [lit. in the footsteps] of the messiah, 1,800 fasts. He is from the tribe of Judah.” . . . The abovementioned man [Nahar] told me . . . “He says that anyone who does not believe in him and his messiah has no part in the God of Israel and comes from the mixed multitude [of non-Jews

who left Egypt with the Jews]. But I am one of those who laughs at his prophecy and his messiah! How could he tell me in prophetic language that I am from the tribe of Judah, while at the same time my disbelief in him and his messiah is hidden from him? How could I believe he is a prophet?"¹⁸

Here and elsewhere Sasportas also expresses his fury at the excessive penances Nathan imposes, pointing out that these will ruin people's health and might even kill them. Nathan did offer other methods of dispensing with large numbers of fasts, but for his critic the folly of imposing so many fasts was but another demonstration that Nathan could not possibly be a genuine prophet.

Sasportas did not limit himself to deriding Nathan's prophetic credentials, however. He expressed genuine concern for the backlash he knew would come when Nathan's prophecies failed. Here he showed himself to be as well aware of earlier Jewish messiahs as Nathan, but the lesson he learned was the very opposite: failed messiahs cause Jews to lose hope and abandon their Jewish faith.

I fear it will be the cause of sin when the time comes and the determinations of this prophet are not fulfilled. He will extract himself by saying all his promises and prophecies were conditional, leaving himself open for attack; for a pledge of good *even made conditionally is not retracted*.¹⁹ Either way his prophecy does us no good; and all the more so if it falls out the way it did at the time of the AR" I z"l. For they appointed themselves, ten people, to use holy Names in order to hasten the coming of the redeemer, of whom one would be Messiah the son of Ephraim [Joseph]. but because a tiny impurity was found in one of them, he [the AR" I] z"l announced that their strength had already been sapped and they could not bring him before his time. It is likely that for some transgression, be it minor or major, this prophet will find an excuse to retract, causing the name of the messiah to be a laughing-stock, the prophet a dreamer of dreams. This would be a disgrace to our community.²⁰

Later he refers to the sixteenth-century chronicle of earlier failed messiahs in *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah* by R. Gedaliah ibn Yahya, as a cautionary tale.

The disaster that will come of this is absolutely enormous—the apostasy and endangerment of the Jewish nation! Even if most of them keep the faith, that of a minority will be ruined, as you can see in episodes of this kind found in the *Shalshet ha-Kabbalah* of ibn Yahya. Furthermore, there

will be contempt toward the Torah and its scholars, especially the sages of the Land of Israel (may it be rebuilt speedily!) who hold them [Nathan and Shabbatai] to be frauds and fight them to the finish *with enough contempt and wrath*.²¹

Further on he repeats the warning about those who are weak in faith, that “although the majority are different and can’t be suspected of this, there are times when a minority must be, for they have apostatized and abandoned the faith, as one will find in the chronicles about past messiahs.”²²

Sasportas sought to neutralize the positive significance Nathan arrogated to previous messiahs by citing them as examples of the danger to faith inherent in such movements. His insight proved frighteningly accurate.²³ Sasportas played a dangerous game here, however, by using Luria’s circle as an example of a failed messianic moment. Bringing down Luria, who already enjoyed an almost canonic status in much of the Jewish world, might invite an attack on the whole kabbalistic tradition.

The most insidious of the earlier messianic movements to endanger the Jews was of course Christianity, whose influences on Nathan Sasportas did not fail to detect. He juxtaposes Jesus with the whole line of failed messiahs: “He warms himself on the impure dust of Jesus of Nazareth by saying [the messiah] has already come. And though the majority of Jews cannot be suspected [of losing faith], a minority is susceptible, as the chronicles of the past faithfully relate concerning the many who were beguiled by those who made themselves out as messiahs.”²⁴

Sasportas is sensitive to the more subtle theological impact of Christianity as well. “My stomach turned over,” he declares, “when I saw that the prophecy of Isaiah 53 was interpreted partially as the Christians understand it.”²⁵ Later, responding to a letter written by Nathan to Shabbatai’s brothers, Sasportas reacts to Nathan’s claim that there can be no redeemer for Israel but Shabbatai: “He exposes things prophetically that do not correspond with the truth and make it fraudulent. It is really the opinion of the Christians, who interpret the same thing concerning Jesus of Nazareth. He has followed their path, the path of heresy, and has not desisted from his evil, even to the point where he calls [Shabbatai] ‘God’ just like the believers in Jesus!”²⁶ Clearly, Sasportas detected Nathan’s Christian influences and may well have understood where they were leading. When he began receiving the letters of Abraham Miguel Cardoso, whose Christian proclivities were even more marked, he became scathing over this issue.²⁷

Sasportas was a truly insightful reader of Nathan's words, his intentions, and the consequences that would follow when it all proved false. He cut through all the pseudo-proofs of Nathan's prophetic calling and pointed out numerous reasons to doubt its veracity. He counteracted Nathan's bid to rehabilitate earlier messiahs by recalling the grave danger these movements had presented to the Jewish faith. He discerned the Christian overtones in Nathan's thought and brought them to the surface. Most importantly, Sasportas understood the heretical implications in Nathan's prophecy.

One particular group of believers was also subjected to the barbs Sasportas usually saved for Nathan and Cardoso: the *converso* physicians who became enthusiastic Sabbateans. These champions of scientific rationalism in the Jewish community should have been the greatest enemies of Shabbatai. Instead, they abandoned their reason, joined the mania, and thus misled those who trusted their supposed wisdom. Sasportas explains that the physicians' usual habit had been to interpret rabbinic tales in a philosophic manner, an approach he considered close to rationalist heresy. But now their reason had fled altogether. These lines were written soon after Shabbatai's apostasy.

And in this time, the scholars of medicine were disgraced, those *who have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people lightly* [Jeremiah 8:11]: the physician Rabbi Isaac Nahar, and also [others] here in Hamburg and in Amsterdam. In their illness, a sickness of the spirit, [the people] did not seek out God, but went instead to the physicians, Rabbi Benjamin Mussaphia and his friends; and they rely also on another physician in Izmir [Cardoso], who had some knowledge in the science of astronomy with which he championed the messianism of the evil one [Shabbatai Zvi]. Thus they were all false physicians, and if their healing of bodies is anything like their healing of the souls that sin in this belief [Sabbateanism], it is no medicine, but rather *the way of the Amorite*.²⁸ This is an amazing thing! They have abandoned their philosophizing ways entirely and arrived at the path of ruined faith. They never did so before in essential matters of belief.²⁹ They [now] fancy their own wisdom, twisting the words of the Sages into positions they never intended, all in order to harmonize these matters with their philosophical logic. All about which they were wise before they have now become foolish . . . Therefore I say, what have they to do with Godly wisdom? Let science be enough for them, if they know the prescriptions and can discern the [humoric] balances of ill people and their qualities; and if they

have help from heaven and are not impeded by the sins of the sick that can disguise the true cause of the malady or recovery. Let them now learn not to consider themselves too wise in the future.³⁰

At the start of the movement Sasportas had already disparaged the erudite Amsterdam physician and rabbi, Benjamin Mussaphia, who had become a staunch believer in Shabbatai.

The philosophizing of this physician did him no good in this situation. He cast it off and did not use it at all, to the point that he was sunk deep in this faith. Where, then, are his deductions and inferences? Where has his sharp discernment gone? And where is his proclivity for explaining things in natural [i.e. scientific] terms? Right away, without any revelation of a sign or wonder, he took upon himself the yoke of [Shabbatai's] kingship as if it was the yoke of heavenly kingship . . . Most of the populace emulated him, for they relied on his discernment.³¹

Sasportas saw the failure of Jewish leaders, especially of intellectuals like Mussaphia and Cardoso who had both scientific and rabbinic training, as a central factor in the acceptance of unsubstantiated Sabbatean prophecy.

It will hardly come as a surprise that Sasportas was no more kindly disposed toward the masses of Sabbatean prophets who appeared in the winter of 1665–66 than he was to Nathan. As a keen observer and analyst, Sasportas was able to spot the mimetic nature of these events as well as their power to convert Jews to the faith. In his introduction he states: “What supported their faith was the appearance in Izmir of many women and children who spoke as if a demon had hold of them. They would say by way of prophecy that ‘Shabbatai Zvi is our master, he is our king,’ etc. This was a miracle and wonder in the eyes of the masses, though not in the view of anyone to whom God gave discernment and wisdom, for it was the spirit that spoke in Nathan of Gaza that spoke through them.”³² Similarly, reporting events in Izmir after his initial exchanges with the Amsterdam rabbis, he says, “At the same time, that very day, letters came from Izmir stating that two hundred prophets and prophetesses, women, men and children, had arisen there. They all prophesied similarly, according to the prophecy of Nathan, that Shabbatai Zvi is the Messiah son of David.”³³ Sasportas, then, saw the connection in style and content.

The North African rabbi's withering vituperation explodes full force in response to these events.

Why should I accept all that has been reported? Because of the words of ridiculous prophecies, or epileptic fits, or a frightening evil spirit? Who gathered spirit outside the bounds of truth, to prophesy with the spirit of Navoth,³⁴ if not the women, who are bereft of all the conditions necessary for prophecy? Neither wisdom nor strength nor wealth exist in an impure land.³⁵ They kneel, bending and falling, to speak the name of their master as messiah. *They bring forth their children*;³⁶ boys and girls are provoked to see in riddles the breaches of the city of David and its piercing, that will be rebuilt [?] by their king. Their birth pangs are exerted—so many prophets who see his image imprinted in the seventh heaven, with all the hosts of heaven standing and declaring, “Make way and give kingship, glory and honor to your lord!”

Their sons dream dreams which mix much foolishness together with straw, chaff and waste. Should they be weighed with the weight of prophets? *And what hath the straw to do with the wheat?*³⁷ They have left the boundaries of truth and not repented it; *they prophesied, but they did so no more*;³⁸ *they are wholly consumed by terrors, as a dream when one awaketh*.³⁹ If they are prophets and the word of God is in their mouths, and if prophecy *built a house in the Land of Shinar*⁴⁰ to rest upon those whose intelligence is unprepared for it, the hasty preparation is good enough for their aptitude [?]. According to them, *Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth [or proveth]*⁴¹ to be a prophet, without differentiating between those who are worthy and those who are not worthy and prepared. It is as those fools think, *Who has set the wild ass free*⁴² from this prophecy?

Is it already possible that the most empty of men will lie down in his bed, and in the morning will find himself a prophet by the decree of God? It is worth as much as the prophecy of a frog or a donkey!⁴³ Heaven forbid that we should think a donkey and its master eat from the same trough.⁴⁴ And *The bands of the wild ass*,⁴⁵ the wild donkey, these ignoramuses and their wives who are imprisoned and tied up, entangled in the roughness of their materiality—*Who hath loosed them?*⁴⁶ Who decided to open the way, *a small wicket*⁴⁷ to enter the chambers of the king of the universe, in a place where there stand towering giants of wisdom and fear of sin? Are we short of wise, righteous and accomplished men from Izmir? Rabbi Hayyim Benveniste,

who is raised and commended by the king messiah, is worthy of appointment to the Sanhedrin! And Rabbi Solomon Algazi is girded with his sword—his books we have here testify to his great wisdom. There are others whose wisdom is of this caliber in the capital, Constantinople, whose qualities are worthy of having God’s presence rest upon them. But the spirit of holiness and prophecy distances itself from the male side to approach the female side and the femininity of the great deep, unless we say there is some hidden meaning in this. The failure of their prophecies to be realized will prove it, and let that suffice; *Thou hast made light of all them that err from Thy statutes, for their deceit is vain.*⁴⁸

This and numerous other passages in the *Zizat Novel Zvi* each focus on different details for the particular recipient of the letter Sasportas is composing. In this section he begins by lampooning the histrionics of the prophets but moves quickly to his main theme: their absolute lack of qualifications for the prophetic calling. His critique centers on the failure of the prophets to conform to the authority of *halakhah* and rabbinic tradition.⁴⁹ Sasportas is well aware that these events were regarded as confirmatory miracles and portents by the masses of believing Jews. He uses extensive skeptical arguments against both the likelihood of the prophecies being genuine, and their significance or reliability even if they are. He pointedly employs language from Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* here, and repeatedly quotes or paraphrases biblical and rabbinic passages with which the Sabbatean prophets appear to conflict. For example, he cites the talmudic stipulation that prophets be persons with wisdom, strength, and wealth, all of which he obviously feels are lacking in women and children. He also refers back to the dictum that prophecy can only happen in the Land of Israel.

Sasportas suggests that these prophetic possessions are either epilepsy (and not just *like* epilepsy), or the effects of an evil spirit. The juxtaposition of a medical explanation and a spiritual explanation for possession (something Sasportas does on several occasions) is typical of early modern responses to “Enthusiasm”; it appears, for example, in the passage at the beginning of this chapter, written against the French Prophets. This conjunction illustrates the integration of what many today would call medieval and modern ideas. Sasportas’ approach closely resembles the reactions in Christian Europe, especially in England, to the seventeenth-century outbreak of prophetic sects in which women and children played a prominent role.

Groups like the Quakers, Ranters, and Familiasts were attacked for creating an alternative system of religious authority in which education and rationalism were less esteemed than inspiration.

A pivotal target for his attack is the centrality of ignorant persons, women, and children in the prophetic outbreak. True to his deep belief in the special status of rabbis and traditional authority structure, Sasportas heaps scorn upon these visionaries who have done nothing to prepare themselves spiritually for the experience. Here Maimonides is central, for in the chapter Sasportas paraphrases, the Egyptian rabbi states the following:

However, we shall find many texts, some of them scriptural and some of them dicta of the Sages, all of which maintain this fundamental principle that God turns whom He wills, whenever He wills it, into a prophet—but only someone perfect and superior to the utmost degree. But with regard to one of the ignorant among the common people, this is not possible according to us—I mean, that He should turn one of them into a prophet—except as it is possible that He should turn an ass or a frog into a prophet. It is our fundamental principle that there must be training and perfection, where upon the possibility arises to which the power of the deity becomes attached.⁵⁰

Thus Sasportas can prove that according to the greatest Jewish legal authority, these lowly people could not possibly be God’s chosen conduits. He also questions the prophets’ bona fides on the basis of the *Zohar* and mystical traditions. In many places he goes back to the theme of women and the kabbalistic symbolism of the feminine aspect of God as the dangerous, dark side.⁵¹

The implication, which he then makes explicit, is that if God *were* to bring prophecy back, even in Turkey, it could not possibly be to these ignorant persons when great Torah scholars live in the same vicinity. Why would God pass up famous rabbis like Hayyim Benveniste (though he was a staunch Sabbatean!) or Solomon Algazi and grant His inspiration instead to women and children who had done nothing—*could* have done nothing—to prepare themselves for a divine communication? Attitudes like this place Sasportas squarely in the context of the contemporary debate over religious Enthusiasm; but before examining that issue, it will be useful to return for a moment to his accusations that the Sabbateans were heretics.

Gershom Scholem characterized the Sabbatean movement as “mystical heresy,” pointing out the heterodox ways Kabbalah was used to justify

Shabbatai's conversion to Islam and invest it with meaning. "Sabbatianism as a mystical heresy dates from the moment when the apostasy of Sabbatai Zevi, which was an entirely unforeseen occurrence, opened a gap between the two spheres in the drama of Redemption, the inner one of the soul and that of history."⁵² But Sasportas had grasped the heresy inherent in Sabbateanism as soon as he examined the first prophetic writings coming from the East in 1665. A contemporary observer, he was concerned with the heresy of Sabbatean *prophecy* and *behavior*, and very little with the heretical Kabbalah that absorbed Scholem. Moreover, Sasportas largely lost interest in Sabbateanism and its heresy after Shabbatai's conversion, whereas for Scholem Sabbatean heresy was just beginning at that point. The Sabbatean heresy as perceived by Sasportas had far more connection with the larger changes occurring in contemporary patterns of religious authority.

The prophecies of Nathan of Gaza sounded the first alarms in Sasportas' well-developed deviation detector. Neither the Kabbalah of Sabbatean prophecy nor the "strange actions" of Shabbatai himself first tripped the sensors, but rather Nathan's claims that the messiah had the right and power to judge all men. Such bizarre claims for the powers of the messiah appear to overturn the authority of tradition and make a New Torah, a phrase Sasportas uses repeatedly.

All the more so, [Nathan cannot] uproot the belief in reward and punishment, something not even imaginable for the power of God himself, *for all His ways are justice*,⁵³ and give [Shabbatai] the absolute power of determining guilt or innocence, even declaring the culpable blameless; it is inconceivable. *Be astonished, O ye heavens*, [at this] *and be horribly afraid, be ye exceedingly amazed*.⁵⁴ If one would tell me that somebody who questions the truthfulness of his prophecy *after* he has offered signs and wonders is lost from the land of the living, he would have spoken well. But *before* confirming it, his messiah has already acquired the power to declare innocence and guilt, etc.! Who would agree with him, and who would listen to him in this matter, to accept a new Torah, God forbid, to abandon my [!] faith, or to discard even one iota of it, before it is confirmed? Quite the opposite—it is impossible for us, and this is not the portion of Jacob! I will not be like the women and fools with their unsound intellects.⁵⁵

The degree to which rabbinic authority decides the issue for Sasportas stands out here again. Nathan cannot be a true prophet if he is overturning essential principles of Jewish faith, such as the doctrine of reward and punish-

ment. His claim to prophecy must in any case be confirmed with a miracle, according to the sages. It is women and fools, those lowest on Sasportas' scale of judiciousness, who are taken in by the news. He conveniently ignores the many rabbis involved, and when confronted with their participation directly, attacks their credentials.

The particular heresy Sasportas detects in the prophecy of Nathan and the other rabbinic prophets is its threat to the Oral Law, that is, the talmudic and rabbinic tradition. Dozens of times throughout the *Zizat Novel Zvi* he emphasizes practices and beliefs taught by these new prophets that threaten or contradict the oral tradition. He is particularly enraged when the unbelievers are labeled "heretics" by the believers, an irony that absolutely infuriates him. The particular subject of his rage here is an Ashkenazi prophet named R. Mattathias Bloch.

Tell me now: the denier [heretic] to whom you referred when you said "Anyone who denies this, it is as if he denied the Torah of our teacher Moses of blessed memory"—it is clear that *you and your friends* are the deniers! For anyone who derides the words of the talmudic Sages is called a heretic. The proof of it is that you made a holiday and happy celebration on the fast of Tisha be-Av. . . . You jettisoned it so readily at the behest of that evil-spirited man, a self-promoter with the spirit of falsehood in his mouth, named Mattathias Bloch, as you wrote in your letter.⁵⁶ For from the time he joined you he declared himself a prophet, and how quickly you believed in him, with no sign or wonder for his prophecy! He permitted you that which is forbidden, and you listened to him because "the power of permissiveness is preferable."⁵⁷ This shows that the belief in the Oral Torah is not ingrained in your hearts.⁵⁸

Sasportas was equally attuned to the heretical threat of mass prophecies, which by their very nature contradicted the prescriptions of rabbinic tradition. "They have not noticed the contempt toward heaven they display by upholding the prophecies of boys and girls, and those madmen or epileptics or victims of delirium who are shaken by convulsions and writhings, with no other sign or wonder, in addition to their appearance outside the Land of Israel."⁵⁹

Sasportas' emphasis on the threat posed by Sabbatean prophecy and activity to the rabbinic tradition places these polemics in a clear framework within Jewish society as well. He had always been sensitive to his own position as scion of a famous rabbinic family, and his sensitivity increased when

he was forced to leave for Western Europe, where respect for talmudic expertise was relatively little valued. His years in Amsterdam, London, Livorno, and Hamburg brought him in constant contact with the population of former *conversos* who were generally apathetic, at times even hostile, to rabbinic authority. Having in many cases become accustomed to a crypto-Judaism based only on the written Torah and acquired a deep hatred for the religious authority of the Inquisition, many former *conversos* had trouble adjusting to life in hierarchical Jewish communities when they escaped northward. It was typically the Oral Law, the numerous details of legal practice developed in the Talmud, and the authority of the local rabbinate in personal and communal affairs that did not sit well with these immigrants. The problem was expressed from the margins of the community, among intellectual rebels, and even in certain ways at the core of leadership in the Western Sepharadi Diaspora.⁶⁰

Sasportas' responsa, *Ohel Ya'akov* (Amsterdam, 1737), and his other writings show he confronted many challenges to rabbinic tradition when he was a communal rabbi. It is not surprising, then, that his sensitivity to these matters was piqued by the letters of Nathan. To Sasportas the Sabbatean movement was simply another chapter in the continuing onslaught against the talmudic tradition and rabbinic authority. These heretical aspects of the movement had to be exposed and attacked just as much as the rationalist critiques of Barukh Spinoza or Uriel da Costa. It is hard to say whether Sasportas saw Sabbatean heresy as the *result* of pernicious forces that had already taken root, or whether he felt it was a *new* challenge to rabbinic authority. The scholar, writing with hindsight, must conclude that it was the former—that the weakened state of rabbinic authority caused by humanism, the *converso* influx, the Kabbalah, and other factors had made the Jewish world susceptible to the radical ideas and prophecies of the Sabbateans. Scholem's position, that Sabbatean heresy was an outcome of Shabbatai's conversion and developed its influence thereafter, must be reevaluated in this light. So too must his already controversial contention that Sabbatean heresy was a major cause of Jewish Enlightenment and Reform.⁶¹

Was Sasportas correct? Did Sabbatean prophecy or the ideas stemming from it represent a radically subversive attitude toward the rabbinic tradition and authority even before Shabbatai's apostasy? Studies in the thought of Shabbatai, Nathan of Gaza, and Abraham Miguel Cardoso strongly suggest that the answer is affirmative. These men were clearly in the throes of a Jewish version of the skeptical crisis in religion.⁶²

Religious skepticism was an important expression of the larger skeptical movement that gripped Europe in the seventeenth century. It came not only in the form to which we are generally accustomed, rationalist skepticism, but also in the form of prophecy and prophetic biblical interpretation. For example, Isaac la Peyrère was at the same time a pioneer of biblical criticism, challenging the traditional authorship and historical accuracy of Scripture, and a millenarian prognosticator who predicted an impending messianic revolution involving the king of France and the *conversos*.⁶³ La Peyrère was not alone in this combination of skepticism and prophetic interests. Sir Isaac Newton, for example, was also both a biblical critic and a millenarian. He believed the scriptural text had been largely corrupted, but that the prophetic messages came through intact and referred to events in his own time. For Newton, the process of biblical criticism and that of prophetic interpretation both occurred organically in the course of interrogating scriptural texts.⁶⁴

Thinkers of this type believed that one could not rely on the canonical texts and traditions of contemporary churches, so they had to be approached skeptically. How, then, could one achieve certainty? Rather than take the rationalist skeptics' path and reject religious or spiritual values altogether, these thinkers turned toward inspiration within themselves. The immanence of this source of knowledge gave them the conviction of its absolute truth.⁶⁵ Their critics referred to this trend as "Enthusiasm."⁶⁶ Inspiration could take various forms. In Newton's case, for example, it was his belief that in his time, at the End of Days, God had given certain persons (including himself, of course) the scientific tools for analyzing Scripture and interpreting it infallibly. Others, like the Quakers and French Prophets, experienced prophetic ecstasies whose authenticity was manifest to them because it did not come from any outside source. The search for certainty might also lead toward the study of the *prisca sapientia*, the wisdom of the ancients, or toward scientific empiricism. Certitude is a subjective matter, and it could take radically different forms for different people.⁶⁷

In the Jewish tradition, which has little dogma and much emphasis on practice, Shabbatai's forbidden "strange actions" and the attempt to justify them on kabbalistic grounds might constitute a sort of heresy in themselves. If one overlooks the rationalizations offered by Shabbatai for his deviations on the philosophical as well as the practical levels, it becomes clear that he was quite ambivalent toward the rabbinic tradition. In presenting his vaunted "Secret of Faith," he claimed that the rabbis had failed over many centuries to understand Jewish faith and texts correctly (especially the

Zohar). Shabbatai's ability to fathom what generations of great rabbis failed to see was attributed to the wisdom of the messiah and his age; but the Sabbateans thought each age had its potential messiah. Why couldn't one of the previous figures have understood what Shabbatai did? Ultimately, it is clear that Shabbatai had a certain contempt for the rabbinic tradition in Kabbalah as well as in theology. He believed his unique personal knowledge of God allowed him to override rabbinic law and tradition.⁶⁸

Nathan of Gaza too struggled with Jewish faith. His skepticism about traditional knowledge, like Shabbatai's, led to a deeply personal kabbalistic conception of God and salvation, one that left the door open to a heresy of immanence.

Nathan of Gaza, however, chose to fashion a heterodox, fideistic model of faith. At the center of its religious and redemptive experience stood a human figure: the messianic persona of Shabbatai Zvi. Faith in the messiah Shabbatai Zvi came to rescue the Jewish religion from the deep crisis into which it had been driven in the seventeenth century, and from its probable atrophy. The believer was saved from his skepticism by means of his faith in the concrete messiah—a faith in which there could be no doubt or boundary. Shabbatai Zvi redeemed the believer from his skepticism, and in the merit of his belief Shabbatai granted him spiritual salvation. In other words, religious certainty was acquired through the power of faith in Shabbatai Zvi.⁶⁹

The intense scholarly and ascetic yeshiva student, then, far from being a stalwart of traditional Jewish authority and values, turns out to have been quite the opposite. His devotions led him to conclude that Jews had long misunderstood God and had therefore been worshiping some false conception of Him. Nathan relied on his own self-induced prophecy to lead him to a solution. The only hope was for Jews to put their complete and total faith into a human messiah, Shabbatai Zvi—such a faith would banish doubt and bring certainty. This is why Nathan invested prodigious efforts in articulating his theory of faith. The relationship of this doctrine to Christianity is obvious.⁷⁰

The skeptical proclivities of the other great Sabbatean prophet, Abraham Miguel Cardoso, are even more marked. Cardoso was himself a university-educated former *converso*, and thus had the intellectual background and tools common to skeptics like Spinoza, da Costa, and de Prado. Cardoso's thought was deeply affected by his Iberian training; the impact of philosoph-

ical ideas was evident throughout his career.⁷¹ An autobiographical passage tells us something of the religious struggles Cardoso underwent earlier in life. He had doubts already in Spain, and was later deeply shaken by an event he witnessed after his reversion to Judaism in Italy.

At that time, a certain monk in the city of Venice preached a sermon in which he challenged all the scholars of the yeshiva to tell him the true nature of the God of Israel. He propounded the problem of the Shekhinah. Is She a created being? he asked. (For such was the opinion of Sa'adia Gaon in his *Book of Beliefs* in the section treating of the divine unity, of ibn Migash and of Maimonides in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, and of many other scholars, all of one accord.) He opened all these books and read aloud from them before us and before the Christians.

But he went on: Nahmanides rejects this view, in his commentary on the Torah portion *Vayiggash*, affirming that the Shekhinah is not a created being but rather a Creator. Countless arguments have been offered, by countless scholars, proving that *this* was the real teaching of Moses.

Well then! It must be that we do not truly know God. . . . [The monk] went on to sharpen this dilemma, with arguments solidly grounded in the teachings of our ancient sages. And there was no one, among all the rabbis of Venice, who could answer him.

My head swirled. I found myself once again caught in a web of doubts. To escape them, to find for myself some kind of spiritual equilibrium, I set out for Egypt. There I spent five years. I wanted medicine to heal this wound of mine, and I sought it from Rabbi Hayyim Kohen, from Rabbi Iskandrani, and from Rabbi Samuel Vital, the son of Rabbi Hayyim Vital. There, too, I found the aged pietist Rabbi Benjamin ha-Levi.

To put the matter in a nutshell: *nothing they could tell me gave me any relief whatever.*⁷²

Clearly, Cardoso too was suffering from a crisis of faith before the advent of Shabbatai Zvi. The source of the problem was apparently Cardoso's discomfort with the Jewish willingness to entertain various ideas about metaphysical matters, as long as they do not affect practice. For a long time he sought a solution using textual and philosophical tools, but it was his own prophecy that ultimately gave him some succor. Cardoso, then, like Nathan of Gaza, did not enter the Sabbatean moment as a traditional, faithful, rabbinic Jew. Both men had sought out the Kabbalah, with its many ambiguities about

the nature of God, but ultimately followed the mystical path beyond the kabbalistic tradition to the font of prophetic certainty.

Islam appears never to have undergone a crisis of faith or identity under the impact of mystics who challenged established authority. Such persons and movements did exist, to be sure, but they were purged or restructured in ways that prevented any real rupture in the powerful fabric of the Muslim religious hierarchy. Judaism and Christianity, on the other hand, were deeply affected by such phenomena, especially in the seventeenth century. The escalation of religious enthusiasm in that age threatened religious institutions every bit as much as rationalist heterodoxy, and there was a tremendous backlash against it. It had become clear that individual prophecy not mediated by institutional authority had the potential to attract mass followings and overthrow the domination of traditional authority. Powerful forces therefore attempted to silence enthusiastic movements like the Collegiants, the Quakers, the French Prophets, the Familiasts, and even the alchemists. The arguments against them were of various types: the enthusiasts were heretics, they were mad, they suffered from melancholy, they were epileptics, or they were possessed by evil spirits.⁷³

Sasportas used the same types of arguments, and for the same reasons. It is hard to know how much of the turmoil in the Christian world had come to his attention, though he had spent considerable time in such centers of enthusiast controversy as London and Amsterdam. Although no direct evidence proves that he was aware of the parallel situation in Europe, Sasportas was very clearly engaged in the same enterprise as Christian opponents of Enthusiasm. He had set himself up as the arch-defender of rabbinic tradition, in which role he had previously battled rationalist skeptics, heterodox rabbis, and overly powerful lay leaders. Now he correctly diagnosed the heretical and anti-authoritarian implications of Sabbatean prophecies. He heaped scorn on the lay prophets, whom he dismissed as sufferers from delusion, disease, or diabolical mischief. But the heavy artillery of his ire was reserved for Nathan and Cardoso, whom he rightly considered renegades, endangering the entire authority of traditional Jewish belief and practice with their radical prophecies.

After all this, it seems astounding to find that Sasportas, the arch anti-Enthusiast, was himself a prophet! But he reports the following story.

And I, the lowliest of my family,⁷⁴ when the letters came that [Shabbatai] had set out for Constantinople, after appropriate preparation and at the

proper time, asked in a dream. And they called to me in my dream, *They are driven forth from the midst [of men]*,⁷⁵ Men shall clap their hands at him [and shall hiss him out of his place];⁷⁶ *They cry after them as after a thief*.⁷⁷ Then I knew that the end of these sinning, deceitful men, this messiah and this prophet [Shabbatai Zvi and Nathan], was to be expulsion from the midst of Israel, from the inheritance of God. There is no repair [*tikkun*] for them but in death or apostasy. This occurred on 22 Tevet. . . . Immediately the next day I revealed the matter to a few people, and it leaked out to the believers. They took it as a joke, but I said to them: Who says that your prophecy will be fulfilled, and not that of me and my friends?. . . . And when it comes around, we will know who the true prophet is!⁷⁸

The method Sasportas used, a dream question (*she'elat halom*) is well known in Jewish literature, and the form of the answers—biblical passages whose meaning must be clear to the questioner—is typical.⁷⁹ But does his prophetic experience contradict his own principles here?

The answer is that what Sasportas wanted to combat was not prophecy of all types, but *unauthorized* prophecy by persons he considered unqualified. It turns out that many philosophers and scientists usually associated with the anti-enthusiastic camp were themselves not free of a prophetic bent. René Descartes, a major figure in the development of modern skepticism, was involved with the Rosicrucians early in his career. Henry More, another anti-Enthusiast, had deep connections with the Christian Kabbalah, and Nicolas Fatio de Duillier, a favorite student of Sir Isaac Newton, was an adherent of the French prophets.⁸⁰ Although each case must be considered in its own context, the common feeling was that latter-day prophecy exists, but can only be considered true if the prophet meets both institutional and personal qualifications determined by the establishment leadership. The question, then, is not about the phenomenon in general, but about the *authority* to be believed. The best example of this can be found in Spain, where the many *alumbrados* and *beatas* who presented themselves as prophets in the sixteenth century could equally well be taken as genuine holy spirituals or as dangerous impostors, depending mainly on how powerful their sponsors were.⁸¹

Sasportas had thus correctly identified potential heresy in Sabbatean prophecy and thrown his immense learning into the battle against it. Many of his concerns were similar to those of contemporary European opponents of religious Enthusiasm. His own practice of prophetic techniques indicates

that, like many of them, he did not disbelieve in contemporary prophecy altogether, but opposed its practice by those he considered unqualified. The battle with the Sabbateans was one installment of his larger defense of rabbinic authority in an increasingly skeptical Jewish world.

Early Christian Reports on Sabbateanism and the Place of Prophecy

European Christian observers, in at least two cases, actually used the term “Enthusiasts” to refer to the Sabbatean prophets, placing them in a familiar context for their readers.⁸² Indeed, fitting the breaking news concerning messianic events in the East into recognized traditions was a primary theme in the early European reports. This is an excellent instance of the way early modern Jewish messianism and Christian millenarianism interacted, so it is useful to look at early Christian descriptions of the Sabbatean outbreak against the background of Jewish-Christian dialogue about messianism.⁸³ The reports played a number of specific roles: they placed Shabbatai and his prophets into the Christian framework of beliefs about the Jews’ function in the Second Coming and the fall of the Ottomans; they served as a portent for the Jews, who watched how the Christians reacted at the same time as the Christians looked at the Jews; and in some cases, particularly that of Peter Serrarius, the Dutch millenarian, the reports actually turned some Christians into believers of a sort.

The earliest Christian reports were sensational letters and stories in the popular press, essentially devoid of real facts about Shabbatai and Nathan. Rather, they fit into a common seventeenth-century convention of reporting the reappearance of the militant Lost Tribes of Israel. After a certain point, in the fall of 1665, the serious business newspapers had picked up the story as well and reported at length on it. The tone of these reports, often from Christian correspondents in the Ottoman Empire, soon became hostile to the Sabbateans. It goes without saying that after Shabbatai’s apostasy the strident temper was greatly amplified. Personal correspondence from various Europeans, not all of them known chiliasts, often reflects a more ambivalent attitude, however. Over the next few years a number of eyewitnesses and observers recorded their experiences with the Sabbateans in works that would constitute some of the best sources on the movement, including the anonymous French *Relation*, the chronicle of the Dutch minister Thomas Coenen, the erratic but useful account by de la Croix, and the often republished discussion by the English diplomat Paul Ricaut.

The earliest reports of Sabbatean activity are so inaccurate and fanciful that it is often unclear whether they were really connected with Shabbatai and Nathan at all. Throughout the mid-seventeenth century Europe was inundated with news of the reappearance of the Lost Tribes and the return of the Jews. These appeared in press reports,⁸⁴ pamphlets, broadsides, and books.⁸⁵ A flurry of such tales materialized around 1650, in connection with a fictitious meeting of Jewish elders purportedly occurring in Hungary.⁸⁶ Another cluster appeared with the messianic excitement surrounding Menasseh ben Israel and his news of the Lost Tribes in America. Other reports surfaced sporadically at various moments. For example, in 1647 a pamphlet appeared in London called *Doomes-Day: or, The great Day of the Lords Iudgement, proved by Scripture . . . With the gathering together of the Jews in great Bodies under Josias Catzius (in Illyria, Bithinia, and Cappadocia) for the conquering of the Holy Land*. On the second page the author explains that “the Jewes, according to certaine and credible information, are at this time assembling themselves together into one body from out of all countreys, whereinto they have been driven with a resolution to regain the holy land once more out of the hand of Ottoman.” Such tales appeared all over Western Europe in mid-century. Thus it is by no means inconceivable that with the approach of 1666, a year prophetically understood by many Christians and Jews to be a messianic watershed, reports spontaneously appeared with or without the input of rumors about Shabbatai.

The text of one of these early reports can give us the flavor of how European Christians couched the Sabbatean moment. Even more enlightening is the discussion, included in the pamphlet, between the author of the letter from Belgium and his informant, the Dutch millenarian Peter Serrarius.⁸⁷ The pamphlet, as it appeared in London, bears the title, “The Restauration of the Jews: Or, A true Relation of Their Progress and Proceedings in order to the regaining of their Ancient Kingdom Being of the Substance of several LETTERS Viz. From ANTWERP, LEGORN, FLORENCE, etc. Published by R.R. London, Printed by A. Maxwell, in the year 1665.”⁸⁸ The pamphlet continues with “The Restauration of the Jews, Etc. A Letter from Antwerp, October 10–20 1665.”

Sir,

Since the last I received from you, I have had occasion to speak with one that is well informed of the proceedings of the Israelites; he tells me, That they appear in great numbers in several places: The first mentioned appears

in Arabia, and are said to possess themselves in Meka; but at the first, the Jews that lived amongst the Turks would not acknowledge them to be their Brethren, but said they were a sort of Arabs, that lived in the Mountainous parts of Arabia the Happy [Yemen]; but now they say they are Israelites, and sent by the ten Tribes to be their fore-runners. Another Company are said to move from the East and North East Countrey of Asia. The third and great Company in the Desert Goth of Morocco, which is as I conceive, not far from Cape de Ver, but more within the Land; they consist of 8000 Companies, the least of them contain 100 men, and some of them 1000. A Jew that lives in these parts came unto Saley in Barbary in August last, and taking the Book of the Law into his hand, did swear by it, That he came lately from them, and had spoken with them, and saw them in that number aforementioned, and that they are armed with Swords, Spears and Bows, and no fire-Arms are found amongst them: This Jew did not understand the Language ordinarily spoken by them, but many of them spoke Hebrew, in which he discoursed with them; their Leader is said to be a holy man, understandeth all languages, and worketh Miracles.

This is by a Jew living in Saly, to his brother in Holland, and upon that Report which he received from the fore-mentioned person who had been with them, and is credited with those of his Nation, because he is a Rabby, and of much reputation among them: They had many incounters with people in the way, and have taken some places, none being able to withstand them; they put all to the sword except Jews, they rest upon the Sabbath day, and no fire is seen in their Camp; their women and children stay, somewhere behind them, and follow at a distance, none are seen with them; they dig in a Mountain in the Desert for a Trumpet, and say, that when they find it, all Nations will be gathered to them upon the sound thereof.⁸⁹

This account appears to have little or nothing to do with Shabbatai Zvi and Nathan of Gaza, unless one wants to suppose the image of the Tribes' leader is somehow derived from Shabbatai. The autumn 1665 date, however, suggests that it could be tied to Shabbatai. In either case it is easy to see that matters have been adjusted to European expectations. The Jews of the Lost Tribes are as different from European Jews as day from night. They do not speak the same languages, they are warlike, numerous, and capable of working miracles. Indeed, the Ottoman Jews themselves are unable to recognize these interlopers as Jews at all in the beginning. They bear all the

marks of biblical Hebrews who have not undergone the humiliation or religious dilution of the Exile—they slaughter their enemies wholesale, but they do not fight on the Sabbath, nor do they bear modern firearms. Their camp is formed in biblical military style. None can stand before them. They search in the ground for a golden trumpet (surely the same as was used in the desert by Moses), which, when blown, will call all peoples to the Jews.

All this fits admirably with the seventeenth-century millenarian mindset. The European Jews were viewed as a relic, too beleaguered and compromised to play their proper role in the Second Coming, so an appropriately fierce bunch of alternative Jews is found *ex machina* for the part. While this particular report does not emphasize the destruction visited on gentiles and their institutions, other reports in this group speak of both Muslim mosques and Catholic or Orthodox churches sinking spontaneously into the earth. The slaughter of all gentiles encountered by the Tribes is palatable to Europeans, of course, since these victims are either Muslims or Orthodox Christians. The Hebrews were thus fulfilling their proper role in the drama by destroying or capturing the Ottoman Empire and returning to their own land, where they would presumably be converted ultimately to Christianity.

The apparent willingness of many Muslims and Christians to look on quietly, or even express belief in the movement was considered a sign and wonder in itself. Ottoman Muslims left little evidence of their belief or disbelief in Shabbatai Zvi. Christians, however, did leave some enlightening sources. One of the most famous documents of this type is a letter from Henry Oldenburg, secretary of the Royal Society and a major scientific figure of the period, to Spinoza, asking the latter's opinion of the news coming in from the East in December of 1665.

As for politics, there is a rumor everywhere here concerning the return of the Jews, who have been dispersed for more than two thousand years, to their native country. Only a few here believe in this, yet there are many hoping for it.⁹⁰ May it please you to communicate to a friend what you have heard regarding this matter, and what you think of it. As for me, I cannot believe this report until it is confirmed by reliable people from the city of Constantinople, which it touches most of all. If the tidings prove to be true, it is sure to bring about an upheaval of everything in the world.⁹¹

Spinoza's reply is unknown, but this is certainly enough to convey a feel for the variety of European attitudes. Some, like Oldenburg, were guardedly positive about the idea of a Jewish messiah's arrival, while others were skept-

tical or inimical. Some scholars have claimed that the response in Christian Europe was mainly negative and hostile, but this reading often comes from a failure to differentiate between reactions at the first arrival of the news, those at the height of the movement, and those from after Shabbatai's apostasy.⁹²

A believing Christian could hardly be a fully believing Sabbatean, because there is no place in any contemporary Christian theology for a second full-fledged messiah who is not Jesus. The understanding of what it might mean for a Christian to be a believer must be evaluated according to the temper of the period. Just as there was a spectrum of belief and disbelief among Jews, the same was true among Christians. The continuation of the pamphlet quoted above contains a singularly enlightening discussion between the Flemish author of the letter summarized, and his informant, Peter Serrarius. This dialogue is particularly valuable because it shows how *two* European Christian views about the news developed in relationship to each other, and how the whole Sabbatean episode was understood to fit into the prophetically imbued apocalyptic future.

The objections raised by the letter-writer imply that because the scenario described does not fit Protestant expectations in all its particulars, it must be untrue, or at least improperly reported. The first section seems to suggest that Serrarius, in communicating the news, had embellished it with his own chiliastic interpretation. Serrarius responds with a beautifully explicit exposition on why and how one should think positively of these developments.

In dispute with my informer, I raised many objections concerning the places from whence they came, as also the manner of their coming, viz. Being in spirit of Judaism, in great power, led by a holy man, doing great miracles, and all things answering the description of the Messias, they may expect that it would be a testimony that the Christians and other people and Nations should be gathered in to the Jews, and not the Jews into Christ.

To the first he said, Those in Arabia are of the same company with them that appear south of Morocco, and all of them seem to lye hid in the Inland Countrey of Africa, extending themselves over the vast Tract of Land comprehending all between the two Tropicks, almost as far as the cape of Good Hope.

He thinketh them to be the white people of whom the Inhabitants of Guiny use to speak, who will not mix themselves with their neighbours, nor have any other commerce with them; they in the night bring Merchan-

dises to set places, and in exchange to have salt and other necessaries as they want, but will be seen by none; such as went from them, are one half of their way to Meka; he thinketh they possessed the Arabians Country, and went out of Africa into America, by the strait of the entry into the Red-Sea; but whether by Boat or Miracle, he knows not; those in the Gost seemed to have lived in the North part of Asia, towards the strait of Amion, from whence Manasses ben Israel came; though many of them past into America; also he saith, that they having suffered great afflictions for the sins of their fathers, are now come out from Idolatry to live according to the purity and perfection of the Law, and shall from thence be raised to the knowledge of Christ; he understandeth this of a Nation to be born in a day, and their Conversion to be their birth: He thinketh, that the Law being true and good, and given them by God, it is suitable to his proceedings amongst them, to give a testimony of his presence with those who have not heard of a Christ, neither are of the posterity of those that slew him, but of the ten Tribes formerly carried into Captivity, and that they are thereby prepared to receive the Gospel; he further saith, That all the Churches called by the name of Christians, are full of vanity, and that they must be purified to whom Christ will teach his truth, and from them shall run a stream overflowing the whole world, whereby the Powers of the world shall be overthrown, and the right of Christ in and with his Saints shall then begin to be established; he pitches much upon 1666 and confidently believes, That all the Prophets of the Old and New Testament Centers in it, it being the time that shall give beginning to that holy and Spiritual Kingdome. I have spoken largely of this, believing you will be willing to hear what is related, and upon what grounds.⁹³

Serrarius first deals with the author's question of the Tribes' location. Apparently the author was concerned with the appearance of these armies in disparate locations; but it might also be surmised that he wondered about the lost Jews of America, whose discovery was so heavily touted a decade earlier. This leads Serrarius to discourse on the geography of the newly appeared armies and that of the dispersed tribes, in Africa and Asia. He conjectures that these Jews might be identical with the legendary white inhabitants of Guinea, the subjects of one of many tales that were rife in Europe soon after the Age of Discovery. It was this group, suggests Serrarius, that was now moving through Arabia toward Mecca, the holiest site of Islam, which they would of course destroy upon arrival. At the same time, Ser-

rarius suggests the route by which some of these same Jews could have arrived in America, thus bridging the gap and bringing these lost Jews into the picture as well. Another group of the Tribes had been living in northern Asia, but he suggests that many of these may also have made their way, or been miraculously delivered, to America. Their route, he says, follows the itinerary of Menasseh ben Israel (who had been a personal friend of Serrarius). He appears at this point to be confusing Menasseh with Menasseh's informant, Antonio de Montezinos, though this too would present certain difficulties in the geography. In any case, Serrarius had imagined a complete, concrete scenario into which the new discoveries in Asia and Africa and the tribal legends of Menasseh ben Israel came together to explain the latest reports.

The next question Serrarius addresses is much stickier. The author has asked him what the role of these armies of Jews can be in the process of the Second Coming, if they are conquering their enemies, performing miracles, and heading for Jerusalem in apparent fulfillment of *Jewish* rather than *Christian* messianic expectations. In response Serrarius presents a two-stage scheme for the religious evolution of the Lost Tribes: from idolatry to proper Judaism (which they have recently accomplished), and soon thereafter, from proper Judaism to Christianity. The only way to make sense of this seemingly idiosyncratic viewpoint is by looking at the previous two decades of Serrarius' millenarian activities involving the Jews.

Serrarius worked with a group of highly influential fellow millenarians, including Jan Amos Comenius, Samuel Hartlib, Adam Boreel, and John Dury, on a program intended to bring Jews and Christians together in a peaceful, highly active attempt to initiate the messianic age. Menasseh ben Israel, Judah Leon Templo, and the Abendana brothers were recruited from the Jewish side, and two main projects were planned. One was a translation of the Mishnah (the essence of the Oral Law) into European languages, and the other was the institution of a college of Jewish studies in which Jews and Christians could study Judaism together for mutual gain. Serrarius and his friends were clear about their objectives in all this. They wanted to make Christianity less offensive to Jews, to lead Christians to understand Judaism, and (most important for our purposes) to bring Jews to understand their own Judaism properly, upon which they would be able to see that Christianity fulfills Judaism rather than conflicts with it.⁹⁴

Why did Serrarius and his group think Jews needed education in their own religion? And if they did, why did the millenarians not focus on the Bi-

ble, as did most Christian polemicists, rather than the Oral Law, which had been regarded for centuries as the main culprit in Jewish intractability? Much of the answer must have to do with the sort of Jews with whom they had contact. The Jewish communities of Amsterdam and London were made up of Portuguese former *conversos* whose knowledge of the Bible was often good, but who had little or no background in the Oral Law before their escape from Iberian soil. Menasseh and others invested much energy educating these people in their own faith and texts. Menasseh, an expert in the Oral Law, was the kind of Jew to whom Serrarius and his friends could relate—a messianist who saw how close Judaism and Christianity could be on questions of the End Times. Apparently, then, knowledge of the Oral Law might bring Jews and Christians together. It might help convince *conversos* who had suffered terribly under Catholicism that pure Judaism—that is, informed talmudic Judaism—was not far removed from pure Christianity—that is, millenarian Protestantism. Furthermore, as contemporary Hebraists explained, the Mishnah was a document from the period and place of Jesus’ life, and it taught Judaism as it was practiced by the earliest Christians. Indeed, Jesus had taught that it was proper for those born Jewish to keep the Law.

This context clarifies Serrarius’ meaning when he wrote “that they having suffered great afflictions for the sins of their fathers, are now come out from Idolatry to live according to the purity and perfection of the Law, and shall from thence be raised to the knowledge of Christ.” The Lost Tribes suffered the same lack of background as the *conversos*: they had not been educated in the Oral Law. In the case of the *conversos* it was because of Catholic shortsightedness in Spain and Portugal, but in the case of the Tribes, it was because they had become separated from the rest of the Jewish people before the redaction of the Oral Law in the Mishnah and Talmud. They too would become educated in the Judaism of the Apostolic age after rejoining the main body of Jews. This shortfall in their education will also be their great strength, for they never returned to the Land of Israel and were thus not among those Jews in the Second Temple era who took the guilt of Jesus’ betrayal upon themselves. Serrarius imagined that it would now be a simple matter for these “pure” Jews to learn proper Judaism, which would lead them to accept proper Christianity. This is how Serrarius fit the newly appeared armies of the Lost Tribes into his own millenarian program.

Serrarius next turns to the larger picture of where these events fit in the

millenarian scenario of the immediate future. All Christians must now recognize that they have been corrupted by vanity. It is this that has prevented them from recognizing the truth from wherever it might appear. The stream of God's truth will now sweep away this vanity, overthrowing all temporal powers so that Jesus can return and rule again with his saints. The expectation of this cataclysmic apocalypse was "the opinion of Millenarians all over Europe, especially the Fifth Monarchy Men in England, who demanded the return of Jews to England for these reasons."⁹⁵ The author emphasizes Serrarius' certainty, based on calculations from the prophets and the New Testament, that 1666 was destined to be the year that the kingdom of Heaven would be restored.

It is clear, then, that Serrarius was ready for news like that of Shabbatai Zvi at exactly this moment. He was not a believer in Shabbatai in the way the Jews were, but because of his flexibility in imagining the pre-millenarian scenario, he could absolutely understand these events as part of the process of the Second Coming. In his vision of the future, the Jews would converge on Jerusalem, rout the Muslims, usurp all temporal power in the region, and thereby serve as the foot soldiers of Christ, saving Christians from the exigencies of these wars. Afterward, of course, they would convert and serve the real messiah, Jesus.

This conception, which becomes clearer in Serrarius' subsequent responses to the better informed Sabbatean reports, constitutes the apogee of Christian Sabbateanism, for Serrarius was the central figure in the distribution of Sabbatean propaganda in the non-Jewish world. To many Jews the positive attitude of Serrarius and others like him was one of the wonders proving the truth of Shabbatai's mission. Hence European millenarianism becomes directly relevant to the success of the movement among Jews.

The author of the letter, who took Serrarius seriously, is an example of the type of neutral or wait-and-see response common among Christians until Shabbatai's apostasy. Numerous documents concerning Christian attitudes toward Sabbateanism could be fruitfully examined here, but this example clearly illustrates some of the ways in which the prophetic understandings of European Christian millenarians and Jewish messianists interacted in 1665, effecting a profound influence on the Sabbatean movement.

One more case of a Christian Sabbatean deserves attention to complete the picture. This is the amazing case of a Christian girl in Izmir who became a Sabbatean prophetess. Though the case properly belongs to the previous

chapter because of the symptoms and circumstances involved, it is part of the Christian world's response to Sabbatean news. This may or may not have been an isolated case.

The spirit of prophecy even rested upon a Christian girl. Afterward she claimed to remember nothing of what she had spoken. Nevertheless, a priest came with the intention of exorcizing the spirit from her. She responded to him with derisive words in front of the Turks and Christians, saying the Master Shabbatai Zvi is the messiah. Later she regretted saying anything, but she felt a great fire in her heart.⁹⁶

The girl continued to confirm her belief in Shabbatai as the messiah before a priest and other people after her ecstasy had worn off, suggesting that she was an actual believer, not just someone caught up in a spiritual moment. Izmir was a busy port city with many Christian merchants from all over Europe in residence, but it also had a native population of Orthodox Christians. It is not known which branch of Christianity the girl professed, and without knowing more about her (her age, for example) it is hard to know what to make of the incident. What is certain is that this was a real Christian who became a Sabbataean—one who came to believe in Shabbatai not as an anti-christ or a precursor of Jesus, but as the real messiah. This strange episode serves as an appropriate indication of how deeply prophetic events and reports had penetrated the atmosphere within months of Nathan of Gaza's first prophecy.

The responses to Sabbatean prophecy among both Jews and Christians, then, fit larger patterns in the period. Not only the willingness to believe, but also the opposition to the prophets displayed by Hakham Sasportas bear a striking resemblance to other models in the seventeenth century. Sasportas' opposition to Sabbatean Enthusiasm mirrors that of opponents to the Quakers, the French prophets, the Saint-Médard convulsionaries, and other visionary movements. At the same time, some European Christians went the other way and were prepared to consider the breaking news about Shabbatai in the context of their own prophetic traditions. Although a Christian could not believe in Shabbatai as the true messiah while remaining committed to all Christian principles, he or she might see the Jewish messiah as part of a larger process in which the Jews prepare the ground for the Second Coming. At least one example indicates that there could be Christians

who would “convert” to Sabbateanism and turn their backs on Christian authority.

Sabbatean prophets continued to appear throughout the movement until Shabbatai’s apostasy, and afterward as well. The enormous wave of popular prophecy in Izmir and Istanbul petered out, but some figures, like Suriel, continued the practice for many months. It is ironic that Shabbatai’s eventual downfall, his forced appearance before the vizier for the second time in the summer of 1666, was the direct result of another prophetic interlocutor, R. Nehemiah Kohen. The details about this figure are shrouded in mystery, but many accounts say he was taken as a prophet in Poland, and that Shabbatai sent for him because of this. Kohen argued with Shabbatai, apparently about the respective messianic identities of the two men, then went and denounced Shabbatai to the authorities.⁹⁷ Messianic prophecy thus closed the exoteric period of the Sabbatean movement, just as it had opened it.

*Prophecy after
Shabbatai's Apostasy*

The Sabbataean movement strikingly illustrates the phenomenon we are concerned with: when people are committed to a belief and a course of action, clear, disconfirming evidence may simply result in deepened conviction and increased proselytizing.

—L. Festinger et al., *When Prophecy Fails*, 12

When Shabbatai Zvi accepted Islam before the sultan in 1666, the majority of the Jewish world turned its back on the would-be messiah and returned to normal life. Yet a great many followers could not accept the idea that their deep emotional investment had been futile. The embarrassed leaders of the Jewish community sought to eradicate the traces of their error, and over time they turned sharply against these remaining believers. Like a minority of followers in most failed messianic movements, however, the loyal Sabbateans went underground and kept up the faith in secret.¹ Several hundred of them converted to Islam during the 1680s to follow the example of Shabbatai, but most remained within Judaism. Cells developed in the Ottoman Empire and Europe. As long as Shabbatai and Nathan were alive, they kept in touch with the believers.

One might expect that in such circumstances the prophecies about Shabbatai would cease; or they might be studied and interpreted, but no new revelations would emerge. In fact, the prophetic activity of Sabbatean believers seems to have *grown* after the apostasy. In a related trend, although numerous authors have written about the negative repercussions caused by the movement on the study and practice of Kabbalah, there is more evidence to show that interest in Kabbalah in the generation after Shabbatai's apostasy dramatically increased. Along with Kabbalah studies came a surge of non-Sabbatean prophecy that was also rife in kabbalistic circles for a long time afterward.

This paradoxical result of Sabbatean prophecy and mysticism raises the question of its impact in other spheres. Scholem's famous thesis, that the antinomianism of Sabbateanism played an important role in the rise of the Jewish Enlightenment and the Reform movement, has been extensively challenged. The truth of the matter is undoubtedly quite complex, but some new approaches to the argument may now be available.

The Sabbatean prophets at the beginning and height of the movement in 1665–66 had been a heterogeneous group of scholars and lay people, the vast majority of whom were active in the Ottoman Empire. After the apostasy, however, this picture changed dramatically. A disproportionate number of those who carried on the faith in secret were rabbis and scholars. The venue too had changed: over the later decades of the seventeenth century both the believers in general and the prophets among them were found increasingly in Europe—eastern as well as western. *Maggidim* continued to appear, but their mode of expression had altered during the post-apostasy events. In addition to maggidism similar to that of Karo and Nathan, new types of prophecy arose whose physical manifestations were entirely different. Dreams became very central in certain circles, and divinatory techniques intended to predict the future of Shabbatai and the movement became widespread. These had been much less important at the height of the movement, when the future looked relatively clear. The increased importance of Kabbalah in post-apostasy prophecy was obviously related both to the higher level of education among many participants, and to the augury trend. The variety and content of Sabbatean prophecy in this later phase of the movement are of great interest; a few general descriptions of the persons and groups involved will serve as examples.

Shabbatai Raphael, a young kabbalist from Mistra in Greece, was one of the first post-apostasy Sabbatean prophets and constitutes a sort of link with the earliest Sabbatean prophecies. He wandered in the Ottoman Empire and Europe around 1666–1668, claiming to have been present at Nathan of Gaza's Shavu'ot night prophecy and other events in the unfolding of the movement in Palestine. Now, he said, he had himself become a prophet through the use of an ancient mystical manual he republished, and had been granted meetings with the prophet Elijah. After an argument with the prophetic tailor of Portoferraio over their respective messianic prophecies, in which Raphael apparently claimed to be a greater prophet than Nathan, he left Italy and traveled via Frankfurt to Amsterdam, and thence to Hamburg. There he came face to face with Hakham Jacob Sasportas, who listened to

Raphael's story, determined that Raphael was a fraud, and launched an extensive campaign against him. Eventually Raphael fled to Posen, where he was accepted as a true prophet in the whole region; but his past caught up with him and he escaped to a life in unknown parts and adventures. Among the further gifts Raphael claimed in Amsterdam and Hamburg were precience, palm-reading skill, knowledge of efficacious amulets, and the ability to cure the sick—all related to his prophetic calling.² Raphael illustrates the way Sabbateanism could be integrated into the identity of an otherwise ordinary Jewish confidence man in the late seventeenth century for added effect, a pattern repeated often over the coming decades.

A striking and well-known prophetic incident occurred in Amsterdam in 1674. The famous Portuguese-Dutch Jewish poet, Daniel Levi de Barrios, an important figure in the larger world of letters, began experiencing prophetic ecstasies during the holiday of Passover, the festival celebrating the redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Ironically, it was Hakham Jacob Sasportas, the arch opponent of the Sabbateans, but also a friend of de Barrios, who was called in to deal with the situation. He reports that he found de Barrios so overcome by prophetic visions and voices that he was at first unable to speak. De Barrios predicted that the messianic deliverance would become known before the fast of Tisha be-Av in summer, and that Shabbatai Zvi would manifest himself as the messiah before the New Year in autumn. Sasportas blamed the excessive fasts, sleep deprivation, and isolation de Barrios had practiced—surely in imitation of Nathan and the kabbalists—for the hyperactivity of the poet's imagination.³ This incident is important for several reasons. It indicates the continued vigor of Sabbatean beliefs in Amsterdam, in an overt setting, many years after Shabbatai's apostasy. De Barrios joins Cardoso as another highly accomplished *converso* intellectual who becomes a prophet of Shabbatai, this time in Western Europe. Sasportas's response is also telling, since it completely lacks the anti-Sabbatean vitriol of the *Zizat Novel Zvi*, and rather takes a medical approach to de Barrios' visions.

Around the same time as de Barrios in Amsterdam, a different sort of prophet arose in Meknes, Morocco, to foretell the return of Shabbatai as messiah in the coming Passover. This individual, Joseph ibn Zur, was a poorly educated, working-class Jew who suddenly found himself in the throes of prophetic ecstasies. Scholem connects this awakening to the visit of R. Elisha Ashkenazi, father of Nathan. Elisha galvanized the faithful and probably brought Nathan's writings to Morocco, creating a connection with

the earlier Sabbatean prophecies. Ibn Zur was entranced by a *maggid*, but was also vouchsafed revelations from the angel Raphael and experienced extended bouts of automatic speech, in which he revealed great kabbalistic secrets. When asked for a sign or wonder, he pointed to the very fact that he had been an ignorant pauper who could hardly read the Torah, let alone kabbalistic works, and was now teaching great mysteries to the rabbis. It is noteworthy that Ibn Zur was not a lone figure in the North African scene; he had several students, including R. Abraham b. Simhon and R. Daniel Bahloul, who carried on his prophetic activities. Ibn Zur died soon after the failure of his prophecies.⁴ He and his disciples are further evidence for the extended geographical and conceptual spread of prophecy after Shabbatai's conversion.

In the late 1670s various circles of Sabbatean believers and prophets were active in Italy, particularly the group connected with R. Abraham Rovigo in Modena. Rovigo kept in close touch with Sabbateans in Europe and around the Mediterranean, including R. Meir Rofe, the same man who checked Nathan of Gaza's pulse during the first public Sabbatean prophecy. Rovigo had been a Sabbatean prophet himself, but around 1676–77 the status of his group changed dramatically in the world of secret Sabbateanism with the advent of a Sabbatean *maggid*, channeled by the distinguished Rabbi Issahar Ber Perlhefter. This *maggid* revealed radical new secrets about the movement, including the highly disputed contention that Shabbatai was only messiah son of Joseph rather than messiah son of David. Another Sabbatean prophet appeared in the circle at that time, R. Mordecai Eistentadt, called "the Rebuker." In the 1690s a new personality, R. Mordecai Ashkenazi, became active in the Rovigo circle and left a notebook concerning his many Sabbatean dreams. Mordecai was part of a wave of Ashkenazi Sabbatean prophets active in this period that also included Hayyim Malakh, Judah Leib Prossnitz, Judah Hasid, and Joshua Heshel Zoref. The politics of Sabbateanism and Sabbatean prophecy during this critical phase were connected with complex class and economic as well as religious struggles. These clandestine Sabbateans cultivated the self-image of poor but faithful bearers of the trust, struggling against the wealthy unbelievers who were not privy to the secret knowledge of Sabbateanism.⁵ In any case, the existence of these circles and the shift from Sepharadi to predominantly Ashkenazi ethnicity of the prophets testify to the dynamic and central role of prophecy in post-apostasy Sabbateanism.⁶

Sabbatean prophecy in the Ottoman Empire existed among the Dönmeḥ,

the group that converted to Islam in the 1680s while continuing its secret Sabbatean faith; but it was still best represented in the household of Abraham Cardoso. Cardoso had been forced to leave Tripoli in 1673, and he wandered in subsequent years from Tunis to Livorno to Izmir, then Brusa, Istanbul, Rodosto, Gallipoli, and other points east, always followed by threats of isolation and excommunication for his Sabbatean activities. The main mode of prophecy in the Cardoso group became maggidic revelations that far surpassed any that had gone on before. The closest parallel is perhaps the Sufi groups whose *shaykhs* encouraged their disciples to seek visions through ecstatic trance—yet even these closed conventicles pale in comparison with the Cardoso group. Cardoso claimed to grant and call up *maggidim* at will, and he appointed specific heavenly mentors to his various students. At least one of these, Daniel Bonafous, became a prophet in his own right and attracted the attention of the historian Jacques Basnage. Like the prophets around R. Abraham Rovigo, Cardoso re-engineered Sabbatean theology to fit his own ideas, most of which contradicted those taught by his nemesis, Nathan.⁷ Nevertheless, the centrality of *maggidim* in this group bears witness to the continued resonance of that form, revived so dramatically by Nathan himself in 1665.

A striking example of the impact Sabbatean prophecy had on the larger Jewish intellectual world is the case of R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto, one of the most influential Jewish thinkers of the early eighteenth century. Luzzatto had close ties to Sabbatean circles and was an avid reader of Nathan of Gaza's kabbalistic works, but was probably not a Sabbatean himself. Luzzatto had a famous *maggid* that revealed various secrets to him, not the least of which was a "second *Zohar*," reminiscent of that put forth by Moses Suriel. Luzzatto was persecuted mercilessly by the rabbis for his prophetic claims and suspected connections with Sabbateans, but this did not prevent him from training students in his path and becoming a highly influential writer in the Jewish world.⁸ At the same time that prophetic activity continued among both the Ottoman and European Sabbateans later in the century, forms of possession and ecstasy closely related to those of the Sabbateans (but sometimes presented in dialectic opposition to them) were becoming widespread in the early Hasidic movement.⁹ Keen awareness of the Sabbatean prophetic precedents remained in Jewish memory, and it testifies to their continuing impact among non-Sabbateans for over a century. Nevertheless, the speed and fervor with which Hasidism spread are distinctly reminiscent of Sabbateanism, and the common element of prophecy may have been equally important in both.

The reaction to Sabbateanism after Shabbatai's apostasy in the Christian world was striking and very different from what happened in the Jewish context. One outcome was that Christians used the episode to try and convert Jews by convincing them that their messianic dreams and prophecies were now exposed as hopeless illusions.¹⁰ But a more widespread argument posed the Sabbatean fiasco as an example of the dangers of prophecy and religious enthusiasm, a warning to Christian Enthusiasts like the Quakers and the French prophets. The episode thus made its unlikely entry into internal Christian theological debate.¹¹

The continuation of prophecy in the Sabbatean style was part of a larger phenomenon whose counterintuitive nature has led many researchers to miss it. This is the *impetus* given to varieties of mystical activity and study in the Jewish world by Sabbateanism. Whereas scholars have often claimed mysticism came into bad repute as a result of its close connection with the Sabbatean failure, and indeed examples of this attitude are evident,¹² overall, the Jewish world showed far greater interest in the study and practice of Kabbalah and mystical prophecy during the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. The wide dispersal of Sabbatean penitential tracts was a major factor in the spread of mystical *regimen vitae* literature.¹³ Rabbi Moses Zacuto, who had been at least open to belief in Shabbatai in 1665–66, became a one-man distribution center for kabbalistic practices, doing more than anyone since R. Menahem Azariah of Fano a century earlier to popularize Kabbalah in Jewish life. The early eighteenth century saw an explosion of works expressly intended to teach Kabbalah (and in some cases the path to prophecy) as widely as possible, by Italian authors such as Luzzatto, Joseph Ergas, Immanuel Hai Ricci, and Aviad Sar Shalom Bazilia. Even the arch-enemies of the Sabbateans—Sasportas, R. Moses Hagiz, R. Jacob Emden—were proponents of Kabbalah to a greater or lesser degree. Some were even prophets themselves; Sasportas resorted to dream divination on one occasion, and Hagiz experienced a revelation by a benevolent angel that communicated with him orally and in writing.¹⁴

Clearly, hostility against mystical study and practice, including the promotion of prophecy, was not typical of the generations after Shabbatai's apostasy, and the events of 1665–66 in fact inspired a lasting penchant for these tendencies. Had mystical and prophetic practice been widespread before the Sabbatean outbreak, this could be explained as an organic development; but this was not the case—it was under the impact of Shabbatai and Nathan that kabbalistic practice (and study to some degree), especially prophecy, became widespread in the Jewish world. Before the advent of Sabbateanism,

Kabbalah was the closed province of a small elite, and prophecy of any type was altogether rare.¹⁵ Afterwards these phenomena turned up everywhere.

If Sabbateanism inspired increased interest in kabbalistic practice and prophecy on the one hand, and antinomian heresies on the other, was Gershom Scholem correct in his claim that Sabbateanism fed directly into the rise of Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) and Reform Judaism at the turn of the nineteenth century?¹⁶ Was Lurianic Kabbalah really the central factor in the rise of Sabbateanism? It played an important role in attracting certain elite rabbis, but extensive evidence argues that prophetic messianism was crucial in Sabbateanism's broader success.

Aspects of Scholem's thesis about the impact of Sabbateanism on Jewish modernity can be upheld, but only if they are modified to fit the model of the anthropologists' Cargo Cult.¹⁷ As societies become modern, a desired outcome that had been wished for because of a religious (especially a messianic) reason sometimes continues to be a desired outcome for more secular reasons. In other words, there is a genuine continuity in the goal (for Scholem this would be the abandonment of strict ritual observance), while at the same time there is a definite break concerning the impetus for that end (from Sabbatean heresy to religious reform). In adopting the Cargo Cult model or others like it, however, one essentially loses any relationship between the *causes* or impetus of the original Sabbatean movement and the cause of the rise of Haskalah and Reform.

From the perspective of a global picture, the Sabbatean movement and its impact actually look somewhat different. The authority structure of Ottoman and European Jewish communities on both the communal and individual levels was already shifting before Shabbatai came on the scene. Few really powerful voices remained in the rabbinate; the Kabbalah had eroded the traditional sense of what constitutes an authoritative text in Judaism; and the *conversos* had formed a living conduit between the Jewish and Christian worlds. Nathan of Gaza, Abraham Miguel Cardoso, and Shabbatai Zvi, all rabbis, were in the throes of powerful ideological crises concerning the Torah, God's relationship to man, the nature of salvation and other issues. Even the Ashkenazi milieu, considered a bastion of traditionalism, was undergoing an upheaval.

Scholem describes how, "within the spiritual world of the Sabbatian sects, within the very sanctum sanctorum of Kabbalistic mysticism, as it were, the crisis of faith which overtook the Jewish people as a whole upon its emer-

gence from its medieval isolation was first anticipated, and how groups of Jews within the walls of the ghetto, while still outwardly adhering to the practices of their forefathers, had begun to embark on a radically new inner life of their own."¹⁸ It may be more valid to say, however, that the Sabbatean movement was a *result* of the forces of change that already existed in the Jewish community, rather than their cause. It was one more manifestation of the Jews' yearning to escape the exigencies of exilic life and forge a new and happier future under a new and happier conception of God's will. The structure of Jewish authority already showed cracks in the pillars, and it was not only radical philosophers like Spinoza who pushed to topple them. The new order promised by the messiah and observed by prophets had its source in the same aspiration—the difference was that kabbalists and ascetics pursued it differently than did the rationalists. Ultimately their descendants sought a better future starting where the seventeenth-century Jews left off—in both moderate and radical Sabbatean sectarianism, Hasidism, Haskalah, Enlightenment, Reform, Socialism, Zionism and assimilation.

It is more satisfying to say that the impetus for Sabbateanism was in a complex ideology, Lurianic Kabbalah, than to suggest that it was the result of ill-advised belief in latter-day prophecy. Scholem, the last of the great German Jewish thinkers, naturally gravitated toward a meaningful ideological understanding of the Jews' attraction to Shabbatai. It was a noble heresy, a gnostic experiment, an epochal crisis of exile and redemption played out alone on the cosmic stage. The more prosaic view of a people involved in a changing authority structure, who were prepared to believe in prophecy because important rabbis and non-Jews did so, whose beliefs about the messiah and the prophetic future were heavily shaped by Christian and Muslim influences, is not the stuff of an epic narrative. The Jews then look like fools instead of heroic mystical heretics.¹⁹ Yet this was the period when the prosaic became the profound, the pedestrian became signal. In the very days of Shabbatai, alchemists were becoming chemists, lowly mathematics was proving to be the cornerstone of a new cosmology, astrology was turning into astronomy, and blood-letting quacks were learning to be effective physicians. Sabbateans and their prophecies were an organic part of this scene.

In the ensuing centuries prophecy did not disappear, nor has scientific rationalism altogether triumphed in the world. In the West, these two approaches have in fact fused: we still try to know the future and the secrets of the universe, but the vehicle to that end is scientific research.²⁰ There has been a great deal of success in this pursuit; in many cases, though, the logic

behind our discoveries is no stronger than that which made belief in Shabbatai Zvi seem reasonable to intelligent seventeenth-century Jews.²¹ In the Islamic world, prophecy has triumphed almost entirely. While a small group of intellectuals, mainly trained in the West, do practice science, the vast majority seek their understanding of the world primarily through charismatic religious leaders. Even the fundamentalist Wahhabi movement, which has eliminated much prophetic Sufi activity, reasserts the centrality of the prophecies of Mohammed as the basis for Muslim life. It is important to understand a movement like Sabbateanism, and the ability of prophecy to attract many believers, not only because of its importance in the seventeenth century, but because it can help us understand human behavior in all periods. Ultimately, people have always wanted the same things: a good life in this world, hope for a better life in some future state, honor, redemption from the effects of evil and sin, spiritual fulfillment, and comprehension of the workings of the universe. Those who seek them through science and those who seek them through the messiah, as well as those who manipulate such hopes, whether in the seventeenth century or the twenty-first, are all part of the same universe of human experience.

NOTES

INDEX

Notes

Prologue

1. Concerning the role of Nathan and the sequence of events, I am completely in agreement with the picture presented in Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi: The Mystical Messiah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).
2. In the following discussion I follow *ibid.*, ch. 2 unless otherwise indicated.
3. See Daniel Goffman, *Izmir and the Levantine World, 1550–1650* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990).
4. See Yosef Kaplan's introduction to Thomas Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden getoont in den Persoon van Sabethai Zevi*, trans. A. A. Langebeer and E. Shmueli, ed. Y. Kaplan [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Dinur Center at the Hebrew University, 1998), 9–22.
5. See Jacob Barnai, *Sabbateanism: Social Perspectives* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 2000), 42–43; Yosef Kaplan, "The Portuguese Community of Amsterdam in the 17th Century Between Tradition and Change," in *Society and Community*, ed. A. Haim (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1991), 141–71. The qualities of the Amsterdam community as described by Kaplan are similar in many ways to those of Izmir, whose members were mainly of the same background, though the proportion of other Jews was larger there.
6. This is of course Scholem's conclusion, based on detailed study of contemporary documents. While a few voices have been raised in criticism of this analysis, I find it convincing.
7. I have adapted this idea from Moshe Idel, who explains it in much more detail in "Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism," in *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, ed. P. Schäfer and M. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 173–202. These conceptions are expanded and explained by Tzvi Mark, in "Dybbuk and Devekut in the *Shivhe ha-Besht*: Toward a Phenomenology of Madness in Early Hasidism," in *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. M. Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 257–301, esp. 272–76. The idea of this sort of reinterpretation as "code switching," a term used by linguists, was suggested to me by Harris Lenowitz.

8. See Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (New York: Avon, 1979), 247–57.
9. On all this see especially Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 146–47. My interpretation follows Scholem along many lines but diverges in several ways.
10. This aspect of Kabbalah has been explored particularly by Elliot Wolfson. See Wolfson, *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), esp. chaps. 3–4. See also, e.g., Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, trans. R. Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1965), 106–09.
11. Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge*.
12. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 109 n20.
13. *Ibid.*, 113. My short interpretation of this passage follows that of Scholem closely, though I am not as convinced as Scholem was that the dream of the burnt penis occurred at the age of sixteen rather than six as it is reported.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 124, 159.
16. *Ibid.*, 161.
17. See Elliot Wolfson, “The Engenderment of Messianic Politics: Symbolic Significance of Sabbatai Ševi’s Coronation,” in *Toward the Millennium*, 203–58; quotation from 246.
18. See Scholem’s provocative discussion of this matter in *Sabbatai Ševi*, 7.
19. *Ibid.*, *passim*.
20. Moshe Idel, “‘One from a Town, Two from a Clan’—The Diffusion of Lurianic Kabbala and Sabbateanism: A Re-evaluation,” *Jewish History* 7:2 (1993): 79–104. Even Scholem admits that most Jews did not know the Kabbalah of Luria. “Luria’s name was freely used because the Lurianic legend as well as the popular hagiography *Shibhey ha-’ARI* was widely known by that time, whereas Lurianic theories were still unknown to the majority of kabbalists.” Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 84. It is hard to know how to fit this with Scholem’s insistence on the centrality of Lurianic Kabbalah in all of Sabbateanism.
21. Amazingly, Scholem himself admits this as well. See *Sabbatai Ševi*, 252.
22. See Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000).

1. Messianic Prophecy in the Early Modern Context

1. The literature on this topic is enormous, but some places to start include Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1948); *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, 3 vols., ed. B. McGinn, J. J. Collins, and S. J. Stein (New York: Continuum, 1998); and Tom McIver, *The End of the World: An Annotated Bibliography* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1999).
2. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 8–15.
3. Moshe Idel presents a far more variegated and complex view of the messianic

- possibilities in Jewish mysticism in *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
4. See *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. W. Bynum and P. Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 1–20.
 5. Shabbatai Zvi, quoted by the Dutch minister Thomas Coenen in his *Ydele verwachtinge*, 55 (my translation from the Hebrew edition); Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 404 and discussion there.
 6. See D. E. Harkness, “Alchemy and Eschatology: Exploring the Connections between John Dee and Isaac Newton,” in *Newton and Religion: Context, Nature, and Influence*, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 1–15.
 7. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 39–44; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), ch. 7.
 8. See the important insights on this matter in Richard Lewinsohn (Morus), *Prophets and Prediction: The History of Prophecy from Babylon to Wall Street*, trans. A. J. Pomerans (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958).
 9. See Andre Neher, *L'essence du prophétisme*, M. Bar-Zvi trans. into Hebrew (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1999), 13; Moshe Idel, Preface to A. J. Heschel, *Prophetic Inspiration After the Prophets: Maimonides and Other Medieval Authorities*, ed. M. M. Faierstein (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1996), ix.
 10. In this and other aspects, prophecy has the hallmarks of William James’s mystical experiences. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), chs. 16–17. It is noteworthy that Shabbatai’s contemporary, Barukh Spinoza, invests a great deal of effort in paring down the meaning of prophecy in his *Theologico-Political Treatise*.
 11. See Deuteronomy 13:2–6, 18:21–22; Heschel, *Prophetic Inspiration*, 1–4 and ch. 1 passim; Howard Kreisel, “The Verification of Prophecy in Medieval Jewish Philosophy” [Hebrew] *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4:1–2 (1984/5): 1–18. For an example of a contemporary position (related to the Lubavitch debates), see Eliahou Bokobza, *Emunat Hakhamim* (n/p, 1993).
 12. See Howard T. Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001).
 13. See, e.g., Amos Funkenstein, *Maimonides: Nature, History and Messianic Beliefs*, trans. S. Himelstein (Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defense Books, 1997), chs. 10–13; Alvin J. Reines, *Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1970); *Eschatology in Maimonidean Thought: Messianism, Resurrection and the World to Come*, ed. J. I. Dienstag (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1983); Benzion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1982), ch. 4; Joel L. Kramer, “On Maimonides’ Messianic Posture,” in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. II, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1984), 109–142; Kreisel, “Verification of Prophecy”; Eric Lawee, “The Messianism of Isaac Abarbanel, ‘Father of the [Jewish] Messianic Movements of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’,” in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. I: *Jewish Messianism in the*

- Early Modern World*, ed. M. Goldish and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 1–39.
14. See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Abraham Berger, “The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia,” in *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*, ed. M. Saperstein (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 250–55; *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, ed. P. Lachower and I. Tishby, trans. D. Goldstein (Oxford: Littman Library, 1989), II:1:3, “Sleep and Dreams” and passim; Y. Liebes, *Studies on the Zohar*, trans. A. Schwartz, S. Nakache, P. Pelli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), ch. 1; Haviva Pedaya, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism* [Hebrew] (Culver City, Calif.: Cherub Press, 2002).
 15. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*.
 16. Robert E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Bernard McGinn, *Apocalypticism in the Western Tradition* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1994), chs. 8–10; Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); Reeves, *Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future: A Study in Historical Thinking* (Guilford, Surrey: Sutton, 1999); and Reeves, *The Prophetic Sense of History in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate/Variorum, 1999.)
 17. See the sources in n2 above, and D. S. Katz and R. H. Popkin, *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).
 18. On messianism in this period see the series *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vols. 1–4 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001). I refer to individual volumes and essays throughout this section.
 19. Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, part III; Paul J. Alexander, “The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and Its Messianic Origin,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 41 (1978): 1–15. Sixteenth-century Ottoman rulers were also fascinated by the idea of a Last World Emperor, on which see the section about Muslim messianism below. On the ancient development of these ideas, see David Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).
 20. Robert E. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy: The Cedar of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
 21. See, e.g., Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, part III; Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Verso, 1990); Curtis V. Bostick, *The Antichrist and the Lollards: Apocalypticism in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998); Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), esp. chs. 6–9; Jean Elizabeth Light McFarlane, “Antichrist in English Literature, 1380–1680” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1980).
 22. See Matt Goldish, “Patterns In Converso Messianism,” in *Millenarianism and*

- Messianism*, vol. I, 41–64; Avraham Elqayam, “The Hidden Messiah: On the Messiah Son of Joseph in the Thought of Nathan of Gaza, Shabbatai Zvi and A. M. Cardoso” [Hebrew], *Da’at* 38 (1997): 33–82.
23. See, e.g., Alain Milhou, *Colón y su mentalidad mesiánica en el ambiente franciscanista español* (Valladolid: University of Valladolid, 1983); *Apocalyptic Spirituality*, ed. Bernard McGinn (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1979), part IV; Richard Woods, *Mysticism and Prophecy: The Dominican Tradition* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Press, 1998), chs. 5–7.
 24. See Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence: Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).
 25. See José C. Nieto, “The Franciscan Alumbrados and the Prophetic-Apocalyptic Tradition,” *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 8 (1977): 3–16; Américo Castro, *Aspectos del vivir hispánico: Espiritualismo, mesianismo, actitud personal en los siglos xiv al xvi* (Santiago de Chile: Cruz del Sur, 1949); Alastair Hamilton, *Heresy and Mysticism in Sixteenth Century Spain: The Alumbrados* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992).
 26. See *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. 2: *Catholic Millenarianism—From Savonarola to the Abbé Gregoire*, ed. K. Kottman (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001).
 27. See Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).
 28. See *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, ed. Marjorie Reeves (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
 29. See William J. Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel (1510–1581)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957); Marion L. Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel: Prophet of the Restitution of All Things—His Life and Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981); Kuntz, *Venice, Myth and Utopian Thought in the Sixteenth Century: Bodin, Postel and the Virgin of Venice* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate/Variorum, 1999); *Guillaume Postel, 1581–1981: Actes du Colloque International d’Avranches, 5–9 septembre 1981* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel/Éditions de la Maisnie, 1985).
 30. See Henry Charles Lea, *Chapters from the Religious History of Spain Connected with the Inquisition* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1890; rpt. 1967), sec. II: Mystics and Illuminati; William A. Christian, Jr., *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Stephen Haliczer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy: Female Mystics in the Golden Age of Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), who emphasizes the dangerous double-edged sword of female prophecy in Spain.
 31. Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia’s Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
 32. See Clark Colahan, *The Visions of Sor María de Agreda: Writing, Knowledge and Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).
 33. See Sherry M. Velasco, *Demons, Nausea, and Resistance in the Autobiography of Isabel de Jesús, 1611–1682* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
 34. Lea, *Chapters from the Religious History*, 296.

35. See *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. 4: *Continental Millenarians—Protestants, Catholics, Heretics*, ed. J. C. Laursen and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001).
36. See Hayyim Hillel Ben-Sasson, “The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes,” *Proceedings of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4 (Jerusalem: The Israeli Academy, 1970), 239–326. An alternative view can be found in Jerome Friedman, “The Reformation in Alien Eyes: Jewish Perceptions of Christian Troubles,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14 (1983): 23–40.
37. Robin Bruce Barnes, *Prophecy and Gnosis: Apocalypticism In the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).
38. See Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, chs. 11–13; George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Vol. 15, *Sixteenth-Century Essays and Studies*; Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2000), passim.
39. See Robert H. Bainton, *Hunted Heretic: The Life and Death of Michael Servetus, 1511–1553* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960); Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva: Droz, 1978).
40. See Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, vol. 2, 542–549; Katherine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530–1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), ch. 7; Bryan W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought In English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 172–177; Sarah Hutton, “The Appropriation of Joseph Mede: Millenarianism in the 1640s,” in *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture*, vol. 3: *The Millenarian Turn—Millenarian Contexts of Science, Politics and Everyday Anglo-American Life In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), ch. 1.
41. See Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, ch. 24.
42. See Howard Hotson, *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000).
43. See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971); Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989).
44. See, e.g., Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1975); Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition*; Bernard S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972); Leo Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).
45. See William M. Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603–1660* (London: Macmillan, 1969); Arthur H. Williamson, “Britain and the Beast: The Apocalypse and the Seventeenth-Century Debate about the Creation of the British State,” in *The Millenarian Turn*, ch. 2.
46. See Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, ch. 6; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, passim.
47. See David S. Katz, *Philosemitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England* (Ox-

- ford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Avrom Saltman, *The Jewish Question in 1655: Studies in Prynne's 'Demurrer'* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1995).
48. See Katz, *Philosemitism and the Readmission*; Richard H. Popkin, "Jewish Messianism and Christian Millenarianism," in *Culture and Politics From Puritanism to the Enlightenment*, ed. P. Zagorin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 67–90.
 49. See Richard H. Popkin, "Hartlib, Dury and the Jews," in *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation: Studies in Intellectual Communication*, ed. M. Greengrass, M. Leslie, and T. Raylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 118–136; Martin Mulsow, "Who Was the Author of the *Clavis apocalyptica* of 1651? Millenarianism and Prophecy Between Silesian Mysticism and the Hartlib Circle," in *Continental Millenarians*, ch. 7.
 50. See Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), ch. 2; Paul Regan, "Calvinism and the Dutch Israel Thesis," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, vol. 2: *The Later Reformation*, ed. B. Gordon (Brookfield, Vt.: Scolar Press, 1996), 91–106; Ernestine van der Wall, "Mystical Millenarianism in the Early Modern Dutch Republic," in *Continental Millenarians*, ch. 5.
 51. See Richard H. Popkin, "Rabbi Nathan Shapira's Visit to Amsterdam in 1657," in *Dutch Jewish History*, vol. I (Jerusalem: Institute for Research on Dutch Jewry, 1984), 185–205.
 52. See Andrew C. Fix, *Prophecy and Reason: The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); *Spinoza's Earliest Publication? The Hebrew Translation of Margaret Fell's 'A loving salutation to the seed of Abraham among the Jews, wherever they are scattered up and down the face of the earth.'* ed. R. H. Popkin and M. Signer (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987); Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 7; *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century: Studies and Documents*, ed. J. van den Berg and E. G. E. van der Wall (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), passim.
 53. See Ernestine G. E. van der Wall, "The Amsterdam Millenarian Petrus Serrarius (1600–1669) and the Anglo-Dutch Circle of Philo-Judaists," in *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century*, 73–94; van der Wall, "Petrus Serrarius and Menasseh ben Israel: Christian Millenarianism and Jewish Messianism in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam," in *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*, ed. Y. Kaplan, H. Méchoulan, and R. H. Popkin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 164–90.
 54. On both Serrarius and Labadie see Ernestine G. E. van der Wall, "A Precursor of Christ or a Jewish Impostor? Petrus Serrarius and Jean de Labadie on the Jewish Messianic Movement Around Sabbatai Şevi," *Pietismus und Neuzeit* 14 (1988): 109–24. See also T. J. Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem: Jean de Labadie and the Labadists, 1610–1744* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987).
 55. See Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in*

- Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Clarke Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), chs. 1–3. The role of Pierre Jurieu in this context is also important. See Harry M. Bracken, “Pierre Jurieu: The Politics of Prophecy,” in *Continental Millenarians*, ch. 9.
56. See *Les convulsionnaires de Saint-Médard: Miracles, convulsions et prophéties à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Catherine-Laurence Maire (Paris: Éditions Gallimard/Julliard, 1985); R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), chs. 9–10, 15–16.
57. See Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*; Roland Haase, *Das Problem des Chiliasmus unter der Dreißigjährige Krieg* (Leipzig: Gebr. Gerhardt, 1933).
58. See Susanna Åkerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden and Her Circle: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-Century Philosophical Libertine* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), part IV: *Millenarianism and Politics*; Åkerman, “Queen Christina of Sweden and Messianic Thought,” in *Sceptics, Millenarians and Jews*, ed. D. S. Katz and J. I. Israel (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 142–60. Christina was not physically in Sweden during her involvement with this activity.
59. See Potter, *Prophets and Emperors*.
60. See Paul J. Alexander, “The Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor and Its Messianic Origins,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978): 1–15; Reeves, *Influence of Prophecy*, part III.
61. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, ch. 6.
62. See, e.g., Alexandre Y. Haran, *Le lys et le globe: Messianisme dynastique et rêve impérial en France à l’aube des temps modernes* (Seysssel [Ain]: Champ Vallon, 2000); Geoffrey Parker, “The Place of Tudor England in the Messianic Vision of Philip II of Spain,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 167–221.
63. See Norman Housley, “Holy Land or Holy Lands? Palestine and the Catholic West in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance,” in *The Holy Land, Holy Lands, and Christian History*, ed. R. N. Swanson (Boydell Press for The Ecclesiastical History Society, 2000), 228–49.
64. See Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarolan Movement in Florence, 1494–1545* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), ch. 7; Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence*.
65. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, 261–71.
66. See Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, ch. 2; Regan, “Calvinism and the Dutch Israel Thesis.”
67. See Katz and Popkin, *Messianic Revolution*, ch. 7; Lamont, *Godly Rule*, passim; Bernard Capp, “Transplanting the Holy Land: Diggers, Fifth Monarchists, and the New Israel,” in Swanson, *Promised Land, Promised Lands*, 288–98.
68. See Graeme Murdock, “Magyar Judah: Constructing a New Canaan in Eastern Europe,” in Swanson, *Holy Land, Holy Lands*, 263–74.
69. See Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. chs. 2–5;

- Joy Gilsdorf, *The Puritan Apocalypse: New England Eschatology in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Garland, 1989), ch. 4.
70. This is the subtitle of Saxby, *Quest for the New Jerusalem*.
 71. Again, sources are very numerous. See Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England*; McGinn, *Antichrist*; Wilhelm Bousset, *The Antichrist Legend: A Chapter in Christian and Jewish Folklore*, trans. A. H. Keane (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999); Richard K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art and Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981).
 72. See Andrew Gow, *The Red Jews: Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age, 1200–1600* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).
 73. See, e.g., Charles Webster, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626–1660* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 9, 23.
 74. See, e.g., the debate between Charles Webster (see previous note) and Margaret Jacob and John Henry, discussed in M. Oster, “Millenarianism and the New Science: The Case of Robert Boyle,” in *Samuel Hartlib*, 137.
 75. Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, vol. 2, 456.
 76. Firth, *Apocalyptic Tradition*, 133.
 77. Napier stressed the role of the “two witnesses” from the Apocalypse, a theme of enormous significance in this period. See Rodney L. Peterson, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of ‘Two Witnesses’ in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
 78. See Froom, *Prophetic Faith*, vol. 2, 455–63; Firth, *Apocalyptic Tradition*, ch. 4.
 79. See, e.g., Philip C. Almond, “Henry More and the Apocalypse,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54:2 (1993): 189–200; Sarah Hutton, “More, Newton, and the Language of Biblical Prophecy,” in *The Books of Nature and Scripture: Recent Essays on Natural Philosophy, Theology, and Biblical Criticism in the Netherlands of Spinoza’s Time and the British Isles of Newton’s Time*, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 39–54; Hutton, “The Seven Trumpets and the Seven Vials: Apocalypticism and Christology in Newton’s Theological Writings,” in *Newton and Religion: Context, Nature and Influence*, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999), 165–78; Rob Iliffe, “‘Making a Shew’: Apocalyptic Hermeneutics and the Sociology of Christian Idolatry in the Work of Isaac Newton and Henry More,” in *The Books of Nature and Scripture*, 55–88; Matania Z. Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another: Sir Isaac Newton and Daniel,” in *The Books of Nature and Scripture*, 105–22; J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin, *Essays on the Context, Nature, and Influence of Isaac Newton’s Theology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1990), passim; Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).
 80. Newton cited in Manuel, *Religion of Isaac Newton*, 107–08.
 81. Kochavi, “One Prophet Interprets Another.” See my comment, which I must partially retract, in Matt Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998), 76 n33.
 82. See Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology*, 62–74; Steven Snobelen, “The Mystery of

- This Restitution of All Things: Isaac Newton on the Return of the Jews,” in *The Millenarian Turn*, ch. 7.
83. See James E. Force, *William Whiston: Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), ch. 4.
 84. Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, chs. 12–13.
 85. See Herbert Breger, “*Elias Artista: A Precursor of the Messiah in Natural Science*,” in *Nineteen Eighty-Four: Science Between Utopia and Dystopia*, ed. E. Mendelsohn and H. Nowotny (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1984), 49–72.
 86. See Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972). On the influence of Rosicrucianism, see, e.g., *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*, ed. R. White (New York: Lindisfarne Books, 1999); Allison P. Coudert, “Newton and the Rosicrucian Enlightenment,” in *Newton and Religion*, 17–44.
 87. Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 294.
 88. Webster, *Great Instauration*, 22–23.
 89. *Ibid.*, passim.
 90. Frances A. Yates, *Ideas and Ideals in the North European Renaissance: Collected Essays* (London: Routledge, 1984), vol. 3, 247–55.
 91. See Allison P. Coudert, *Alchemy: The Philosopher’s Stone* (London: Wildwood House, 1980), 27–28.
 92. Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 82–83.
 93. See Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
 94. See Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs, “Alchemical Death and Resurrection: The Significance of Alchemy in the Age of Newton,” in *Science, Pseudo-Science, and Utopianism in Early Modern Thought*, ed. S. A. McKnight (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 55–87; Marion Leathers Kuntz, “Alchemy and the Restitution of Nature in the Thought of Guillaume Postel,” *Cauda Pavonis* ns 17 (1–2) (1998): 19–23.
 95. See, e.g., Peter French, *John Dee: The World of an Elizabethan Magus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), chs. 4–5; Nicholas H. Clulee, *John Dee’s Natural Philosophy: Between Science and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1988), part II; Stanislas Klossowski de Rola, *The Golden Game: Alchemical Engravings of the Seventeenth Century* (New York: George Braziller, 1988), passim.
 96. Yates, *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, ch. 5.
 97. See Dobbs, “Alchemical Death”; Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Coudert, *Alchemy*, ch. 4.
 98. See Coudert, *Alchemy*, 15, 91, 95; Arturo Schwartz, *Kabbalah and Alchemy: An Essay on Common Archetypes* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 2000).
 99. See Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), ch. 12 and references there.

100. *Ibid.*, chs. 27, 28, 34, and 36, respectively. See also ch. 38 on R. Jacob Emden, a great enemy of the Sabbateans.
101. See Don C. Allen, *The Star-Crossed Renaissance: The Quarrel About Astrology and Its Influence in England* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973); Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 143–45 and *passim*.
102. Eugenio Garin, *Astrology in the Renaissance: The Zodiac of Life* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), 18.
103. *Ibid.*
104. Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: The Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350–1420* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
105. *Ibid.*, 3.
106. See Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. M. Domandi (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), 120–22, who minimizes the determinative power ascribed to the stars by Kepler; for another view see Sheila J. Rabin, “Kepler’s Attitude Toward Pico and the Anti-Astrology Polemic,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 50 (1997): 750–70; J. R. Christianson, “Tycho Brahe’s German Treatise on the Comet of 1577,” *Isis* 70 (1979):
107. See Clulee, *John Dee’s Natural Philosophy*, ch. 3. Dee was also deeply involved with other prophetic methods, particularly conversations with angels. On this see Deborah Harkness, *John Dee’s Conversations with Angels: Cabala, Alchemy and the End of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Harkness’s work shows the connection between eschatology, science, alchemy, Kabbalah, and universal redemption.
108. See Elizabeth Labrousse, *L’entrée de Saturne au lion (l’éclipse de soleil du 12 août 1654)* (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974); Christianson, “Tycho Brahe’s German Treatise”; Åkerman, *Queen Christina*, 161–165; C. Doris Hellman, *The Comet of 1577: Its Place in the History of Astronomy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944), ch. 8; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Ch. 10–12; Sara J. Schechner, *Comets, Popular Culture, and the Birth of Modern Cosmology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Schechner, “Newton and the Ongoing Teleological Role of Comets,” in *Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: A Longer View of Newton and Halley*, ed. N. J. W. Thrower (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 299–311.
109. Moshe Idel, “Shabbatai [Saturn] the Planet and Shabbatai Zvi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism,” [Hebrew] *Jewish Studies* 37 (1997): 161–84.
110. See L. Daston and K. Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); *Wonders, Marvels, and Monsters in Early Modern Culture*, ed. P. G. Platt (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999); *Ambroise Paré on Monsters and Marvels*, trans. and ed. J. L. Pallister (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Niccoli, *Prophecy and People*, chs. 2, 5.
111. The Thirty Years’ War itself was not lacking in messianic significance. See Haase, *Das Problem des Chiliasmus*.
112. See Allison Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life*

- and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), ch. 7; Coudert, “Kabbalistic Messianism versus Kabbalistic Enlightenment,” in *Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, 107–24.
113. See the literature on Newton cited above, and Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), ch. 3.
 114. See G. S. Rousseau, “Medicine and Millenarianism,” in Rousseau, *Enlightenment Borders: Pre- and Post-Modern Discourses—Medical, Scientific* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 78–117.
 115. See Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).
 116. R. H. Popkin, “The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought: Scepticism, Science and Millenarianism,” in Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth Century Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 90–119; quotation from 90–91.
 117. *Ibid.*, 103.
 118. *The ‘Libro de las profecías’ of Christopher Columbus*, trans. and ed. by D. C. West and A. Kling (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), 60. See also Cristóforo Colombo, *Epístola de Insulis Nuper Inventis, with an English Translation by Frank E. Robbins* (n/p: Readex Microprint Co., 1966), 16–17.
 119. *Ibid.*, 61.
 120. *Ibid.*, 54–55. The editors understand this episode in the framework of *spiritualis intellectus*; but this is certainly nothing less than a prophetic dream.
 121. Djelal Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth: Europe’s Prophetic Rhetoric As Conquering Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1. See also *Libro de las profecías*, 71–72.
 122. See in general Milhou, *Colón y su mentalidad mesiánica*; Kadir, *Columbus and the Ends of the Earth*; ‘*Libro de las profecías*’; Ronald Sanders, *Lost Tribes and Promised Lands* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978).
 123. See Paolo Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time: The History of the Earth and the History of Nations from Hooke to Vico*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. part II; Norman Cohn, *Noah’s Flood: The Genesis Story in Western Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), chs. 4–7; Don C. Allen, *The Legend of Noah* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1949); Lynn Glaser, *America on Paper: The First Hundred Years* (Philadelphia: Associated Antiquaries, 1989); Andrew Gow, “Gog and Magog on *Mappaemundi* and Early Printed World Maps: Orientalizing Ethnography in the Apocalyptic Tradition,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 2 (1998): 61–88.
 124. See Richard H. Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676): His Life, Work and Influence* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987).
 125. See *ibid.*, chs. 9, 10; Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 272–76; and chs. 4–10 in general for the light they throw on many problems dealt with here.
 126. See Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère*, chs. 4, 7.

127. *Ibid.*, 3.
128. *Ibid.*, ch. 8.
129. The characters dealt with in Rossi, *Dark Abyss of Time*, part II, shared these interests, though most were more technically orthodox, including Vossius (father and son), Bochart, Marsh, Burnet, and Horn. Father Simon, on the other hand, was even more heretical.
130. See Robert Silverberg, *The Realm of Prester John* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1972); *The Hebrew Letters of Prester John*, trans. and ed. E. Ullendorff and C. F. Beckingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).
131. Gow, *Red Jews*.
132. See Adolph Neubauer, “Where Are the Ten Tribes?” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 1 (1888–9): 14–28, 95–114, 185–201, 408–23; *Letters from Beyond the Sambatyon*, ed. Simcha Shtull-Trauring (New York: Maxima New Media, 1997).
133. See Avraham Gross, “The Ten Tribes and the Kingdom of Prester John—Rumors and Investigations Before and After the Expulsion from Spain,” [Hebrew] *Pe’amim* 48 (1991): 5–41; A. Z. Aescoli, “Introduction” to *Sippur David ha-Re’ubeni* (Jerusalem: Ha-Hevrah ha-Eretz-Yisra’elit le-Historiah ve-Ethnographiah, 1940); Sanders, *Lost Tribes*; David B. Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew: The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1981), ch. 11; Silverberg, *Realm of Prester John*, chs. 5–7.
134. See previous note, and David A. Ruderman, “Hope Against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages,” in *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and Madrid: Consejo Superior de investigaciones científicas, 1991), pp. 185–202 (reprinted in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. D. B. Ruderman [New York: New York University Press, 1992], 299–323).
135. Richard H. Popkin, “Christian Jews and Jewish Christians in the 17th Century,” in *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, ed. R. H. Popkin and G. M. Weiner (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994), 57–72.
136. Aaron Zeev Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements: Sources and Documents on Messianism in Jewish History from the Bar-Kokhba Revolt Until Recent Times*, 2nd ed. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1987), p. 341, commentary on 342, and following documents.
137. See Elkan N. Adler, *Jewish Travelers in the Middle Ages: Nineteen Firsthand Accounts* (London: Routledge, 1930; reprint New York: Dover, 1987), 4–21.
138. See Manasseh ben Israel, *The Hope of Israel*, ed. H. Méchoulan and G. Nahon (Oxford: Littman Library, 1987); Lynn Glaser, *Indians or Jews? An Introduction by Lynn Glaser to a Reprint of Manasseh ben Israel’s ‘The Hope of Israel’* (Gilroy, Calif.: Roy V. Boswell, 1973).
139. *Hope of Israel*, ed. Méchoulan and Nahon, p. 158.
140. See Richard H. Popkin, “The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Indian Theory,” in *Manasseh ben Israel and His World*, 63–82; *Hebrew and the Bible in America: The*

- First Two Centuries*, ed. S. Goldman (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), part 2.
141. See Lucien Wolf, *Menasseh ben Israel's Mission to Oliver Cromwell* (London: Jewish Historical Society of England, 1901); Katz, *Philosemitism and the Readmission*, ch. 6; Cecil Roth, *A Life of Menasseh ben Israel: Rabbi, Printer, and Diplomat* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1945), ch. 10.
 142. See Roth, *Menasseh ben Israel*, ch. 8, esp. 154–55; *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*, passim.
 143. This was the important discovery of Jacob Barnai, *Sabbateanism: Social Perspectives* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 2000), 46–49.
 144. See “Between Mysticism and Messianism: The Life and Thought of Muhammad Nürbakš (d. 1464),” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1997), 151.
 145. *Ibid.*, 144–45, 164, fig. 5.
 146. See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, “Is There a Concept of Redemption in Islam?” in *Types of Redemption: Contributions to the Theme of the Study-Conference Held at Jerusalem 14th to 19th July 1968*, ed. R. J. Z. Werblowsky and C. J. Bleeker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970), 168–80.
 147. Lazarus-Yafeh, “Concept of Redemption,” 172–74; Mohamad Yasin Owadally, *Emergence of Dajjal: The Jewish King* (New Delhi: Rightway Publications, 2001).
 148. See Cornell H. Fleischer, “The Lawgiver As Messiah: The Making of the Imperial Image in the Reign of Süleymân,” in *Soliman le magnifique et son temps*, ed. G. Veinstein (Paris: Ecole du Louvre/Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1992), 165.
 149. See Gershom Scholem, “The Tradition of the Thirty-Six Hidden Just Men,” in Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 254.
 150. *Ibid.*
 151. See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Du Tage au Gange au XVI^e siècle: une conjoncture millénariste à l'échelle eurasiatique,” *Annales HSS* 56:1 (2001): 58.
 152. See Cornell H. Fleischer, “Mahdi, Messiah, and the Last Roman Emperor: Ottoman Sovereignty and the Intersection of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Apocalyptic” (unpublished paper), 32. I am grateful to Professor Fleischer for allowing me to use this important material, and to Professor Geoffrey Parker for making his copy available to me.
 153. See *ibid.*, 33.
 154. See *ibid.*, passim; Bashir, “Between Mysticism and Messianism,” passim.
 155. See Jonathan G. Katz, *Dreams, Sufism and Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muhammad al-Zawâwî* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996). See especially ch. 7 on issues of visions and prophecy in Islam.
 156. See Subrahmanyam, “Du Tage au Gange,” 57.
 157. See Fleischer, “Mahdi, Messiah,” esp. 2.
 158. See Subrahmanyam, “Du Tage au Gange,” 60–67. He emphasizes the parallel with the Alexander legend.
 159. “Messianic imperialism” is Geoffrey Parker’s phrase; see Parker, “Place of Tudor England.”
 160. See Subrahmanyam, “Du Tage au Gange,” 58–60; Robert Finlay, “Prophecy

- and Politics in Istanbul: Charles V, Sultan Süleyman, and the Habsburg Embassy of 1533–1534,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 2 (1998): 1–31.
161. Fleischer, “Mahdi, Messiah,” 1–3, confirming an idea of F. Braudel’s.
 162. *Ibid.*, 4.
 163. Barnai, *Sabbateanism*, 107.
 164. Paul B. Fenton, “Shabbatay Sebī and his Muslim Contemporary Muhammad an-Niyāzī,” in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, vol. III, ed. D. R. Blumenthal (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 81–88.
 165. See Marc D. Baer, “Honored by the Glory of Islam: The Ottoman State, Non-Muslims, and Conversion to Islam in Late Seventeenth-Century Istanbul and Rumelia” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2001), 301–03.
 166. See Daniel W. Hollis III, *ABC-CLIO World History Companion to Utopian Movements* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 151–52.
 167. Katz, *Dreams, Sufism and Sainthood*, 224.
 168. Fleischer, “Mahdi, Messiah,” 17.
 169. See Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 55–56 and ch. 6.
 170. See Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983).
 171. See *Les traditions apocalyptiques au tournant de la chute de Constantinople* [*Varia Turcica* 33], ed. B. Lellouch and S. Yerasimos (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2000), considering several sides of this issue; Carl Göllner, *Die Türkenfrage in der öffentlichen Meinung Europas im 16. Jahrhundert* [*Turcica* 3] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1978), 173–86; Dorothy M. Vaughan, *Europe and the Turk: A Pattern of Alliances, 1350–1700* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1954); Robert Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453–1517)* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967); Gow, *Red Jews*, ch. 6, esp. 160–75; Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. ch. 5; Matar, *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Matar’s work is particularly useful for understanding the trialectic relationship.
 172. See Popkin, “Rabbi Nathan Shapira’s Visit.” On Christian conceptions of the Jewish return to Palestine and its significance, see esp. the articles by Nabil Matar on the subject: “The Idea of the Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought: From the Reformation Until 1660,” *Durham University Journal* 78 (1985): 23–36; “The Idea of the Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought: From 1661–1701,” *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 115–48.
 173. For important discussions of sixteenth-century Jewish views about the apocalyptic roles of Christians and Muslim, see Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, “Messianic Impulses in Joseph ha-Kohen,” in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B. D. Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 460–87; Moshe Hallamish, “The Attitude Toward Christianity and Islam in *Kaf ha-Ketoret*,” [Hebrew] *Da’at* 43 (1999): 53–76.
 174. The following discussion is based entirely on Israel Friedlaender, “Shiitic

- Influences in Jewish Sectarianism,” in Saperstein, *Essential Papers*, ch. 5, originally published as part of a larger study in *Jewish Quarterly Review* n.s. 1 (1910–11, 2 [1911–12], and 3 [1912–13]).
175. See Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200–1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), esp. chs. 2, 6, 7.

2. Messianism and Prophecy

1. See Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs, from the Galilee to Crown Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), chs. 2–4; Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, chs. 1–5; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, chs. 1–2.
2. See Abba Hillel Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel, from the First through the Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Macmillan, 1927; reprint, Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1978).
3. See Gerson D. Cohen, “Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim,” in Saperstein, *Essential Papers*, ch. 8 (originally published in Cohen, *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991]), 202–33; Elisheva Carlebach, “Between History and Hope: Jewish Messianism in Ashkenaz and Sepharad” (third annual Victor J. Selmanowitz Chair of Jewish History lecture, Touro College, 1998).
4. See Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941), chs. 7–8.
5. See Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, ch. 4; Idel, “Introduction” to Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*; Ruderman, “Hope Against Hope.”
6. See Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Littman Library, 1998), chs. 1–3.
7. See Aron Rodrigue, “The Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire,” in *Spain and the Jews: The Sephardi Experience 1492 and After*, ed. E. Kedourie (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 162.
8. See, e.g., Ruderman, “Hope Against Hope.” The autobiography of R. Hayyim Vital from two generations before Shabbatai is full of information concerning the great kabbalist’s discussions with Muslims on messianism, prophecy, and other topics. See Vital, “Book of Visions,” in *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies: Book of Visions and Book of Secrets*, trans., ed., and introduced by M. M. Faierstein (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), *passim*.
9. See Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, ch. 4, esp. 145 and notes; and the more extensive discussion of these matters in Chapter 2 below.
10. On Abarbanel’s messianism, see Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, ch. 4. For a critique, see Lawee, “The Messianism of Isaac Abarbanel.”
11. See Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 132–35 and notes; Ira Robinson, “Abraham ben Eliezer Halevi: Kabbalist and Messianic Visionary of the Early Sixteenth Century” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1980).
12. See *Ma’amar Mashre Kitrin*, ed. G. G. Scholem and M. Beit-Arié [Hebrew] (Je-

- rusalem: Jewish National and University Library, 1978); *Galya Raza*, ed. Rachel Elior [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1981).
13. Tishby, *Messianism in the Time of the Expulsion from Spain and Portugal* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1985). Portions can be found in English translation in Saperstein, *Essential Papers*, ch. 11.
 14. On this movement see Haim Beinart, *Chapters in Judeo-Spanish History* vol. II [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 543–788; Renée Levine Melammed, *Heretics or Daughters of Israel? The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 3.
 15. I say this despite the case made by Moshe Idel (*Messianic Mystics*, ch. 4) that much of the agitation was not kabbalistic. I think the evidence still indicates Kabbalah was quite important.
 16. See Idel, *ibid.*, 140–42; Lenowitz, *Jewish Messiahs*, 99–101; Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, 329–34.
 17. *Ibid.*, 336–50.
 18. See Aescoly, *Sippur David ha-Reubeni*; Lenowitz, *Jewish Messiahs*, ch. 5; Miriam Eliav-Feldon, “Invented Identities: Credulity in the Age of Prophecy and Exploration,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 3 (1999): 203–32.
 19. See Lenowitz, *Jewish Messiahs*, Ch. 5; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 144–52 and notes; Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, 387–434. Aescoly also published editions of Molkho’s works.
 20. See David Tamar, “Expectations in Italy for the Year of Redemption in 1575: Two Chapters from the Anonymous Book ‘Avodat ha-Qodesh,’” in Tamar, *Studies in the History of the Jewish People in Eretz Israel and in Italy* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1986), 11–38 (originally published in *Sefunot* 2 [1958]: 61–88); Yoram Jacobson, *Along the Path of Exile and Redemption: The Doctrine of Redemption of Rabbi Mordecai Dato* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1986), ch. 4.
 21. See, e.g., Lenowitz, *Jewish Messiahs*, ch. 6; Lenowitz, “A Spirit-Possession Tale as an Account of the Equivocal Insertion of R. Hayim Vital into the Role of Messiah,” in *Spirit Possession in Judaism: Cases and Contexts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. M. Goldish (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003), 197–212; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, ch. 5; David Tamar, “Rabbi Isaac Luria and Rabbi Hayyim Vital as Messiah son of Joseph,” in Tamar, *Studies in the History*, 115–23 (originally published in *Sefunot* 7 [1963]: 169–77); Vital, *Book of Visions*, *passim*.
 22. Ziegler, an Amsterdam Ashkenazi, presented himself as a prophet of the coming messiah around 1650, but he appears to have made little impression. We know of him only through the history of the Jews of Basnage. See Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, 438–39.
 23. See Silver, *History of Messianic Speculation*, ch. 7. The intensity of this activity was compounded by the acute messianism in seventeenth-century Europe.
 24. Much new evidence about the *converso* connection is presented in Barnai, *Sabbateanism*, chs. 1–4 and *passim*. Scholem was also well aware of the *converso* role and mentions it in passing at various points. Stephen Sharot, *Messianism*,

- Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 101–14, gives a relatively detailed account of the possible links between *conversos* and Sabbateanism, but neither Scholem nor Sharot offers the concrete documentary evidence that Barnai has assembled to make the connection.
25. The literature on Sepharadi (Spanish) Jews and *conversos* is enormous, but one might start with Kedourie, *Spain and the Jews*.
 26. The foregoing paragraphs, and much of what follows, are based on Goldish, “Patterns in Converso Messianism.”
 27. Elias Lipiner discusses the debate about Bandarra’s *converso* background, which is still inconclusive. See Lipiner, *O sapateiro de Trancoso e o Alfaiate de Setúbal* (Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora, 1993), 25–33.
 28. See *ibid.*, *passim*; J. Lúcio de Azevedo, *A Evolução do Sebastianismo* (Lisbon: Livraria Clássica Editora, 1947); Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), ch. 7, who makes the explicit connection between Sebastianism and Sabbateanism.
 29. See Antonio José Saraiva, “Bocarro-Rosales and the Messianism of the Sixteenth Century,” in *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*, ed. Y. Kaplan, H. Méchoulan, and R. H. Popkin (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 240–43; Francisco Moreno-Carvalho, “Yaakov Rosales: Medicine, Astrology, and Political Thought in the Works of a Seventeenth-Century Jewish-Portuguese Physician,” *Korot: The Israel Journal of the History of Medicine and Science* 10 (1993–4): 143–156; Moreno-Carvalho, “On the Boundaries of Our Understanding: The Case of Manuel Bocarro Francês/Jacob Rosales’ Intellectual Life,” in *Troubled Souls: Conversos, Crypto-Jews, and Other Confused Jewish Intellectuals from the Fourteenth Through the Eighteenth Century*, ed. C. Meyers and N. Simms (Hamilton, New Zealand: Outrigger Publishers, 2001), 65–75.
 30. A comment made by Saraiva may be helpful in understanding this paradoxical belief system. In comparing the millenarian Jesuit Antonio Vieira with Bocarro-Rosales, he suggests they have in common “their belief in a sort of recurrence of the same human being, or soul, appearing behind several masks throughout history. Bocarro seems to have believed that he himself was a new Rosales [after his ancestor], and D. Teodósio [the current Duke of Bragança] was a new D. Fernando [the Duke of Bragança in his ancestor’s time].” Saraiva, “Bocarro-Rosales,” 243. Were the thinkers involved here actually kabbalists one would be inclined to consider such a belief in terms of *gigul ha-neshamot*, the metempsychosis stressed in Lurianic Kabbalah. Moreno-Carvalho, “On the Boundaries,” takes a systematic approach to this question and comes up with rather different ideas.
 31. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court*, 306–13.
 32. On Menasseh’s relationships with Christian millenarians, see Roth, *A Life of Menasseh*, ch. 8; *Menasseh ben Israel and His World*; Menachem Dorman, *Menasseh ben Israel* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uhad, 1989), intro. On all aspects of Menasseh’s activities, see J. H. Copenhagen, *Menasseh ben Israel: A Bibliography* (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1990).

33. See, e.g., David Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996). While there are those who claim crypto-Judaism was essentially an invention of the Inquisition, I believe that much *converso* testimony reflects real practices.
34. The role of Kabbalah in Sabbateanism is the subject of a major scholarly debate, mainly between Gershom Scholem, who argued for the centrality of Lurianic Kabbalah in the rise of Sabbateanism, and Moshe Idel, who argues against it. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, ch. 1; Idel, “One from a Town, Two from a Clan”; Idel, “Shabbatai [Saturn] the Planet.”
35. The picture I present here is based on the writings of Gershom Scholem, Moshe Idel, Elliot Wolfson, R. J. Z. Werblowsky, and Mordecai Pachter, though I am not certain that any one of them would agree with the my entire composite.
36. Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 265–69 and elsewhere.
37. See in general Jacob Katz, *Divine Law in Human Hands: Case Studies in Halakhic Flexibility* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), esp. 78–84.
38. I have no intention of entering the debate over the age of these books. However, they are clearly pseudepigraphic.
39. See Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, 305–08 and notes; R. Abraham b. Eliezer ha-Levi, *Shloshah Ma’amare Ge’ulah: Nevu’at ha-Yeled, Mashreh Kitrin, Iggeret Sod ha-Ge’ulah*, ed. Amnon Gross (Jerusalem: Aaron Barazani, 2000), 1–106. Note that the person who brought this text to press was Rabbi Jacob Zemah, that most messianic of contemporary Palestinian sages, and a Portuguese former *converso*.
40. Again, see Katz, *Divine Law*; Moshe Hallamish, *Kabbalah: In Liturgy, Halakhah and Customs* [Hebrew] (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000).
41. It is discussed in Avraham Elqayam, “The Mystery of Faith in the Writings of Nathan of Gaza” [Hebrew] (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1993), 32–66.
42. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 436; quoted from Leyb b. Oyzer.
43. Idel, *Messianic Movements*, 127.
44. Meir Benayahu, *The Toledoth ha-Ari and Luria’s ‘Manner of Life’ (Hanhagoth)* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute at the Hebrew University, 1967), 224.
45. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 387–88 n122; Barnai, *Sabbateanism*, 46.

3. Nathan of Gaza

1. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 199–206.
2. This important episode is discussed in detail in *ibid.*, 203–13. Much of what I have to say here consists of a shift in emphasis on certain aspects of the vision.
3. *Ibid.*, 204–214.
4. *Ibid.*, 205.
5. The following version is from *ibid.*, 204–05. The account is found in Columbia University Library MS X893-Z8, 1:20, fol. 16v-17r (reproduced in: Scholem, *Major Trends*, 417–18); a shorter version in Oxford Neubauer MS. 2571 (repro-

- duced and discussed by Chaim Wirszubski in *Zion* 3 [1938], 215–20 and 227–35; reproduced in Wirszubski, *Between the Lines* (Hebrew) [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990], 121–26 and 133–41); another version in Moscow Guenzburg MS. 517; and a longer version in Ben-Zvi Amarillo MS. 2262 fol. 1–37 (reproduced and discussed in Scholem, “Iggeret Natan Ha-Azati al Shabbatai Zvi ve-Hamarato,” *Kovez al Yad* 6 [16; 1966]: 421–56, reproduced in idem, *Texts and Studies*, 233–73, and partially in Scholem *Shabbatai Zvi*, Heb., vol. 1, 166–67.
6. Aaron Freimann, *Injane Sabbatai Zewi* (Berlin: Mekize Nirdamim, 1912; repr. Jerusalem, 1968), 95–96; excerpts corrected and reproduced in Scholem, *Shabbatai Zvi*, Heb., vol. 1, 167–69 and *Sabbatai Şevi*, 205–06 The version here is my translation from Freimann, with some corrections based on Scholem’s Hebrew quotations.
 7. This refers to the chariot seen by Ezekiel (Ch. 1), the focus of much early Jewish mystical thought. This critical word is missing in Freimann’s version.
 8. Baruch of Arezzo, *Zikhron Li-vne Yisra’el* in Freimann, *Injane*, 47. Baruch was a believer. A large section of this work in English translation, along with an introduction, can be found in Matt Goldish, “The Early Messianic Career of Shabbatai Zvi,” in *Judaism in Practice, from the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, ed. L. Fine (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 470–82. Sections are reproduced here with the kind permission of Princeton University Press.
 9. This date does not accord with what we know of the timing. Elul 5425 would be in early fall, whereas both this first Sabbatean prophecy and the second, discussed below, occurred in the spring of that year.
 10. The examples of this are rife in the Lurianic literature, but see, e.g., Benayahu, *Toledoth ha-ARI*, 164–65, 181–83, 230.
 11. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 210.
 12. For Abulafia’s instructions on mystical experience, see Louis Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken, 1976), 57–72; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 135–38. For al-Botini’s instructions, see David R. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism: A Source Reader*, vol. 2 (New York: Ktav, 1982), 70–79. On the technique of seclusion, particularly with reference to the Abulafia school, see Moshe Idel, “*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah,” in Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), ch. 7. On the relationship between *merkabah* (chariot) and *harkabah* (combination), see Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 50; Idel, *Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 21, and chaps. 1 and 3 in general. The point concerning Vital’s preference of focus on Mishnah is made in Paul B. Fenton, “Solitary Meditation in Jewish and Islamic Mysticism in the Light of a Recent Archeological Discovery,” *Medieval Encounters* 1 (1995): 290–91.
 13. See R. Hayyim Vital, *Sha’are Kedushah* (Jerusalem, 1981), 75v–77r, and in general in part III, Sha’ar 6–7 for Vital’s explication of the mystical ascent toward

prophetic revelation. A more complete view of Vital's notions on prophecy and instructions for specific stages of the mystical ascent can be found in his *Sha'ar Ru'ah ha-Kodesh* (Jerusalem, 1879).

14. Although Nathan was certainly indebted to Abulafia and his followers for the precise techniques, there is no doubt that Vital was an influence on his vision as well. Many of the same methods of preparation are found in Vital, *Sha'are Kedushah*, part III, Sha'ar 8, but Vital does not use the wording which is almost identical in Abulafia, Albotini, and Nathan. Vital's debt to Abulafia is pointed out in R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962 [reprint: Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977]), 39. Werblowsky gives an excellent account of prophetic and divinatory methods in sixteenth-century Palestine.
15. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 63 and 61 respectively.
16. Blumenthal, *Understanding Jewish Mysticism*, 72–73.
17. Fenton, "Solitary Meditation."
18. Ibid.; Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, ch. 6; Jonathan Katz, "Visionary Experience, Autobiography, and Sainthood in North African Islam," *Princeton Papers in Near Eastern Studies* 1 (1992): 85–118, esp. 86–88, 104; Albrecht Hofheinz, *Internalizing Islam: Shaykh Muhammad Majdhūb, Scriptural Islam, and Local Context in the Early Nineteenth-Century Sudan* (Bergen: University of Bergen, 1996), ch. 7, esp. 475–77, where he questions Katz's conclusions.
19. This connection was made by Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 280.
20. Moshe Idel describes Abulafia as "A prophet of his own messianism, a Messiah who dreamed of bringing prophetic experiences to the masses." Idel, "The Time of the End': Apocalypticism and Its Spiritualization in Abraham Abulafia," in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. A. I. Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 158.
21. The literature on possession is very large. See T. K. Oesterreich, *Possession: Demoniacal and Other, Among Primitive Races, in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times* (London: Kegan Paul, 1930); I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1971); D. P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion from the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987). Several of the articles in Holm, *Religious Ecstasy*, also deal with this topic. For Jewish aspects, see Gedalyah Nigal, *Magic, Mysticism, and Hasidism: The Supernatural in Jewish Thought* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1994); Nigal, *Dybbuk Tales in Jewish Literature*, 2d ed. [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1993); Lawrence Fine, "Maggidic Revelation in the Teachings of Isaac Luria," in *Mystics, Philosophers and Politicians: Essays in Jewish Intellectual History in Honor of Alexander Altmann*, ed. J. Reinharz, D. Swetschinski, and K. Bland (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982), 141–57; *Spirit Possessions in Judaism*; J. H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Yoram Bilu and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, "Dybbuk-Possession as a Hysterical Symptom: Psychodynamic and Socio-Cultural Fac-

- tors,” *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 26 (1989), 138–49; Howard Schwartz, “Spirit Possessions in Judaism,” *Parabola* 19:4 (Winter, 1994), 72–77.
22. See S. Pines, “Le *Sefer ha-Tamar* et les *Maggidim* des kabbalistes,” in *Hommage à Georges Vajda*, ed. G. Nahon and C. Touati (Louvain: Éditions Peeters, 1980), 333–63.
 23. See Gershom Scholem, “The ‘Magid’ of R. Yosef Taitazak and the Revelations Attributed to Him,” [Hebrew] *Sefunot* 11 [*Sefer Yavan* 1] (1971–77): 67–112; Moshe Idel, “Inquiries into the Doctrine of ‘Sefer ha-Meshiv,’” [Hebrew] *Sefunot* 17 [N.S. 2] (1983): 185–266.
 24. See Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*.
 25. *Ibid.*, 14; Vital, “Book of Visions,” *passim*.
 26. See Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, chaps. 4 and 12.
 27. Fine, “Maggidic Revelation,” 143.
 28. On R. Samson Ostropoler’s *maggid* see Yehuda Liebes, “Mysticism and Reality: Towards a Portrait of the Martyr and Kabbalist, R. Samson Ostropoler,” in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. I. Twersky and B. Septimus (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies, 1987), 221–55. Oddly enough, there is a possible connection between R. Samson’s *maggid* and the original Sabbatean circle in the Land of Israel as well (pp. 24–25 and notes there).
 29. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 172–173.
 30. Freimann, *Injane Sabbatai Zewi*, 47. This is my English translation from Fine, *Judaism in Practice*, 476.
 31. See Harris Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 132–33. On the issue of odor in Jewish tradition and Kabbalah, see Abraham Ofir Shemesh, “Scents, the World of Souls, and Paradise,” [Hebrew] *Da’at* 47 (2001): 53–68.
 32. See Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, 286–89.
 33. On Karo and his *maggid* see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*. For Karo in general see Meir Benayahu, *Yosef Behiri* (Jerusalem: Yad ha-Rav Nissim, 1991).
 34. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies*, 123–26.
 35. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 218.
 36. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, vii, 26; Avraham Ya’ari, *Shluhei Eretz Yisra’el* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1977), 154–55, 157–58, 281–82. Ya’ari notes the influence of the *Maggid Mesharim* on the maggidic manifestations of the later Sabbatean R. Mordecai Ashkenazi, and the Sabbatean-influenced R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto. I hope to discuss the prophecy of these later figures elsewhere.
 37. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 203 and n13.
 38. Quoted in Chaim Wirszubski, “The Sabbatean Ideology of the Messiah’s Apostasy According to Nathan of Gaza and the *Iggeret Magen Avraham*,” in Wirszubski, *Between the Lines: Kabbalah, Christian Kabbalah and Sabbatianism*, ed.

- M. Idel [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990), 232 (originally in *Zion* 3 [1938]: 232.)
39. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 203.
 40. *Ibid.*, 75–76.
 41. Werblowsky, *Lawyer and Mystic*, 122–24.
 42. On aspects of Safed mysticism in the sixteenth century, see the essays in Goldish, ed., *Spirit Possession in Judaism*; Lawrence Fine, *Safed Spirituality* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1984). On the particular Sufi-kabbalistic relationships, see Moshe Idel, “R. Yehudah Hallewa and his ‘Zafanat Pa’aneah,’” [Hebrew] *Shalem* 4 (1984): 119–48 and n75.
 43. Mor Altshuler is presently studying messianic aspects of R. Karo’s writings and has presented her work at scholarly conferences.
 44. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 171–72, 245–47, 256, 263, 276, 355, and 389 on Lurianists who joined the Sabbatean movement; 203 on the Azikri manuscript; 212–15 on Nathan as a soul doctor; 244 on the location of hidden tombs and prayer thereat; 271–72 on the replacement of Lurianic *tikkunim*; 280 on Nathan and reincarnation of Luria.
 45. *Ibid.*, 84. This tremendously important distinction, whose implications Scholem did not pursue, was also made by Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 177.
 46. See Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 15–19. Later kabbalists’ inclusions of elements from Cordoverian Kabbalah in their Lurianic treatises may be a result of the same delicate treatment. See, e.g., Bracha Sack, “The Influence of Cordovero on Seventeenth-Century Jewish Thought,” in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. I. Twersky and B. Septimus (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 365–79; *EJ* s.v. “Fano, Menahem Azariah da (1548–1620),” vol. 6, col. 1175–6.
 47. See Howard E. Adelman, “Success and Failure in the Seventeenth Century Ghetto of Venice: The Life and Thought of Leon Modena, 1571–1648,” Part 1 (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1985), 469–78.
 48. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 394–95.
 49. In Chapter 2 I mentioned that Basnage speaks of a pretender named Ziegler who was active in Western Europe around 1650, but he clearly made little impression.
 50. For a far deeper and broader perspective on this issue see Avraham Elqayam, “The Hidden Messiah: On Messiah son of Joseph According to Nathan of Gaza, Shabbatai Zvi and A. M. Cardoso,” [Hebrew] *Da’at* 38 (1997): 33–82. See also Tamar, “Luria and Vital.”
 51. For more on Nathan’s maggidic revelation and its place in the history of Jewish possessions, see Goldish, “Vision and Possession: Nathan of Gaza’s Earliest Sabbatean Prophecies in Historical Perspective,” in Goldish, ed., *Spirit Possession in Judaism*.
 52. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi* (p. 225 n72) points out that this expression is taken from the Song of Songs, but was first used by R. Joseph Karo and later others

- to refer to the experience of xenoglossia or automatic speech by the power of a *maggid*. This ties the Vision of R. Abraham back to Nathan's public maggidic possession on Shavu'ot night, and to his link with the Karo tradition.
53. As Scholem notes (*Sabbatai Sevi*, 225), these are untranslatable puns, but I have added them here to make clear the reference to Moses and his father, Amram, redeemers of the Jews from Egyptian exile.
 54. Scholem (*ibid.*, 225 n72) comments that this figure in the vision is "Based on the denigrating description of Pharaoh given in the Talmud (B. Mo'ed Qatan 18a). In Nathan's paradoxical symbolism the messiah is the true Pharaoh." This is borne out by Nathan's commentary to the vision.
 55. Here Scholem adds a note (*ibid.*, 226; and see 110–11) that this refers to R. Moses Pinheiro, Shabbatai's childhood friend, and their teacher, R. Isaac de Alba, in Izmir. The Hebrew text refers to *hanhagot* (ritual practices) associated particularly with Luria, which suggests to me that the passage may still be referring to him on some level.
 56. Scholem (*ibid.*, 226 n. 83) identifies these by a passage in the *Zohar* as demons born of nocturnal emissions.
 57. Scholem, *ibid.*, 224–26, with minor additions.
 58. Elqayam, "The Mystery of Faith," ch. 2. Elqayam follows the path set out by his teacher, Yehuda Liebes. See Liebes, "Sabbatean Messianism," and "Sabbatai Zevi's Religious Faith," in Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 93–113.
 59. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 225 n25.
 60. See Liebes, "Sabbatean Messianism," 106. My understanding takes a somewhat different direction and is of course heavily influenced by Scholem's convincing analysis of Nathan.
 61. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 227 and n84.
 62. The passage in question is translated in Lenowitz, *Jewish Messiahs*, 117–9; from Aescoli, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, 398–400. Aescoli quotes from his own edition of Molkho's book, and his comments on 400–01 are invaluable.
 63. Ha-Levi, *Shloshah Ma'amare Ge'ulah*, 2. On this work see, e.g., J. Dan, "Concerning the Episode of *Nevu'at ha-Yeled*," *Shalem* 1 (1974): 229–34.
 64. *Ibid.*, 9. On young Jewish visionaries and wonder-children in the early modern world, including several cases which bear on Nathan's vision, see David B. Ruderman, "Three Contemporary Perceptions of a Polish Wunderkind of the Seventeenth Century," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 4 (1979): 143–63. It is highly noteworthy that R. Jacob Sasportas, the great opponent of the Sabbateans, was aware of the Gródek case at the center of Ruderman's article, and that unlike R. Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, he tended to believe supernatural forces were at work. See Jacob Sasportas, *Sefer Zizat Novel Zvi*, ed. I Tishby (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1954), 147.
 65. See Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 56.
 66. Scholem, *Be-Iqvot Mashi'ah*, 55.

67. *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. and ed. C.W.R.D. Moseley (New York: Penguin, 1983), 50.
68. See *Book of Mormon*, passim; John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ch. 7.
69. Scholem (*Sabbatai Şevi*, 232) claims that Joseph Almosnino was aware of the forgery (though not bothered by it) because he refers to it as “a vision that [Nathan] beheld.” However, if Almosnino heard Cuenque’s version of the apocalypse’s origin (ibid., 230 n88), that it was given directly to Nathan by Elijah, his comment would not indicate a belief that Nathan was the original visionary, but only that Nathan had a vision in which he was given the “Vision of R. Abraham.”
70. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics*. A detailed discussion of early modern pseudepigrapha and forgery can be found in K. K. Ruthven, *Faking Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Ruthven makes the important argument that the disparagement of literary forgery is really an attempt to mask the fact that literature and forgery are equally creative constructions.
71. I do think Funkenstein goes too far in completely denying a genuine Jewish humanism. See Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 208–19.
72. This is the view of Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 229–33.
73. This letter is discussed in detail in ibid., 267–90; Elqayam, “The Mystery of Faith,” part II, ch. 2.
74. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 269.
75. Ibid., 272, with my minor modifications to the translation.
76. See Benayahu, *Toledoth ha-AR”I*, 158–59, 169–71, 178–79, 217–24; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 141–45.
77. Scholem points out (*Sabbatai Şevi*, 280) that Nathan saw himself as a reincarnation of Luria, and that this was what gave him the authority to modify or eliminate Lurianic practices.
78. See Lenowitz, “Insertion of R. Hayyim Vital.”
79. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 276.
80. See Benyahu, *Toledoth ha-AR”I*, 168–69.
81. See, e.g., Gershom Scholem, “The Story of R. Joseph della Reyna,” [Hebrew] *Zion* 5 (1939–40): 123–30; Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 175–76; Zalman Shazar, “The Story of Joseph della Reyna in Sabbatian Tradition,” [Hebrew] *Eder ha-Yakar: S. A. Horodetsky Jubilee Volume*, ed. E. Bin-Gurion (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1947), 97–118.
82. Aescoly, *Jewish Messianic Movements*, 330.
83. Scholem astutely points out that “even” in this case really means “especially.” Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 284–85.
84. This is a major theme in the researches of Yehuda Liebes and Avraham Elqayam. Scholem was convinced, for reasons not entirely clear to me, that Nathan’s fascination with Christian images and doctrines, as well as his interest

- in previous messiahs more generally, must have come mainly from Shabbatai. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 211–12, 217, 284–85.
85. Scholem is not entirely correct in stating that the material here fits the traditional apocalyptic mode and was therefore attractive to ordinary Jews. See *ibid.*, 287.
 86. This is the thesis of Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550–1750*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Littman Library, 1998).
 87. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 274 n221. Some of Scholem’s references are clearly unrelated to the imagery Nathan is attempting to conjure.
 88. *Ibid.*, 286.
 89. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Principles of Torah*, ch. 7. All translations below are my own.
 90. *Ibid.*, s. 2.
 91. *Ibid.*, s. 7.
 92. *Ibid.*, ch. 8, ss. 1 and 3.
 93. For this reason I disagree with Scholem (*Sabbatai Ševi*, 212), who claims that because of Maimonides’ disdain for signs and miracles, Nathan’s doctrine “does not, therefore, constitute a radical innovation.” Nathan must modify Maimonides’ position in a subtle but critical way to make his claim. The Sabbateans’ use of this loophole in Maimonides is dealt with in David Berger, “Some Ironic Consequences of Maimonides’ Rationalistic Messianism,” [Hebrew] in *Maimonidean Studies, Vol. 2*, ed. A. Hyman (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1991), 4–6. But note that it is Maimonides’ position on *prophecy* that Nathan must finesse.
 94. Scholem (*Sabbatai Ševi*, 211, and in more detail concerning the Christian overtones on 282–83) points out the centrality of this doctrine and the probable Christian influences upon it. Elqayam and Liebes place it at the center of their analyses of Nathan.
 95. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings*, ch. 11, s. 3.
 96. See Lenowitz, *Jewish Messiahs*, 14–15 and *passim*, on the question of past messianic pretenders and the literature associated with them.
 97. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 284–85 and below. Bar-Kosiba becomes an even bigger subject for Abraham Miguel Cardoso.
 98. See Menachem Kallus, “Pneumatic Spirit Possession and the Eschatology of the Soul,” in Goldish, ed., *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, 159–85.
 99. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 156; and 154; Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 284–85.
 100. The complex and fascinating history of bar-Kosiba’s image, including a fine treatment of the conflicts in Jewish thought concerning unfulfilled messiahs, can be found in Richard G. Marks, *The Image of Bar Kokhba in Traditional Jewish Literature: False Messiah and National Hero* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). Marks deals with Maimonides in ch. 2, and with Nathan in ch. 8.
 101. Maimonides, *Laws of Kings*, ch. 11.

102. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 285–86.
103. Zvi Mark, “Dybbuk and Devekut in the *Shivhe ha-Besht*,” in Goldish, ed., *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, 287–288.
104. Elisheva Carlebach has recently gathered the evidence of its use in German lands. See Carlebach, *Divided Souls: Converts from Judaism in Germany, 1500–1750* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 67–87.
105. See, e.g., Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), chs. 4–5; Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983); Louis Israel Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1925), bks. 3 and 4; Goldish, *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton*, ch. 6.
106. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 286.
107. See Bouwsma, *Concordia Mundi*, 276–281. Postel was not thinking in a vacuum. On various contemporary thinkers with related ideas, see Maurice de Gandillac, “Le thème postelien de la concorde universelle,” in *Guillaume Postel, 1581–1981* (Paris: Editions de la Maisnie, 1985), 191–97 and elsewhere in that volume.
108. See Webster, *Great Instauration; Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation*; Jean Dietz Moss, “*Godded with God*”: *Hendrik Niclaes and His Family of Love* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981).
109. See Allison P. Coudert, “Kabbalistic Messianism versus Kabbalistic Enlightenment,” in *Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, 107–24; Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 137–52. My understanding of the evidence is slightly different from Coudert’s.

4. From Mystical Vision to Prophetic Eruption

1. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 254.
2. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 4–5; my translation.
3. Baruch of Arezzo, *Zikkaron le-Vne Yisra’el*, trans. M. Goldish in *Judaism in Practice*, 474–75.
4. In the Yiddish text the author repeatedly refers to Sarah with the Hebrew word *betulah*, a virgin.
5. *The Story of Shabbetay Zevi by R. Leib ben R. Ozer, Amsterdam, 1711–1718*, trans. Z. Shazar, ed. S. Zucker and R. Plesser [Yiddish and Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1978), 13–15.
6. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, p. 195. Note that Sasportas and Baruch had contact with the girl, her family, and those who knew her. Two other accounts about Sarah, from the Frenchman de la Croix and from the German convert Ragstatt de Weile, contain some variant details, but these are doubtful and based on

- legend. The account by Johannes Braun appears to be based on the same legend known to Ragstatt about the coat of Eve. On these versions see Scholem, *ibid.*, pp. 193–95.
7. This point is brought out by Harris Lenowitz, “A Spirit Possession Tale as an Account of the Equivocal Insertion of Rabbi Hayyim Vital into the Role of Messiah,” in M. Goldish, ed., *Spirit Possession in Judaism, 197–212*.
 8. *Ibid.*, app. G.
 9. This fear was most famously realized in the case of the brilliant John Dee. Despite his great learning, he spent years being duped by the unscrupulous medium Edward Kelly, who pretended to be conversing with angels through the aid of the famous crystal ball.
 10. This is a highly simplified picture of a very complex phenomenon that will be dealt with sporadically throughout the chapter. In general see Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (California: University of California Press, 1992); Rosalynn Voaden, *God’s Words, Women’s Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (St. Edmunds, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 1999).
 11. See Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia’s Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
 12. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 196.
 13. Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden*, 41. All quotations from this work here are my translations from the Hebrew edition.
 14. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 195 n. But de la Croix’s story contains more material suggestive of the unchaste side than Scholem indicates. See de la Croix, *Memoire . . . contenant diverses Relations très curieuses de l’Empire Ottoman*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1684), 278–80.
 15. Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden*, 45.
 16. *Ibid.*, 192 n.
 17. From *Toledot Yeshu ha-Notzri*, in J. D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Wikuhim: A Collection of Polemics and Disputations* (in Hebrew) (np, nd; reprint, Israel, n/p, 1969), 227.
 18. On the place of the Adam/Messiah relationship in Sabbateanism and its important relationship to Christian ideas, see Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, 203–04.
 19. See Angelo S. Rappoport and Raphael Patai, *Myth and Legend in Ancient Israel*, vol. 1 (New York: Ktav, 1996), 156–59.
 20. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 191–97.
 21. Rebecca was the wife of Isaac and the second mother of the entire Jewish people. Sarah and Rebecca are the only women who could claim this distinction.
 22. The question of female prophecy in the movement is discussed in the context of a larger study about women in Sabbateanism by Ada Rappoport-Albert, “On the Position of Women in Sabbatianism,” [Hebrew] in *The Sabbatian Movement and Its Aftermath: Messianism, Sabbatianism and Frankism (Ha-Halom U-Shevaro)*, vol. 1, ed. R. Elior [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Institute of Jewish Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2001), 147–60, and thereafter dealing with women prophets after Shabbatai’s conversion. While Rappoport-Albert deals brilliantly

with this material in the context of Jewish women's history, my aim is to consider the same events and personalities within the context of the Sabbatean movement's early internal dynamics.

23. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 396–400.
24. A good introduction to the man and his thought, along with many translated texts, is available in *Abraham Miguel Cardoso: Selected Writings* translated and introduced by David J. Halperin (New York: Paulist Press, 2001). For Cardoso's background in classical philosophy and ecclesiastical theology, see Nissim Yosha, "The Philosophical Background of Sabbatian Theology—Guidelines Toward an Understanding of Abraham Michael Cardoso's Theory of the Divine," in *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. A. Mirsky, A. Grossman and Y. Kaplan (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1988), 541–72. See also Yosha's master's thesis from the Hebrew University on Cardoso. For a detailed study of Cardoso's view of the divine presence, see Elliot Wolfson, "Constructions of the Shekhinah in the Messianic Theosophy of Abraham Cardoso, With an Annotated Edition of *Derush ha-Shekhinah*," *Kabbalah* 3 (1998): 11–143. For a view opposing Scholem's interpretation of Cardoso as a gnostic, see Bruce Rosenstock, "Abraham Miguel Cardoso's Messianism: A Reappraisal," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 23:1 (1998): 63–104.
25. This is the surmise of Halperin; *Cardozo*, 118.
26. Tishby comments that she was apparently crippled.
27. Tishby says it should be the twenty-fifth.
28. *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 291–93. This and all material from this work quoted below are my translations from the Hebrew unless otherwise noted.
29. Cardoso's ideas concerning gender matters may be concealed in his complex theology of the Adamic androgyne, discussed in Wolfson, "Constructions of the Shekhinah," 57–89.
30. Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden*, 45.
31. Idel, "Shabbatai the Planet."
32. See Halperin, *Cardozo*, part I and sources cited there; Goldish, "Patterns in Converso Messianism"; Wolfson, "Constructions of the Shekhinah," 29–57.
33. Goldish, "Patterns."
34. See *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews*, ed. R. H. Popkin.
35. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 352.
36. *Ibid.*, 417–18.
37. *Ibid.*, 241–44.
38. Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden*, 53.
39. See *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, app. F (by Harris Lenowitz).
40. Goldish, "Early Messianic Career," p. 481.
41. Jacques Basnage, *The History of the Jews* (London, 1708), 758.
42. *Ibid.*, 53–54.
43. This point is made by Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 418.
44. Tishby notes that this is a location on the island of Elba.

45. *Zizat Novel Zvi*, p. 73.
46. Corrected in Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 256 n.
47. Freimann, *Injane Sabbatai Zewi*, 49; from my translation in “The Early Messianic Career,” 480. See also Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 420.
48. Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden*, 58.
49. Giacomo Saban (see next note) says this is the name of a district in Istanbul.
50. Michel Fèvre, *Teatro della turchia . . .* (Milan, 1680), trans. by Giacomo Saban, “Sabbatai Şevi as Seen by a Contemporary Traveler,” *Jewish History*, 7:2 (Fall, 1993): 112–13.
51. *Hollandtze Mercurius* (January 1666; published 1667), quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 419.
52. While the author mentions Samuel Peña, he may be confusing him with Hayyim Peña, whose daughters are known to have prophesied. See Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, pp. 108 and n14, 419–20.
53. Quoted in Nathaniel Crouch (ed), *Two Journeys to Jerusalem . . . With an Account of the Wonderful Delusion of the Jews, by a Counterfeit Messiah or false Christ at Smyrna, in 1666. and the Event thereof* (London, 1685), 143–44.
54. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 368.
55. *Ibid.*, 256–57 and n.
56. Barnai, *Sabbateanism*, 49–50.
57. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 392–393.
58. *Ibid.*, 245.
59. *Ibid.*, 256–57, 385.
60. See, e.g., Rouget, *Music and Trance*, ch. 7, esp. 271–81; Ernst Zbinden, *Die Djinn des Islam und der altorientalische Geisterglaube* (Bern: Paul Haupt, 1953).
61. Hanna Swiderska, “Three Polish Pamphlets on the Pseudo-Messiah Sabbaetai Şevi,” *British Library Journal* 15 (1989): 212–16; Heyd, “‘Jewish Quaker.’”
62. Coenen, *Ydele verwachtinge der Joden*, 59.
63. R. Farmer, quoted by Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Studies in Christian Enthusiasm, Illustrated from Early Quakerism* (Wallingsford, Penn.: Pendle Hill, 1948), p. 61 and surrounding discussion. Nuttall is very apologetic, but it is clear that this type of event occurred frequently among the Friends, who themselves did not like to describe it with any more detail than a reference to “the Power.” On the origins of lay prophesying in England and some German precedents, see Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), ch. 5.
64. Mack, *Visionary Women*.
65. See Chajes, *Between Worlds*, ch. 4; Chajes, “Judgments Sweetened: Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern Jewish Culture,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 1:2 (1997): 124–69.
66. See William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (London: Macmillan, 1912), 418–24 (quotation from 422). Richard H. Popkin (“Christian Interest and Concerns about Sabbatai Zebi,” *Jewish Messianism*, 94) claims Shabbatai was in Jerusalem at this time, but he was in fact still wandering in Greece. For our purposes the presence of Nathan is probably more interesting.

67. See *Spinoza's Earliest Publication?*, ed. R. H. Popkin and M. Signer.
68. Mack, *Visionary Women*, 169.
69. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 418–20.
70. See Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 356–57.
71. *Ibid.*, 358.
72. *Ibid.*, 361.
73. *Ibid.*, 360. On the Camisard prophets, their travels, and their influence, see Garrett, *Origins of the Shakers*; Schwartz, *The French Prophets*.
74. Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 376–78.
75. *Ibid.*, 377. Similar convulsions were occurring at the same time among Jansenists in Holland. I am grateful to Douglas Palmer for this information.
76. See William A. Christian, Jr., *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).
77. See, e.g., Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 40–42, where we learn of an apparition seen in Portugal by a relative of Isaac Pinto telling him to revert to Judaism. Several more famous and “mainstream” cases of *converso* visionaries are discussed in Catherine Swietlicki, *Spanish Christian Cabala: The Works of Luis de León, Santa Teresa de Jesús, and San Juan de la Cruz* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1986.)
78. See in particular the excellent analysis of gender and “discernment” issues in Voaden, *God's Words*.
79. See Lea, *Chapters*, 215–16.
80. Surtz, *Guitar of God*, 64.
81. See Haliczzer, *Between Exaltation and Infamy*.
82. Lea, *Chapters*, 220.
83. *Ibid.*, 223.
84. There is a vast literature on possession, but see for example Erika Bourguignon, *Possession* (San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp, 1976); I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1989); *Case Studies in Spirit Possession*, ed. V. Crapanzano and V. Garrison (New York: Wiley, 1977); Mary Keller, *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power and Spirit Possession* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
85. This point is made cogently by D. P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).
86. See *Witch-Hunting in Seventeenth-Century New England*, ed. D. D. Hall (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 205, 208–11 (xenoglossia, physical and mental feats); Henry Charles Lea, *Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft*, vol. 3, ed. A. C. Howland (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), 1040 (mental feats); Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 477–92; Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum—The Montague Summers Edition* (New York: Dover, 1988), 167–69.
87. Jean Michel Oughourlian, *The Puppet of Desire: The Psychology of Hysteria, Posses-*

- sion, and Hypnosis*, trans. E. Webb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 15.
88. *Ibid.*, 15 n., 98–144.
 89. I discuss this matter more in my paper, “Vision and Possession: Nathan of Gaza’s Earliest Prophecies in Historical Context,” in *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, 217–36.
 90. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 395–98, 420.
 91. Leib, *Story of Shabbetai Zevi*, 53–59.
 92. Coenen, *Ydele verwachinge der Joden*, 58–9.
 93. Beinart, in *Chapters*, 482.
 94. Coenen, *Ydele verwachinge der Joden*, 65.
 95. Scholem is missing this phrase in the English translation.
 96. Leib, *Story of Shabbetai Zevi*, 59–61.
 97. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 437–38; de la Croix, *Memoire*, 357–59; my emphases. I have also made minor changes to the translation given in Scholem.
 98. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 437: “His charisma was considered as miraculous as Nathan’s to which, indeed, it bore a striking resemblance.” And in n250: “Even his ecstatic dance and subsequent swoon are paralleled by Nathan’s similar performance at the Shabu’oth vigil in Gaza.”
 99. Scholem (*ibid.*, p. 438) makes an odd comment: “There can be no doubt that Moses Suriel established a new pattern of prophetic homiletics and inspired kabbalistical composition. The kabbalistic mysteries were no longer revealed by *maggidim* . . . but by supernal spirits and by angels incarnate in human bodies.” The texts indicate quite the opposite—that Suriel followed the precedent of Nathan’s prophetic style very closely, and that he was inspired with a *maggidic* possession precisely as was Nathan! Suriel indeed mentions that the earth is now full of angels in human bodies, but his own example shows renewed human prophecy through the medium of *maggidim* was still important.
 100. Mary E. Giles, *The Book of Prayer of Sor María of Santo Domingo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 9.
 101. On the myth of Apollo and Python and the founding of the Delphic oracle see Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).
 102. On the concept of a New Torah in messianic times, see Patai, *Messiah Texts*, 247–57. On the Sabbateans’ use of the concept see Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 319–25.
 103. See Harkness, *Dee’s Conversations*, ch. 5; quotation from 158.
 104. See Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, “Salvation Through Philology: The Poetical Messianism of Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651–1689),” in P. Schäfer and M. Cohen, *Toward the Millennium*, 259–98.

5. Opponents and Observers Respond

1. Quoted in Hillel Schwartz, *Knaves, Fools, Madmen, and That Subtile Effluvium: A Study of the Opposition to the French Prophets* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978), 41.

2. Personal conversation, 2001.
3. On Sasportas, including the details mentioned here, see my “Rabbi Jacob Sasportas: Defender of Torah Authority in an Age of Change” (MA thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1991), 3–12. I. Tishby’s introduction to his full edition of *Zizat Novel Zvi* contains much valuable material, and more can be found in Elie Moyal, *Rabbi Yaacob Sasportas* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1992), ch. 1.
4. On some of the problems facing these rabbinates see my “The Amsterdam Portuguese Rabbinate in the Seventeenth Century: A Unique Institution Viewed from Within and Without,” in *Dutch Jews as Perceived by Themselves and by Others: Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium on the History of the Jews in the Netherlands*, ed. C. Brasz and Y. Kaplan (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 9–19. On the Western Sephardi Diaspora and its leadership see Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, trans. R. Loewe (Oxford: Littman Library, 1989); Kaplan, *An Alternative Path to Modernity: The Sephardi Diaspora in Western Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Kaplan, “The Portuguese Community of Amsterdam in the 17th Century: Between Tradition and Change,” in *Society and Community: Proceedings of the Second International Congress for Research of the Sephardi and Oriental Jewish Heritage 1984*, ed. A. Haim (Jerusalem: Misgav Yerushalayim, 1991), 141–71.
5. On Sasportas’ personality and attitudes see Goldish, “Rabbi Jacob Sasportas”; Moyal, *Rabbi Yaacob Sasportas*, ch. 2; Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 566–72; Tishby, “Introduction”; Avraham Gross, “Demuto shel R. Ya’akov Sasportas mi-Tokh Sefer ha-Shu”t ‘Ohel Ya’akov,” *Sinai* 93:3–4 (1983): 132–41.
6. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 20.
7. *Ibid.*, 39.
8. *Ibid.*, 80–81.
9. *Ibid.*, 13–14, 38.
10. Lamentations 4:20. The words “the Lord” have been changed to “his Lord”, i.e. Shabbatai.
11. Isaiah 11:2.
12. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 13.
13. *Ibid.*, 39.
14. *Ibid.*, 81.
15. *Ibid.*, 83.
16. *Ibid.*, 14; biblical quotation from Isaiah 52:7.
17. *Ibid.*, 15.
18. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
19. Although Tishby (15 n1) refers to BT Shabbat 58r for this statement, I believe it is in fact based on BT Berakhot 7r: “R. Johanan said in the name of R. Yossi: Every single statement that came from the mouth of God was for the good; even if it was conditional He does not reverse Himself.”
20. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 14–15. Tishby gives a reference in the *Shivhe ha-AR”I*, but says he did not find the source for this particular version of the story.
21. *Ibid.*, 47; biblical quotation from Esther 1:18.

22. *Ibid.*, 116.
23. Carlebach, *Divided Souls*, ch. 4.
24. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 98.
25. *Ibid.*, 21.
26. *Ibid.*, 201.
27. See e.g. *ibid.*, 297–308.
28. The Talmud forbids Jews to follow the habits and styles of the idolatrous nations, symbolized by the tribe of the Amorites. In BT Shabbat 67r, “Abaye and Rava agree that any act of healing does not constitute the ‘ways of the Amorites’.” The Talmud then discusses the absurd converse: whether any act that is not for healing is “ways of the Amorite.”
29. The implication is that until now their impingements on Jewish doctrine had not been in fundamental areas, but with the Sabbatean faith these impingements came to touch on essentials.
30. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 251–52.
31. *Ibid.*, 128.
32. *Ibid.*, 3.
33. *Ibid.*, 60.
34. In the Talmud, the spirit of Navoth the Jezreelite says it will lead men astray by placing falsehoods in the mouths of all the prophets. See BT Shabbat 149v, Sanhedrin 89r and 102v.
35. The rabbis declare that prophets have these three qualities. See, e.g., Mishnah Avot 6:1; BT Shabbat 92r; BT Nedarim 38r.
36. According to Job 39:3. The whole passage paraphrases a passage in Otzar Midrashim, Hallel ch. 7.
37. Jeremiah 23:28. The full context, from 23:26–28, runs thus. “How long should this be? Is it in the heart of the prophets that prophecy lies, and the prophets of the deceit of their own heart? That think to cause My people to forget My name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What hath the straw to do with the wheat? Saith the Lord.”
38. Numbers 11:25. The passage refers to the seventy elders whom God inspired to prophesy in the desert. All ceased prophesying except Eldad and Medad.
39. Psalms 73:19–20.
40. Zechariah 5:11. The Midrashim (Eliahu Rabba 23 and Midrash Ruth 5:8) explain that Shinar is Babylonia, and that the Jews disposed (*le-na’er*) of their sins there; i.e. it was sin that built a home for itself in Shinar.
41. Proverbs 3:12.
42. Job 39:5.
43. Tishby refers the reader to Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* II:32 (in the translation of S. Pines [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], vol. II, 361–62.) This is in fact the source of several phrases and concepts in the discussion.

44. Based on BT Makkot 23r.
45. Job 39:5. This is the continuation of the passage from Job that Sasportas began quoting above.
46. Job 39:5, continuing his “commentary” on the same passage.
47. BT Tamid 26v.
48. Psalms 119:118. The whole passage is from *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 96.
49. Tishby, “Introduction,” 29.
50. Maimonides, *Guide*, 362.
51. See Ada Rapoport-Albert, “On the Position of Women in Sabbatianism,” 147–61.
52. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 306.
53. Deuteronomy 32:4.
54. Jeremiah 2:12.
55. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 43.
56. Tishby notes that this is not in our version of the letter Sasportas received, but we have other evidence showing Bloch’s involvement. Nathan also declared the annulment of the strict fast of the Ninth of Av, which was deemed unnecessary in light of the coming redemption.
57. Sasportas is speaking ironically of a talmudic dictate (e.g. BT Berakhot 16r, Betzah 2v, etc.) that in a case of legal doubt it is preferable to uphold the more permissive opinion. Here, of course, there is no legal doubt.
58. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, 192.
59. *Ibid.*, 64.
60. See the works of Kaplan cited above, and Shalom Rosenberg, “Emunat Hakhamim,” in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. I. Twersky and B. Septimus, 285–341.
61. Scholem argues this point in “Redemption Through Sin,” in Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 78–141.
62. On the skeptical crisis of the period see Popkin, *The History of Skepticism*; Popkin, *The Third Force in Seventeenth-Century Thought*.
63. Popkin, *The History of Skepticism*, ch. 11; Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère*.
64. See J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin, *Isaac Newton’s Theology; Newton and Religion*, ed. J. E. Force and R. H. Popkin.
65. An excellent discussion of this phenomenon can be found in Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*.
66. See Knox, *Enthusiasm*, for a discussion of the term and its significance.
67. On this issue see Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).
68. See Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth*, ch. 4, esp. 111; Liebes, *On Sabbateanism and Its Kabbalah: Collected Essays* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1995), chs. 1–2; Elqayam, *Mystery of Faith*, 63 and passim.
69. Elqayam, “The Mystery of Faith,” 2–3.
70. *Ibid.*, 102–104 and passim.

71. Yosha, “Philosophical Background.”
72. Halperin, *Abraham Miguel Cardoso*, 112–13 (with very minor emendations of mine to the translation.) An analysis of the kabbalistic significance of Cardoso’s doubts concerning the *Shekhinah* can be found in Elliot R. Wolfson, “Constructions of the Shekhinah.”
73. On the movement against enthusiasm see Michael Heyd, “*Be Sober and Reasonable*”: *The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Hillel Schwartz, *Knives, Fools, Madmen*; Daniel Fouke, *The Enthusiastical Concerns of Dr. Henry More: Religious Meaning and the Psychology of Delusion* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).
74. Based on Judges 6:15.
75. Tishby (n6), cites this from Job 30:5.
76. Tishby (n7), cites Job 27:23.
77. Tishby (n8) cites Job 30:5.
78. Sasportas, *Zizat Novel Zvi*, p. 79.
79. See Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 41–48.
80. On Descartes and the Rosicrucians see Heyd, “*Be Sober and Reasonable*”, 109–43. On More see Fouke, *Enthusiastical Concerns*, 12 (part of an important discussion about the problem of categories among enthusiasts and anti-enthusiasts); Allison P. Coudert, *Impact of the Kabbalah*, 220–40. On Fatio de Duillier see Heyd, *ibid.*, 251–61; Schwartz, *French Prophets*, *passim*.
81. See Kagan, *Lucrecia’s Dreams*.
82. Anonymous, *Relation de la veritable imposture du faux messia des iuifs* (Avignon, 1667), 23; de la Croix, *Memoire*, 357.
83. Scholem, *Sabbatai Ševi*, 332–354; Jetteke van Wijk, “The Rise and Fall of Shabbatai Zevi as Reflected in Contemporary Press Reports,” *Studia Rosenthaliana* 33 (1999): 7–27; and see the discussion of Ruderman and Popkin in Chapter I above.
84. See van Wijk, “Rise and Fall,” 16. She cites Joseph Frank, *The Beginnings of the English Newspaper 1620–1660* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), as the source of her point that news of the Lost Tribes was a common stylistic device of pamphleteers.
85. References to a number of these can be found in Copenhagen, *Menasseh*, 209–24; and Katz, *Philo-Semitism*, ch. 4, “The Debate over the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel.”
86. See Richard H. Popkin, “The Fictional Jewish Council of 1650: A Great English Pipedream,” *Jewish History* 5(2) (Fall 1991): 7–22.
87. In Scholem’s copy of the Wilenski article (see next note), found in the Gershom Scholem Reading Room in the Jewish National and University Library, Jerusalem, he has noted next to the word “informer” further on in the letter: “Serrarius.”
88. Mordecai Wilenski, “Four English Pamphlets Concerning the Sabbatian Movement in 1665–1666,” *Zion* 17 (1952): 160.
89. *Ibid.*, 160–61.

90. Scholem is certainly correct to assume here that Oldenburg is referring to Christians rather than Jews.
91. Quoted in Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 544, from Spinoza's collected letters.
92. See, e.g., Ernestine G. E. van der Wall, "A Precursor of Christ," 111. This is an extremely useful and carefully documented article.
93. Wilenski, "English Pamphlets," 161–62.
94. See "Some Aspects of Jewish-Christian Theological Interchanges in Holland and England, 1640–1700" in *Jewish-Christian Relations*, 3–32. Other papers in this volume deal with specifics of these projects in more depth.
95. Wilenski, "English Pamphlets," 162 n22.
96. A. Z. Aescoly, "A Flandrian Newletter Concerning the Sabbatian Movement," [Hebrew] *Sefer Dinaberg*, ed. Y. Baer, Y. Guttmann, M. Shovah (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1949, pp. 227, 234.
97. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 658–68.

6. Prophecy after Shabbatai's Apostasy

1. On the patterns of failed prophetic movements see Leon Festinger, Henry W. Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956/1964); *Expecting Armageddon: Essential Readings in Failed Prophecy*, ed. J. R. Stone (New York: Routledge, 2000). Festinger et al. deal with Shabbatai Zvi on pp. 8–12.
2. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 781–92.
3. Scholem, *Sabbatai Şevi*, 893–95; Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 228–29.
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5. Avraham Elqayam, "The Rebirth of the Messiah," *Kabbalah* 1 (1996): 101–04
6. Isaiah Tishby, *Paths of Faith and Heresy: Essays in Kabbalah and Sabbateanism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1982), ch. 5; Tishby, "R. Meir Rofe's Letter of 1675–80 to R. Abraham Rovigo," [Hebrew] *Sefunot* 3–4 (1960): 71–130 (reprinted in his *Studies in Kabbalah and Its Branches: Researches and Sources* vol. 2 [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993], 273–332); Isaiah Sonne, "New Material on Sabbatai Zevi from a Notebook of R. Abraham Rovigo," *Sefunot* 3–4 (1960): 39–70; Meir Benayahu, "The 'Holy Brotherhood' of R. Judah Hasid and Their Settlement in Jerusalem," *Sefunot* 3–4 (1960): 131–82; Elqayam, "The Rebirth of the Messiah"; Gershom Scholem, *Researches in Sabbateanism*, ed. Y. Liebes (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), chs. 6–7.
7. Abraham Amarillio, "Autobiographical Letters of Abraham Cardozo," [Hebrew] *Sefunot* 3–4 (1960): 183–242; Halperin, *Cardozo*, 281–83; Basnage, *The History of the Jews*, 757–59.
8. See Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah*, vol. 3; Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, chs. 7–8.
9. Benzion Dinur, "The Messianic-Prophetic Role of the Baal Shem Tov," *Essential*

- Papers*, ed. M. Saperstein, 377–88; Zvi Mark, “Dybbuk and Devekut in the *Shivhe ha-Besht*: Toward a Phenomenology of Madness in Early Hasidism,” in *Spirit Possession in Judaism*, 257–301. Mark offers superb insights into the reception history of Sabbatean prophecy and its impact.
10. Carlebach, “The Last Deception.”
 11. Richard H. Popkin, “Christian Interest and Concerns,” 91–106; Michael Heyd, “The ‘Jewish Quaker’: Christian Perceptions of Sabbatai Zevi as an Enthusiast,” in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists, Jews, and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. A. P. Coudert and J. S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).
 12. See e.g. Matt Goldish, “Halakhah, Kabbalah, and Heresy: A Controversy in Early Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 84 (1993–4): 153–76, esp. 170–71.
 13. Ze’ev Gries, *Conduct Literature (Regimen Vitae): Its History and Place in the Life of Beshtian Hasidism* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1989), 91–93.
 14. Carlebach, *Pursuit of Heresy*, 51–52.
 15. See Idel, “‘One from a Town’”; and Chapter 1 above.
 16. Scholem, “Redemption Through Sin.” For critiques of Scholem see Shmuel Werses, *Haskalah and Sabbatianism: The Story of a Controversy* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 1988); Jacob Katz, “The Suggested Relationship Between Sabbatianism, Haskalah and Reform,” in Katz, *Divine Law in Human Hands: Case Studies in Halakhic Flexibility* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 504–30.
 17. This approach was devised by Hillel Levine, “Frankism as a ‘Cargo Cult’ and the Haskalah Connection: Myth, Ideology and the Modernization of Jewish Consciousness,” in *Essays in Modern Jewish History: A Tribute to Ben Halperin*, ed. F. Molino and P. C. Albert (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1982), 81–94.
 18. Scholem, “Redemption Through Sin,” 84.
 19. This view of the movement is quite similar to that of Scholem’s nemesis, the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* historian Heinrich Graetz. Graetz was writing an apologetic and polemical history, so he did not make a really sincere attempt to understand the Sabbateans on their own terms.
 20. See Lewinsohn (Morus), *Prophets and Prediction*.
 21. See, for example, Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1978); Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

Index

- Abarbanel, R. Isaac, 11, 42
Abendana brothers, 17, 157
Aboab de Fonseca, R. Isaac, 33
Abraham (biblical patriarch), 52, 63
Abu-Isa of Isfahan, 41
Abulafia, R. Abraham, 12, 41, 62, 63, 83;
 influence on Nathan of Gaza, 61, 84,
 193n14; messianic mission to Rome,
 38
Abulafian tradition, 63
Adam (biblical), 4, 29, 56, 63, 69, 96
“adorcism,” 117
Adrianople, 36, 66, 119, 120
Africa, 29, 30, 135, 155, 157
Ailly, Pierre d’, 25
Akiba, Rabbi, 41, 53, 85
Albotini, R. Judah, 61, 62
alchemy, 19, 21, 24–25, 149
Aleppo, 105, 108, 110
Algazi, R. Solomon, 141, 142
Ali (Mohammed’s cousin & 4th caliph),
 34
Alkabetz, R. Solomon, 66, 67, 68
Alroy, David, 41, 83
Alsheikh, R. Moses, 78
Alsted, Johann Heinrich, 16
alumbrados, 14, 47, 150
AMIRAH. *See* Shabbatai Zvi
Amorites, 138, 206n28
Amsterdam, 45, 46, 49, 80, 131; enthusiast
 controversy in, 149; post-apostasy
 prophecy in, 164
Anabaptists, 18
Anacephalaeosis de Monarchia Lusitana I
 (Bocarro-Rosales), 48
Anau of Damascus, R. Raphael, daughter
 of, 94, 100, 108, 110, 123
androgyny, 6
Anes, Gonçalo, 47
angels, 167, 200n9
an-Niyāzī, Muhammad, 36
anthropology, 27, 28, 29
antichrist, 13, 17–19, 30, 34, 37, 72
antinomianism, 39, 40, 49, 168; apocalyp-
 tic utopia and, 79; Jewish Enlighten-
 ment and, 163
Antonius Margaritha, 86
Apocalypse of St. John, 9, 14, 28
apocalyptic ideas, 12, 15, 19, 34; astrology
 and, 25; *conversos* and, 49; Nathan of
 Gaza, 84–85; role of Jews in, 37
Arabia, 156
Aramaic language, 119, 125
AR”I. *See* Luria, R. Isaac
asceticism, 3, 5–6, 40, 51, 169
Asclepius (Hermes Trismegistus), 23–24
Ashkenazi, R. Elisha, (father of Nathan of
 Gaza), 67, 68, 164
Ashkenazi, R. Mordecai, 165
Ashkenazi Jews, 41, 165, 168
Asia, 29, 35, 157
assimilation, 169
astrology, 16, 25–26, 35; heavenly por-
 tents, 128; influence on Sabbateanism,

- astrology (*continued*)
 100–101; transition to astronomy, 19, 169
- astronomy, 19, 169
- augury, 54
- authenticity, proof of, 11, 55
- authority, faith in, 7, 50–51
- automatic writing, 54
- Azariah de Rossi, 74
- Azariah of Fano, R. Menahem, 64, 70, 167
- Azikri, R. Eliezer, 63, 70
- ba'al maggidim*, 64, 67
- Ba'al Shem of London, 25
- Ba'al Shem Tov, 85
- Bacharach, Naphtali, 70
- Bacon, Sir Francis, 22–23, 87
- Bahir* (Illumination), 52
- Bahloul, R. Daniel, 165
- Bandarra, O (Gonçalo Anes), 47, 48
- Bar-Kosiba (Bar-Kokhba), Simon, 41, 83, 84, 85
- Baruch ben Gershon of Arezzo, 60, 64, 103; on Sabbatean prophets, 105–106; on Sarah, wife of Shabbatai Zvi, 90–91, 94
- Basnage, Jacques, 166
- Bayezit II (Ottoman sultan), 38, 42
- Bazilia, Aviad Sar Shalom, 167
- beatas*, 110, 115, 118, 127, 150
- Bektashi dervishes, 36, 110
- Benveniste, R. Hayyim, 140–141, 142
- Benveniste, Jacob, wife of, 105
- Berab, R. Jacob, 68
- Berakhiah of Modena, R. Aaron, 64
- Bet Din (rabbinic court), 133
- Bet Yosef* (R. Karo), 64, 66
- Bible, Hebrew, 9, 11, 18; biblical study and criticism, 28, 146; Christian views of, 12–13; crypto-Judaism and, 45. *See also* specific books of
- Bigdei Kehuna, De vestitutu sacerdotum Hebraeorum* (Braun), 93
- bipolar syndrome, 3
- Bloch, R. Mattathias, 144, 207n56
- Bocarro-Rosales, Manoel, 47, 48, 190n30
- Bochart, Samuel, 32
- Bomuano, Samuel, 105
- Bonafous, Daniel, 103, 166
- Bonseneor, Elijah, 105
- Book of Beliefs* (Sa'adia Gaon), 148
- Book of Visions* (R. Hayyim Vital), 94
- Boreel, Adam, 157
- Braun, Johannes, 93, 200n6
- Bruno, Giordano, 24
- Brusa, 36, 52
- Burgos, Bishop of, 47
- caliphate, 34
- Calvinism, 87
- Camisard prophets, 110, 112–114
- Capua, Jacob, wife of, 105
- Cardoso, Abraham Miguel, 48, 89, 137, 139, 145; maggidism and, 166; sister-in-law of, 123; skepticism of, 147–148; as theologian of Sabbateanism, 97–101
- Cargo Cult model, 168
- Catholicism, 2, 12, 14, 16, 158; ideas about Second Coming, 87; Jansenist, 114. *See also* papacy
- Cedar of Lebanon prophecy, 13
- Censura Temporum* (Eubulus), 130
- charisma, 51
- Charles V (Holy Roman Emperor), 14, 44, 115
- Chelebi, Raphael Joseph, 57, 76–81
- Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz, The*, 24
- chemistry, 19, 169
- Cheyne, George, 26
- children, 139, 140, 141
- chiliasm, 15, 17, 33, 151
- China, 32
- chiromancy, 69
- Chmielnicki massacres, 38, 90
- “chosen” people, 18
- Christianity, 3, 28, 73, 147; *conversos* and, 49; criticism of Jewish “false messiahs,” 86; early Christian reports on Sabbatean movement, 151–161; influence on Shabbatai Zvi, 79; in Jewish messianism, 80; Jews seen as evil mirror, 37; kabbalism and, 50; messianic exegesis, 100; as messianic movement, 137; Or-

- thodox, 154, 160; prophecy and, 9, 11, 12–19; reaction to Shabbatai's apostasy, 167; Sarah, wife of Shabbatai Zvi, and, 95. *See also* Catholicism; Protestantism
- Christina, queen of Sweden, 17
- “Christ -lovers,” 35
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 73
- Clavis Apocalyptica* (Mede), 16
- Clement VII, Pope, 44
- Coenen, Thomas, 4, 95, 111, 119, 151; on mass prophecies, 123; on Sabbatean movement, 106; on Shabbatai's visit to *cadi*, 102–104
- Collegiants, 17, 149
- Columbus, Christopher, 25, 27–28
- Comenius, John Amos, 17, 26, 27, 157
- commandments, breaking of, 1, 3, 53
- Confessio*, 21
- Constantinople, 13, 105, 154; fall to Ottomans, 2, 31, 35; Shabbatai Zvi in, 1. *See also* Istanbul
- Convent of the Conception (Cáceres, Spain), 15
- conversos*, 2, 3, 28; as conduit between Jewish and Christian worlds, 168; heresy and rabbinic authority, 131–132; Lost Ten Tribes legend and, 32; Lurianic legend and, 70; messianism and, 29, 43–44, 45–49, 101; Oral Law and, 158; possession cases among, 123, 124; prophecy and, 97, 99; rabbinic authority and, 145; in Sabbatean movement, 108, 138–139, 190n24; valuation of Jesus and, 86–87; women among, 115
- Conway, Lady Anne, 27
- Cordovero, R. Moses, 64, 68, 78
- Corinthians I, Book of, 36
- Corpus Hermeticum*, 23
- Croll, Oswald, 21
- Crusades, 30
- crypto-Judaism, 45–46, 47, 145
- Cuenque, R. Abraham, 73, 197n69
- Czech Brethren, 87
- dajjal*, 34, 35
- Daniel, Book of, 8, 9, 19, 32
- David, King (biblical), 14, 53, 65–66, 71, 84
- de Barrios, Daniel Levi, 164
- Dee, John, 24, 25, 128, 200n9
- de la Croix, Chevalier, 95, 96, 125–127, 128, 151
- Delmedigo, Elijah, 74–75
- Delmedigo, R. Joseph Solomon, 70, 75
- dervishes, 36, 39–40, 110, 118
- Descartes, René, 150
- De vetula* (anonymous), 25
- Días, Luis, 47
- Diatribes de mille annis apocalypticis* (Alsted), 16
- dietary prohibitions, 1
- Diggers, 16
- discovery, voyages of, 13, 27–28, 156
- Dominican monastic order, 14, 116
- Dönneh group, 165–166
- Doomes-Day* pamphlet, 152
- dreams, 11, 14, 54, 99; dream question (*she'elat halom*), 150; post-apostasy prophecy and, 163, 165
- Dreznitz, R. Shlomi, 70
- Duillier, Nicolas Fatio de, 150
- Dury, John, 16, 17, 26, 27, 157
- Edict of Nantes, 113
- Egypt, 23–24, 92, 97, 103, 128, 148
- Eisenstadt, R. Mordecai “the Rebuker,” 165
- Eldad the Danite, 31
- Elias Artista idea, 21, 22, 23
- Elijah (biblical), 21, 22, 54; as harbinger of messiah, 134; meetings with, 163; revelations of, 110; sightings of, 102; in visions of Nathan of Gaza, 71
- Elijah de Vidas, R., 70
- Elisha (biblical prophet), 65
- Emden, R. Jacob, 75, 167
- Emek ha-Melekh* (Bacharach), 70
- Encoberto, O (The Hidden One), 47–48
- End of Days, 14, 19, 27, 121, 158; biblical criticism and, 146; Protestant Reformation and, 15, 16; scientific revolution and, 20; special status of Jews and, 9, 16
- England, 15, 16–17, 33, 141

- English Revolution, 16
 Enlightenment, European, 88
 Enlightenment, Jewish, 145, 163, 168, 169
 "Enthusiasm," 141, 146, 149, 150
 Erasmus of Rotterdam, 13
 Ergas, Joseph, 167
 Esau (biblical), 65
 eschatology, 13, 14, 36, 87
 Eubulus, 130
 Eve (biblical), 9, 96
 excommunication, 1, 90
 exegesis, 20, 51, 87, 100
 exile, idea of, 6, 50
 Exodus, Book of, 103
 Ezekiel (biblical prophet), 60, 61
- Fama Fraternitatis*, 21, 22
 Familiasts, 142, 149
 fasting, 1, 59, 60
 Fell, Margaret, 17
 Ferdinand, king of Spain, 28
 Ficino, Marsilio, 23
 Fifth Monarchy, 128
 Fifth Monarchy Men, 16, 159
 Finti, Daniel, 105
 Fisher, Mary, 112
 Florentine Republic, 18
 forgeries, 74, 75, 197nn69–70
 Fox, Margaret Askew Fell, 112
 France, 15, 17, 46, 113, 146
 Francês, Manuel Bocarro, 48
 Frances of Mantua, Emanuel and Jacob, 75
 Francisca de la Concepción, Sor, 15
 Franciscan monastic order, 11, 14, 28, 115
 François de Pâris, 114
 Frederick II (Holy Roman Emperor), 18
 Freemasons, 56, 86
 French Prophets, 26, 129, 141, 150, 167;
 authenticity of prophetic ecstasies and,
 146; institutional attack upon, 149
 Freudianism, 4, 72
- Galante, R. Jedidiah, 70, 78
 Galante, R. Moses, 54, 69, 105, 109, 110,
 117
 Galileo Galilei, 56
- Galya Raza* (Exposition of Secrets), 42
 Gans, R. David, 79
 Garin, Eugenio, 25
 Gedaliah ibn Yahya, R., 136
 gender, redemption of, 9
 Genesis, Book of, 65
 Geniza Pages, 43
 German pietism, 62
 Germany, 15, 17, 90
gilgulim (reincarnations), 53
 gnosticism, 169
 God: direct communication with, 10; End
 of Days and, 27; secret names of, 133–
 134
 Gog and Magog, 29, 30, 33, 34
 Gómez, María, 110
Greater Wisdom of Solomon, The (Nathan of
 Gaza), 84–85
Guide of the Perplexed (Maimonides), 141,
 148
- Habillio, R. David, 64, 69
hadith literature, 34–35
 hagiography, 50, 53, 68, 70, 85
 Hagiz, R. Jacob, 57
 Hagiz, R. Moses, 167
 ha-Kohen, R. Isaiah, 105
halakhah, 3, 52, 141
 ha-Levi, R. Abraham ben Eliezer, 42, 52,
 73, 74, 78
 ha-Levi, R. Benjamin, 148
 ha-Levi, R. Joseph, 90
 Hamburg, 46, 48, 80, 131, 164
 Hapsburg dynasty, 36
harkabah, 61
 Hartlib, Samuel, 16, 17, 26, 27, 87, 157
 Hasid, Judah, 165
 Hasidic movement, 85, 166, 169
 Haskalah. *See* Enlightenment, Jewish
 Hassan (son of Ali), 34
 Hathaway, Jane, 131
 healing, bodily and universal, 26
 Hebrew language, 74, 119, 153
 Helmont, Francis Mercurius von, 21, 26,
 87
 heresy, Christian, 15, 24

- heresy, Islamic, 40
 heresy, Jewish, 82, 97, 132, 137, 142–143
 Hermes Trismegistus, 23, 24
 hermeticism, 23, 52
History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom, A (White), 19
 Hobbes, Thomas, 29
 Holland, 15, 17
 Holmes, Nathaniel, 17
 Holy Land, 28, 30, 37, 43
 homiletics, 51, 204n99
Hope of Israel, The (Manasseh ben Israel), 32–33, 49
 Horowitz, Isaiah, 70
hub-mesihî, 35
 Huguenots, 113
 humanism, 7, 10, 13, 14, 19–34
 Hurufi, Fazl Allah, 35
 Hussein (son of Ali), 34
- Idel, Moshe, 89
 identity, 46, 100, 123
 India, 30, 31, 32, 135
 Indian, John, 118
 Indians, American, 29, 33
 Inés of Herrera, 43, 46, 110
 Inquisition, 15, 44, 45, 47, 116, 145
 Isaac (biblical patriarch), 38, 65
 Isabel de Jesús, 15
 Isaiah, Book of, 100, 137
 Ishmael (biblical), 38
 Iskandrani, R., 148
 Islam, 2, 6, 49; Dönmeh conversion to, 166; idea of potential messiah, 79; judges (cadis), 102; Mecca as holiest site of, 156; medieval conflict with Christendom, 27–28; messianic prophecy in, 34–40; perennial messianic soul, 84; power of religious hierarchy in, 149; prophecy and, 11, 12; Rosicrucians and, 22; Second Coming of Christ and, 159; Shabbatai Zvi's conversion to, 2, 6, 49, 101, 143, 162. *See also* Sufi mysticism
 Isma'il (Safavid ruler), 36
 Israel, Daniel. *See* Bonafous, Daniel.
 Israel, Land of, 1, 16, 62, 63, 81; kabbalism in, 69; as proper location of prophecy, 134; return of the Jews to, 21, 158
 Istanbul, 1, 36, 45, 66. *See also* Constantinople
 Italy, 14, 43, 50, 70
 Izmir (Smyrna), 1, 2, 33, 45, 102; possession outbreak in, 119–120; Quaker missionaries in, 111; Sabbatean movement in, 105, 139; Shabbatai Zvi in, 89
- Jacob (biblical patriarch), 65, 128
 James I (king of England), 16
 Jansenists, 17, 113, 114
 Jerusalem, 4, 17, 31, 79; destruction of, 81; Quaker missionaries in, 111; Shabbatai Zvi in, 102
 Jesus Christ, 25–26, 39, 79, 156; astrology and, 101; as failed messiah, 137; importance to Nathan of Gaza, 84; Jewish messianism and, 41; Lurianic kabbalism and, 85; as the Mahdi, 34, 35, 72; Mary as mother of, 97; reevaluated status in Christian world, 86–87. *See also* Second Coming (of Christ)
 Jewish Indian theory, 33
 Jews: alchemy and, 24–25; European Christendom's attitudes toward, 16–17, 80; expulsion from Spain, 42, 43, 51, 63, 79; identified with antichrist, 19, 30, 37; in Muslim messianism, 35; universal redemption and, 9–10. *See also* Ashkenazi Jews; Judaism; Sephardic Jews
 jinn (evil spirits), 110
 Joachim of Fiore, 12–13, 18
 Johannes à Lent, 86
 Joseph, R. Raphael, 91, 132
 Joseph (biblical), 14, 71
 Joseph della Reina, R., 68, 79, 84
 Joseph ibn Zur, 164–165
 Josephus, Flavius, 41, 86
 Juana de la Cruz, Mother, 115
 Juan de Prado, 132, 147
 Judaism, 8, 16; of Apostolic Age, 158; commandments of, 1; crisis in authority structure of, 50; humanistic pursuits marginalized in, 74–75; Lost Tribes and,

- Judaism (*continued*)
 157; prophecy and, 11, 12; Protestant study of, 86; women in, 94. *See also* Ashkenazi Jews; Jews; Sephardic Jews
- Judgment, Day of, 11
- Kabbala denudata*, 26
- Kabbalah and kabbalism, 1, 11–12, 43, 44, 97, 116; alchemy and, 24–25; ambiguities of, 148–149; astrology and, 101; Christian interest in, 87, 128–129, 150; critique of, 75; gnostic wisdom of, 53; interpretation of texts, 3; Lurianic, 69, 85, 168, 174n20, 191n34; messianism and, 50–55; Muslim influence on, 62; Nathan of Gaza's study of, 63; post-apostasy prophecy and, 162, 163, 167–168; pseudepigraphy and, 74, 75; rabbinic authority and, 147; redemption in, 10; Sabbatean movement and, 142–143; in Safed (Palestine), 42; sexual demons in, 5; in Spain, 41, 42; view of the feminine, 4. *See also* Safed kabbalists; *Zohar*
- Kaf ha-Ketoret* (Ladle of Incense), 42
- Kanah*, 50
- Karo, R. Joseph, 60, 64, 78; importance to Nathan of Gaza, 84; influence on Nathan of Gaza, 117; Luria circle and, 70; maggidism and, 66–67, 70
- Kepler, Johannes, 25
- Knox, Ronald A., 113
- Kohen, R. Hayyim, 148
- Kohen, R. Nehemiah, 161
- Koprülü (Ottoman grand vizier), 80
- Kor'an, 34, 39
- Kuhlmann, Quirinius, 128
- Labadie, Jean de, 17
- Labadist movement, 18
- Laemmlein Reutlingen, Asher, 43, 79, 83
- Laniado, Yomtov, wife of, 105
- La Peyrère, Isaac de, 15, 28–29, 146
- Last World Emperor, 13, 14, 18, 36, 176n19
- law codes, 51
- Leib ben Oyzer, 92, 93, 95, 119–120, 121–122
- letter combinations, 61
- Levantine (Romaniote) Jews, 2, 108
- Levellers, 16
- Lightfoot, John, 86
- Lilith (biblical), 3–4
- Lissabona, Samuel, 57
- Livorno, 45, 48, 80, 131; R. Cardoso in, 97; *conversos* in, 111–112; Sarah in, 90, 91, 94
- London, 46, 80, 131, 149
- Lost Ten Tribes, 29, 30, 31, 49, 80; American natives identified with, 33, 152, 157; reported reappearances of, 151, 152; significance to medieval Jews, 32
- Loving Salutation to the Seed of Abraham Among the Jews, A* (Fell-Fox), 112
- Lucrecia de León, 15, 95
- Luria, R. Isaac, 6, 10, 44, 50, 65, 127; circle of, 53, 54, 61, 68; as “failed” messiah, 83, 88, 137; maggidism and, 64; mystical rituals of, 54; Nathan of Gaza on, 58, 59, 76; reincarnation of, 53, 63, 197n77; Sabbatean movement and, 71; self-confidence of, 60–61; superiority to older sages, 78
- Luther, Martin, 13, 15
- Lutheranism, 87
- Luzzatto, R. Moses Hayyim, 166, 167
- Luzzatto, Simone, 75
- madness, 3, 144
- maggidism, 54, 63–64, 67–71, 163, 165
- Maggid Mesharim*, 67
- Mahdism, 34–39, 72
- Maimonides, Moses, 11, 41, 141; disdain for signs and miracles, 198n93; on past messiahs, 85; on prophecy, 59, 81–82; on rabbinic authority, 142; *Shekhinah* (God's feminine presence) and, 148
- Malakh, Hayyim, 165
- Mal'akh ha-Meshiv* (The Responding Angel), 42. *See also* *Sefer ha-Meshiv*.
- Manasseh ben Israel, R., 17, 26, 32–33, 44, 47, 48–49; Lost Tribes of Israel and, 152; Serrarius and, 157
- manic depressive syndrome, 3
- María de Agreda, Sor, 15

- María of Santo Domingo, Sor, 127
 Marsafi, Zayn al-'Abidin al-, 37
 masturbation, 3
 mathematics, 20, 169
 Mede, Joseph, 16, 20, 27
 Mehmet IV (Ottoman sultan), 80, 112
 Meir ha-Rofe, R., 65, 83
 mercantilism, 80
 Mercurius, Francis, 26
merkabah (Ezekiel's chariot), 59, 60, 61–62
 Messiah King, 17
Messianic Mystics (Idel), 89
 messianism, 1, 12, 38, 41, 79; asceticism
 and, 5–6; Christian, 9, 12–19; *conversos*
 and, 45–49; early modern, 42–44; ene-
 mies of Jews and, 81; expectations of, 8–
 10; “failed” or false messiahs, 83–84, 86,
 136; Kabbalah and, 50–55; major
 streams of, 8; science/humanities and,
 19–34; Shabbatai's acceptance as mes-
 siah, 6–7. *See also* prophecy
 Mexico, 47
 Middle Ages, 12, 30, 41
 Midrashim, 51, 52, 72, 74
 millenarianism, Christian, 12, 16–17, 151,
 157–158
 mimesis, 117, 127, 129
 miracles, performance of, 132, 134
 Mishnah, 59, 61, 66–67, 157
Mishreh Kittrin (Loosening of Knots), 42
 Mizrahi, R. Nissim, wife of, 105
 Modena, Leon, 75
 Mohammed (Prophet of Islam), 11, 34, 39,
 170
 Molkho, Solomon, 38, 42, 43, 67, 72–73,
 84
 monsters, 26
 Montalto, Elijah, 70
 Montezinos, Antonio de, 32, 49, 157
 Mordecai Zvi (father of Shabbatai Zvi), 2
 More, Henry, 20, 26, 27, 87, 150
 Moriscos, 45
 Morletto, Joshua, 105
 Mormons, 18, 73
 Morocco, 164–165
 Moses (biblical), 63, 68, 82; daughter of,
 80; golden trumpet of, 154; importance
 to Nathan of Gaza, 84; kabbalism and,
 69; Pharaoh and, 103
 Moses of Crete, 41
mujaddid, 35
 Münster, Sebastian, 86
 Musasa, Muhammad b. Falah, 35
 Mussaphia, R. Benjamin, 25, 138, 139
 mysticism, 3, 7, 53, 63, 167
 Na'amah (demon), 4–5
 Nahar, R. Isaac, 138
 Nahmanides (R. Moses ben Nahman), 131,
 148
 Napier, John, 19–20
 Nathan Ashkenazi of Gaza, R., 1, 4, 6, 38,
 55, 89; authority of, 51; kabbalism and,
 166; letter to Raphael Joseph Chelebi,
 76–81, 132; life of, 57; maggidism and,
 117; messiahship of Shabbatai Zvi and,
 57; possession of, 63–71; prophecies of,
 52, 57–63, 101–102, 122; pseudepi-
 graphic apocalypse of, 57; relationship to
 past messianic prophets, 81–88;
 Sasportas's critique of, 138; self-con-
 fidence of, 60; Vision of R. Abraham, 71–
 76, 80, 81, 83, 128; as yeshiva student,
 112
 Nature, Book of, 27, 128
 Nayler, James, 111
 Nebuchadnezzar, 81
 Nehunya ben ha-Kanah, R., 52
 Netherlands, 15, 17
 New Christians, 47. *See also* *Conversos*.
 New England, 118
 New Jerusalem, 17, 18
 New Testament, 11, 12–13, 18, 41, 118,
 159
 Newton, Sir Isaac, 19, 20–21, 27, 86, 146,
 150
 Noah's flood, 10
 North America, 15, 17, 29, 157
 Nurbaks, Muhammad, 35

Ohel Ya'akov (R. Sasportas), 145
 Oldenburg, Henry, 26, 33, 154
 One True Prophet and Successive Incarna-
 tion, 39

- Oral Law, 74, 132, 144, 145, 157, 158
- Origen, 12
- Ortelius, Abraham, 32
- Orthodox Christianity, 154, 160
- Ottoman Empire, 1, 2, 7, 34, 151; Bektashi dervishes in, 110; capture of Constantinople, 13; Jewish communities in, 42; Jews' attitudes toward, 38; Jews welcomed in, 79; post-apostasy prophecy in, 162, 163, 165–166; Sabbatean movement in, 104; sultan identified with antichrist, 18–19; widespread prophecy in, 129
- Oughourlian, Jean-Michel, 117
- Palestine, 7, 18, 37; kabbalism in, 60; messianism in, 44; under Ottoman rule, 42, 62. *See also* Israel, Land of.
- papacy, 14, 18, 38, 43, 44, 114. *See also* Catholicism
- Paracelsus, 21, 22
- patriarchs, biblical, 53, 128
- Paulli, Oligier, 15
- Peasants' Revolt (Germany, 1520s), 15, 21
- Peña, Hayyim, 118–124, 202n52
- Peña, Jacob, family of, 105, 107, 108, 109
- Peña, Samuel, 202n52
- Pereira, Abraham Israel, 33
- Perlhfefer, R. Issahar Ber, 165
- Pharaoh, 72, 81, 103
- Philip II (king of Spain), 48
- philology, 27
- pillar of fire, image of, 102–104, 106, 110
- Pinheiro, R. Moses, 59–60, 61, 103
- Pinto, R. Daniel, 105, 109, 110, 117
- Pires, Diogo, 44
- Poland, 38, 77, 90, 92, 161
- Popkin, Richard H., 27
- Portugal, 2, 7, 118, 158; *conversos* in, 43–44, 46, 48; forced conversion of Jews in, 42, 45
- possession, mystical, 110–111, 116–117, 118
- Postel, Guillaume, 14, 15, 87
- Praises of the AR"IZ"l*, 54
- Pre-Adamism, 28–29
- Prester John, 29–30, 31
- prognostication, 51, 101
- prophecy, 2, 3, 10–11, 51; after apostasy of Shabbatai Zvi, 162–170; in Bible, 9; in household of Hayyim Peña, 118–124; kabbalism and, 54; monotheism and, 11; popular openness to, 7; revival of, 63; royal prerogative and, 18; Shabbatai Zvi's messiahship and, 93; of R. Suriel, 124–129; unauthorized, 150. *See also* messianism; Sabbatean movement
- Prophecy of the Boy [or Child] (Nevu'at ha-Yeled)* (R. ha-Levi), 52, 73, 100
- Prossnitz, Judah Leib, 165
- prostitute, image of, 95–96
- Protestantism, 13, 16, 26, 155, 158; advocacy for return of Jews to Palestine and, 37; study of Jesus as Jewish figure, 86
- Psalms, Book of, 9, 128
- pseudepigraphy, 51–53, 57, 74
- Qa'im, al-* (the Riser), 34
- Quakers, 16, 110, 111–114, 117, 129, 167; authenticity of prophetic ecstasies and, 146; critics of, 142; institutional attack upon, 149; prophecy among, 202n63
- rabbinic authority, 50, 68; attitude of *conversos* toward, 145; heretics and, 132; Oral Law and, 74; popular ignorance and, 142; prophecy and, 122, 141; Shabbatai Zvi's contempt for, 146–147
- racism, 29
- Raj'a doctrine, 39
- Raleigh, Sir Walter, 29
- Ranters, 16, 142
- Raphael, Shabbatai, 163–164
- rationalism, 82, 138, 145, 149, 169
- recojimiento*, 116
- Reconquista*, 15
- redemption, 6, 8, 13, 143; of gender, 9; kabbalism and, 50; *tikkun* (mystical repair) and, 88
- Red Jews, 29, 30
- Reed Beast, The (Hayyat Kaneh)* (R. Molkho), 73

- Reformation, Protestant, 13, 15, 25
- Reform Judaism, 163, 168
- Remembrance for the Children of Israel, A* (Baruch ben Gershon), 60
- Renaissance, 9, 13, 23, 94; astrology in, 25; humanist textual analysis in, 28; voyages of discovery during, 30
- Reshit Hokhmah* (R. Elijah de Vidas), 70
- “Restauration of the Jews” pamphlet, 152–153
- Reubeni, David, 38, 43–44
- Reuchlin, Johannes, 13
- Ricaud, Paul, 151
- Ricci, Immanuel Hai, 167
- Robinson, George, 112
- Rofe, R. Meir, 165
- Romaniote Jews, 2, 108
- Rome, city of, 38
- Rosenkreutz, Christian, 22, 23
- Rosenroth, Christian Knorr von, 87
- Rosicrucian movement, 17, 21–22, 23, 26, 150; ancient knowledge and, 56–57; appeal to ancient mystical tradition, 86
- Rovigo, R. Abraham, 165, 166
- Royal Society, 26, 33, 154
- Rycaud, Paul, 107
- Sa’adia Gaon, 148
- Sabbatean movement, 2, 8, 38; background of, 36, 44; Christian reports on, 151–161; doctrine of two messiahs and, 14; early prophets and possession outbreak, 104–118; genesis of, 7, 34; Jewish Enlightenment and, 168; Lurianic circle and, 69; R. Sasportas’s rejection of, 130–151; scientific revolution and, 19; women in, 116. *See also* prophecy
- Sabbatical River, 30. *See also* Sambatyon River.
- Sack of Rome (1527), 14
- Safavid dynasty, 36
- Safed kabbalists, 44, 50, 54, 62, 68, 83; authenticity of prophecy and, 122; legacy of, 71; Lurianic legend and, 70; maggidism and, 64; *Sefer ha-Meshiv* and, 42. *See also* Kabbalah and kabbalism
- sages, 53
- Saint-Médard, convulsionaries of, 110, 114–115, 160
- Salonika, 5, 36, 42, 45, 119
- salvation, 9, 11
- Sambatyon River, 30, 31, 77, 80
- Samson of Ostropol, R., 64
- Samuel II, Book of, 65–66
- Sanhedrin, 68
- San Juan de la Cruz, 15
- Santa Teresa de Jesús, 15
- Sarah (third wife of Shabbatai Zvi), 55, 80, 89–97, 101; identity of, 109; prediction of marriage to messiah, 90, 91, 93, 94, 122; Shabbatai’s messiahship and, 129; *tikkun* (mystical repair) and, 54
- Saravel, R. Moses. *See* Suriel, R. Moses
- Sasportas, R. Jacob, 52, 74, 75, 95, 104, 122; Kabbalah and, 167; as opponent of Shabbatai Zvi, 130–151; on Sarah, wife of Shabbatai Zvi, 90; Shabbatai Raphael and, 163–164
- Satan, 68, 79, 96
- Savonarola, Girolamo, 14
- Schickard, Wilhelm, 32
- Schneersohn, R. Menachem Mendel, 83
- Scholem, Gershom, 8, 67–68, 127, 169; on historic role of antinomianism, 163, 168; on Jesus as Jewish figure, 87; on letter to Chelebi, 76, 81; on Lurianic kabbalism, 69–70; on “mystical heresy” of Sabbatean movement, 142–143, 145; on Sarah, wife of Shabbatai Zvi, 95
- science, 7, 10, 13, 19–34, 88, 146
- Scripture, Book of, 27
- Sebastian, Dom (king of Portugal), 48
- Second Coming (of Christ), 16, 18, 19, 22, 47; Christian differences concerning, 87; crusading spirit and, 28; health and, 26; Jews’ function in, 151, 154, 159; *Kühlpsalter* and, 128–129; thousand-year reign of Christ, 15. *See also* Jesus Christ
- Second Commandment, 1
- Second Temple period, 41, 158
- Sefer ha-Meshiv* (Book of the Responder), 42, 53, 63, 67, 68, 79

- Sefer Haredim* (R. Azikri), 70
Sefer ha-Tamar, 63
Sefer Yetzirah (Book of Creation), 51–52
semikhah ordination, 68
 Sephardic Jews, 2, 41, 43, 97, 108, 145
ser'asker, 35
 Serrarius, Peter, 17, 33, 152, 155–157
 Servetus, Michael, 15, 86
 Sextus Empiricus, 27
 sexuality, 3–5, 54
Sha'ar Ru'ah ha-Kodesh (R. Hayyim Vital), 64
 Shabbatai Zvi, 23, 32, 55, 71;
 antinomianism of, 49, 72; astrological
 interpretations of name of, 26, 101; burn
 on penis, 72, 174n13; Christianity and,
 79; conversion to Islam, 2, 6, 49, 101,
 143, 162; denounced to the authorities,
 161; dreams of, 4–5; father of, 111; jour-
 ney to Turkey, 89, 103; lack of creden-
 tials, 51; life of, 1–3; marriages, 5;
 messiahship of, 76, 93, 112; mother of,
 4–5; Nathan of Gaza's prophecies con-
 cerning, 57–63, 72; opponents of, 118–
 119, 130–131; possession outbreak and,
 110, 120–121, 124; in post-apostasy
 prophecy, 164; relationship to women,
 3–5, 9, 72; “Secret of Faith” of, 146;
 “strange actions” of, 53, 54, 143, 146;
 visit to the Cadi, 101–104; wives of, 54–
 55, 80, 89–97
 Shalom ben Joseph z”l, R., 135
Shalshet ha-Kabbalah (R. Gedaliah ibn
 Yahya), 136–137
 shamanism, 63
 Shapira, R. Nathan, 17, 37
 shari'ah (Islamic law), 39
she'elat halom (dream question), 150
 Shefami, Moses, 105
Shekhinah (God's feminine presence), 72,
 126, 128, 148
Shene Luhot ha-Brit (Horowitz), 70
Shibhey ha-'ARI, 70
 Shiite Muslims, 34, 35, 38–39
Shivhe ha-Besht, 85
Shulhan Arukh (R. Karo), 64, 66
 Simeon bar Yohai, R., 52, 74, 125, 127,
 135
 Simon, Richard, 29
 sin, 10, 11
 skepticism, 27, 50, 146
*Small Moonlight and Starlight of the Lusita-
 nian Monarchy* (Bocarro-Rosales), 48
 Smith, Joseph, 73–74
 Solomon, King (biblical), 79, 84
 South America, 17, 29
 Spain, 2, 7, 158; *beatas* in, 115, 118;
 conversos in, 46; expulsion of Jews from,
 42, 43, 51, 63, 79; messianism in, 14, 15,
 43
 Spinoza, Baruch (Benedict), 29, 88, 145,
 154, 169; Collegiants and, 17; as *converso*,
 112, 132; Quakers and, 112
spiritualis intellectus, 11, 28
 Sufi mysticism, 34, 35, 36, 116, 118; influ-
 ence on Sabbatean movement, 110;
 maggidism compared to, 166; methods
 of, 62; self-induced visions and, 61;
 Wahhabi fundamentalism and, 170. *See*
also Islam
 Suleiman, Sultan, 36
Sullam Ha-Aliyiah (Ladder of Ascent) (R.
 Judah Albotini), 61
 Supino, R. Raphael, 104–105, 122, 133
 Suriel, R. Moses, 52, 122, 124–129, 161,
 166, 204n99
 Swedenborg, Emanuel, 18
Ta'alumot Hokhmah (R. Delmedigo), 70
 Talmud, 41, 51, 158; damnation of Jesus,
 85; legal guidelines of, 134; Nathan of
 Gaza's vision and, 58; as Oral Law, 74,
 132, 144; Protestant scholars and, 86;
 “ways of the Amorites” and, 138,
 206n28
 Tammon, R. Abraham, daughter of, 106
 Taytatzak, R. Joseph, 25, 42, 64; circle of,
 67, 73, 117; maggidism and, 67, 68
 Templo, Judah Leon, 157
 Tetragrammaton, 1
 Third Force, 27
 Thirty Years' War, 16, 26

- tikkun* (mystical repair), 54, 58, 69, 78;
Lurianic Kabbalah and, 88; prophecy
and, 125, 126, 135; redemption of the
unredeemable, 96–97
- Timur (Tamerlane), 35
- Tishby, Isaiah, 43
- Tituba, 118
- Toledoth ha-AR"l*, 70, 78
- Toledoth Yeshu*, 96
- Torah, 3, 52, 59, 66, 137, 165; crypto-Ju-
daism and, 145; ideological crisis and,
168; marriage to, 5, 89–90; Nathan of
Gaza and, 61; New Torah, 128, 143;
scholars of, 142; transgression of laws of,
54
- Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, 73–74
- Trigault, Nicolas, 32
- Trinity, in Christian doctrine, 13
- Tripoli, 101
- trovas* (prophetic verses), 47
- Turkey, 62
- Twisse, William, 27
- Unigenitus* (papal bull), 114
- Uriel da Costa, 132, 145, 147
- Valencin, Daniel, 105
- Valle, R. Isaac ha-Levi, 91, 94
- Veneto, 14
- Venice, 14, 45, 97
- virgin, image of, 95–96
- Virgin Mary (Christian), 5, 96, 97, 116
- Vision of Rabbi Abraham, The* (Nathan of
Gaza), 57
- Vital, R. Hayyim, 25, 44, 60, 63, 110; circle
of, 94, 100; complex relationship with R.
Luria, 78; discussions with Muslims,
188n8; importance to Nathan of Gaza,
84; maggidism and, 64; prophecy and,
61–62; reincarnation of, 53; study of
Mishnah and, 61
- Vital, R. Samuel, 69, 78, 148
- Wahhabi movement (Islamic), 170
- Wars of Religion, 16
- When Prophecy Fails* (Festinger et al.), 162
- Whiston, William, 21
- White, Andrew Dickson, 19
- witchcraft, 116, 118
- women, 3–5, 9; feminine aspect of God
and, 142; as leaders of messianic move-
ments, 46–47; as oracles, 94, 110; pos-
session trance and, 114; prophecy and,
100, 111; in Sabbatean movement, 39,
40, 41; as visionaries, 106–107
- wonder-working, 51, 82
- xenoglossia, 54, 67, 117, 127
- Ximénes de Cisneros, Cardinal, 15
- yeshivot*, 2–3, 4, 57
- Zacuto, R. Moses, 64, 167
- Zawâwî, Muhammad al-, 35
- Zikkaron Li-vne Yisra'el* (Baruch of Arezzo),
64–65
- Zionism, 169
- Zizat Novel Zvi* (Withering of the Flower of
Zvi), 130, 132, 141, 144, 164
- Zohar*, 12, 43, 50, 65, 77, 98; authorship of,
52; Nathan of Gaza and, 58, 134–135;
pseudepigraphy in, 74; R. Suriel and,
125, 127. *See also* Kabbalah and
kabbalism
- Zoref, Joshua Heshel, 165
- Zvi, Mordecai (father of Shabbatai Zvi), 2
- Zvi, Shabbatai. *See* Shabbatai Zvi