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David J. Halperin. *Sabbatai Zevi: Testimonies to a Fallen Messiah.* Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007. 246 pp. $49.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-904113-25-6.

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Sources for the Study of an Early Modern "Messiah"

This book is a follow up to David Halperin's edition of selected writings in translation of Abraham Miguel Cardozo (2001). It is a very welcome, fruitful addition to ongoing discussion of the enigmatic figure of Sabbatai Zevi and of early modern messianism. This volume contains a brief, but engaging and informative introduction that rehearses some of the main themes in the biography and scholarly discussion of Zevi. Readers are introduced to the outline of Zevi's life and intellectual environment, but also to the intense discussions of the "fallen messiah" after his conversion to Islam and death. While this book will not serve as a stand-alone introduction to the infamous messianic figure, David Halperin provides nicely translated, well-annotated, intriguing sources about Sabbatai Zevi by both followers and opponents. This very approachable book will be of great value to students and teachers.

At the heart of the book are five "testimonies:" Baruch of Arezzo's "Memorial to the Children of Israel" (1680-1685); "The Letters of Joseph Halevi" (1666-67); "The Najara Chronicle" (for the year 1671); "The Biography of Abraham Cuenque" (ca. 1692); and "From the Reminiscences of Abraham Cardozo" (ca. 1701). Each testimony includes a brief introduction and helpful explanatory notes. The volume also includes several appendices with notes on translations and manuscripts, as well as additional source material in translation, and a bibliography and index.

The first account (testimony) is from Baruch Arezzo, author of the earliest surviving biography of Zevi. Halperin provides a summary of the work and a history of the manuscript along with a thorough review of both internal textual and external evidence as he dates the work and compares the first two "editions" of it. The work appears to have been written in pieces between 1680 and 1685. The text itself, which begins by noting the relationship between repentance and redemption, concedes that people dealing with Zevi fell into three categories–those who believe in his faith; those who deny and abuse him; and those who doubt but neither speak good nor ill. It is to the last group that the author claims to direct his attention.

Arezzo reviews Sabbatai's early life, the story of his bride, and Nathan of Gaza and his visions. He next re-

counts Sabbatai's travel from Gaza to Izmir, his apparently strange deeds–which Arezzo argues were seen but not contested by Muslim officials–and his later transformation of some aspects of Jewish religious observance, such as changing the day of mourning on the Ninth of Av to a great festival. Arezzo describes various prophecies that pointed to Sabbatai as the messiah, before turning to Sabbatai's arrest in Constantinople (his treatment in captivity and an engagement with a group of rabbis who challenged him and excommunicated him), and his interview with the sultan, here presented as a means by which Sabbatai saved the Jews of the city.

Sabbatai's various non-normative behaviors are justified as an effort to mend the world and are frequently placed within a discussion of biblical precedents. Indeed, Arezzo invokes a string of biblical quotes to demonstrate that the messiah will perform strange deeds. He justifies Sabbatai's conversion to Islam (taking on the turban) by referring to discussion of the final exile in the Zohar and by drawing a parallel with the actions of Queen Esther. Arezzo also details the birth of Sabbatai's son after his conversion and discusses at great length the signs of Sabbatai's power at the Ottoman court. The text reproduces letters, or alleged letters, from various sources referring to Sabbatai and events surrounding his life and activities.

The "second testimony" is a series of letters by Joseph Halevi of Leghorn, about whom we know very little. Halperin nevertheless constructs a useful background to the materials and the text in question. Halperin translates two of four letters included in a dossier of materials related to the Sabbatian movement collected in a book by Jacob Sasportas. The first letter, dated late November 1666, opens in a vitriolic vein against "a brainless adolescent from Gaza, Nathan the Lying Prophet" and "a malignant lunatic whose Jewish name used to be Sabbatai Zevi" (p. 107). Halevi notes the widespread acceptance of Sabbatai Zevi, even among Jewish leaders. He, however, urges them to abandon their delusion and insists on true acts of repentance–no more meaningless grudges, returning stolen money, no more drinking of gentile wine and running after gentile women, no more shaving their sidelocks, and so on. Halevi then offers his own account of Sabbatai's imprisonment and conversion to Islam and the subsequent vindictiveness of the apostate and his desire for the destruction of Judaism. The second letter to Sasportas is dated mid-February 1667. It discusses the response to his apostasy by five groups of supporters, upbraiding each in turn. The author of the letter also addresses certain liturgical innovations that resulted from belief in Sabbatai Sevi.

The third testimony is the "Najara Chronicle," by Jacob Najara, a believer in Sabbatai. The chronicle, which surveys various "illuminations" and "eclipses" of Sabbatai's "light," provides eyewitness information for four months of Sabbatai's life while he was a nominal Muslim. As the chronicle records, for example, "The beginning of his illumination, consequently, was 25 Sivan [June 4]. On the fourth day he sent for us and we saw him in his beauty and power. We rabbis all fanned him with a fan, like slaves serving their master" (p. 144).

The fourth testimony is the biography of Sabbatai Zevi by Abraham Cuenque, written around 1692. Halperin provides a biographical overview of Cuenque and a brief comparison of this work with others in the volume, noting, for example, the text's literary polish. Cuenque notes that as a youth, he witnessed the events he describes. He asserts that he has no intention to persuade his readers to believe in this faith. What follows is a portrait that claims impartiality–describing Sabbatai as an ascete, but also as an individual with "peculiarities." For Cuenque, Sabbatai was "unique," and he "could not get his fill of watching him" (p. 161). Much of the account transmits occurrences narrated by Nathan of Gaza on the special qualities and attraction of Sabbatai. The image presented is often rather grand; Cuenque writes, for example, that as Sabbatai and his wife entered Constantinople, the land "quaked at his arrival" (p. 169). Sabbatai's transforming of customary observances–such as the end of the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz–was signaled earlier in the text and interpreted as evidence of his special providence. Sabbatai is presented as a learned rabbi, a master of both the written and oral Law, but also as a respected and key participant in the life of the Ottoman court, at times upbraiding and controlling the king. His obvious Jewish observances were not deterred or punished, and the king often defended Sabbatai, until Sabbatai himself announced his desire to leave. Cuenque also narrates Sabbatai's death and the ongoing attribution to him of the status of messiah.

The final, and very brief, testimony is from the reminiscences of Abraham Cardozo, who was born in 1627 and fashioned himself the messiah, son of Joseph, in correspondence to Sabbatai as the messiah, son of David. The story included here was recorded towards the end of the author's life.

Throughout there are many excellent explanatory notes and the translations are very readable and appear to be quite accurate. The volume misses the opportunity to set the sources within a broader comparative setting

that witnessed many intriguing and lesser-known messianic movements. Nonetheless, this valuable collection will be of great use to students in a number of areas, but particularly those interested in early modern Jewish history, the development of Jewish thought, and comparative religious history.

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