2

Jacob Sasportas and Jewish Messianism

Yaacob Dweck

THE RABBIS HAVE HAD A vexed relationship with the Messiah and messianic movements since antiquity. In a wide-ranging study that has generated considerable scholarly debate, Gerson D. Cohen distinguished between the messianic posture of Ashkenazi Jews, those whose predominant cultural influence was Franco-Germany in the Middle Ages and Poland-Lithuania in the early modern period, and that of Sephardic Jews, those whose predominant cultural influence was Babylonia and the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages and the Ottoman Empire and western Europe in the early modern period. Cohen characterized Ashkenazi Jews as quietist, passive, and given to heroic acts of martyrdom, in contrast to Sephardic Jews, who were politically activist, intellectually dynamic, and revolutionary.[1] In a response to Cohen's framework, Elisheva Carlebach has written, "The grand role in Jewish messianism of Sephardic rabbinic conservatism, from the Geonim [of Babylonia] to Maimonides through Jacob Sasportas simply did not enter into Cohen's neat typology."[2] The list of Sephardic conservative thinkers identified by Carlebach and others runs variously from Maimonides and Nahmanides in medieval Spain and Egypt through Isaac Abravanel and Solomon Beit ha-Levi in the Ottoman Empire after the expulsion up through Moses Hagiz and Hakham Zvi Ashkenazi in the Western Sephardic diaspora in the aftermath of Sabbetai Zevi.[3]

The contours of Sephardic rabbinic conservatism involve a complex mix of philosophical rationalism, emphasis on the law, and, with the death of Maimonides in 1204, a pronounced struggle over the proper interpretation of his discussion of the messianic age in his code of law, the *Mishneh Torah*, and

his "Epistle to Yemen."[4] Scholars agree that Jacob Sasportas constituted an important link in this chain but have yet to explain how these elements were adumbrated in the pages of his work *Zizath novel zvi* (Heb. Fading Flower of the *Zvi*). A rabbi in the Western Sephardic diaspora, Sasportas emerged in 1665 as one of the few opponents to the Jewish Messiah named Sabbetai Zevi. Jews everywhere from the eastern fringes of the Ottoman Empire to the European edges of the Atlantic Ocean greeted the news of redemption with uncritical enthusiasm. For the better part of the next year, until the Messiah converted to Islam at the behest of Sultan Mehmed IV in September 1666, throngs of believers abjured the laws of Judaism and adhered to new norms established by the Messiah and his prophet, Nathan of Gaza.[5]

In his response to Sabbatianism, Sasportas held up a series of texts as sources of authority to counter the immediate religious experience of the Sabbatians. He repeatedly emphasized an imperative to doubt and beseeched the recipients of his letters to question the certainty of their messianic sensibility. Behind both the authority of these written works and his demand for skepticism was the law as the fundamental point of departure for all thinking about the Messiah. This stress on the law, which Sasportas held himself up as uniquely capable of interpreting and from which he excluded almost anything but the written word as a possible source, went hand in hand with a deep-seated fear of the crowd. His appeal to legal expertise and pietist sensibility evolved in reaction to the expressions of mass enthusiasm and the public celebration of the Messiah's arrival. In his invocation of the authority of the written word and in his denunciation of the Jewish crowd, Sasportas articulated a distinction between the lettered versus the unlettered that had a long afterlife in the early modern period.

Sasportas developed this position—the imperative to doubt popular sentiment, the authority of the written word, the denigration of experience as a source of religious truth, and his fear of the crowd—only in response to the Sabbatian theology articulated by Nathan of Gaza and other Sabbatian prophets. In a series of letters by Nathan of Gaza before the apostasy of Sabbetai Zevi and by a number of other figures such as Abraham Miguel Cardozo subsequent to the Messiah's conversion to Islam, Sabbatian prophets espoused a new conception of time. With the revelation of the Messiah in the form of Sabbetai Zevi, the redemption had begun. What exactly this redemption meant was the subject of fierce internecine dispute among the Sabbatians, particularly in the period after Sabbetai Zevi's conversion. For some believers, this new sense of time was reflected in their approach to the calendar.[6] Their letters bore the date of the first or the second year since the arrival of the Messiah; they addressed one another as if they were living in a new era. Yet for figures such as Raphael Supino, a preacher and printer in Livorno who cor-

responded with Sasportas, this new sense of time did not impinge upon his observance of the law. Supino and many believers like him continued to observe the commandments as they had done before the arrival of the Messiah. For others, however, this new sense of time was accompanied by a radical reevaluation and restructuring of the legal norms that governed Jewish observance. This reordering took a number of forms and developed gradually over the course of the roughly sixteen months between Nathan's declaration of Sabbetai Zevi as the Messiah and the latter's conversion to Islam. It took on even more radical forms in the immediate aftermath of the conversion, but the fundamental point of the enterprise was the same.

In the period of redemption, the law lost much of its former social power. Sabbatians jettisoned significant legal norms as a result of their experience of redemption. For the masses of Jews swept up by the charismatic authority of the leaders of their movement, the Sabbatian prophet replaced the Talmudist as the source of communal authority. These prophets embraced a form of antinomianism that involved the reinterpretation of a celebrated rabbinic saying, "a transgression committed for its own sake is greater than a commandment not committed for its own sake," which they construed as "the abrogation of the law is its fulfillment."[7] In light of the experience of redemption, days of mourning for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, traditionally observed with ascetic restraint and fasting, became days of joy celebrated with food, drink, and general merriment. Sabbetai Zevi reintroduced the ritual slaughter of animals on Passover, a practice abolished with the invention of rabbinic Judaism in the wake of the Temple's destruction in the first century CE. Sabbatians did not confine their innovations to the abrogation of the law; they introduced new liturgies into the daily service and transformed obscure rituals, such as the fourth meal at the conclusion of the Sabbath, into prolonged celebrations of their Messiah.[8] At the same time, they engaged in a series of provocative sexual practices, including the suspension of Jewish laws governing conjugal relations and the demand for sexual abstinence. This was the ultimate form of antinomianism as it threatened the primary unit of all social discipline: the family.[9]

If Sabbatian prophets and their followers drew on their ecstatic physical experience of redemption as the source of legitimacy for their suspension of the law and their introduction of new rituals, Sasportas turned to the bookshelf in order to reinstitute textual discipline. Against the authenticity of their revelations, Sasportas held up written norms as the sole source of authority. Trained in a tradition that placed emphasis on erudition at the expense of local custom or individual experience, Sasportas took pride in his mastery over the entirety of Jewish law from the Mishnah and the Talmud of antiquity through the codes and commentaries of the Middle Ages up through the most recent

responsa. His saturation in rabbinic literature was so thorough that when a Sephardic merchant who lived in Frankfurt named David Mercado claimed to have derived the ability of the Sabbatians to establish their own laws from a passage in the Mishnah, the compendium of Jewish law attributed to Judah the Prince at the close of the second century, Sasportas retorted:

> משנתך זאת המפורשת אצלך אינה משנה אלא בדותא היא ולא נודע מקומה איו. ולפי דעתי גם אתה לא ראית אותה כי אם שמע מפי אחרים ובדו אותה מלבם וראויים הם לעונש זולת חרפתם ובשתם לפני חכמים. איך בהיותי שוקד על דלתות המשנה מנוערי ועד היום אני מתעסק בה ובפירושה לעשות חיבור נאה ומתקבל בלשון צח וקצר אם יגזור ה' בחיים לא באה לידי המשנה הזאת המפורשת לך?
>
> This explicit Mishnah of yours does not exist; rather it is imagined and its location is entirely unknown. In my opinion you yourself have not even seen it but you heard about it from others who made it up and should be punished for the shame and embarrassment that they have caused the sages. In my vigilant study of the Mishnah, from my youth up until today . . . how have I never seen this explicit passage?[10]

In a dazzling display of learning, Sasportas had earlier raised two possible texts in the Mishnah and dismissed them as potential sources for Mercado's claim before accusing him of inventing the passage out of whole cloth. Sasportas manifested here what Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin has called "a new mishnaic consciousness" that was a unique feature of the early modern period.[11]

Sasportas drew most frequently on medieval rabbinic literature, rather than the Mishnah and the Talmud of antiquity. At the center of his anti-messianism and at the core of his account stood the *Mishneh Torah*, the legal code of Moses Maimonides (d. 1204). Sasportas repeatedly drew upon the fourteen books of Maimonides' code, especially his treatment of the messianic age in the laws of kings at the conclusion of the code's final volume, the Book of Judges. His dispute with the Sabbatians, however, was not merely about this celebrated discussion of the Messiah in Maimonides' writing. Throughout *Zizath novel zvi*, Sasportas reverted to passages scattered all over the code, including those concerning the laws of evidence, the laws of repentance, and the laws of prayer. And even as he accused Mercado of inventing new sources, he appears to have quoted Maimonides from memory and on one occasion remembered a passage in the law code that did not actually exist.[12]

At the very beginning of the outbreak of Sabbatian enthusiasm, Sasportas wrote an open letter to the rabbinate of Amsterdam in general and to its leader, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, in particular.[13] In this letter, he outlined the reasons for his skepticism and drew upon Maimonides' code.

ואם בעד כתבים הראשונים הייתי כמספק עכשיו בכתבים שניים המגדילים יתר אמונתכם וכמעט שמחזיקים הענין לודאי קרוב באתי כשואל . . . ואסכים לדברי הרמב"ם ז"ל בסוף הלכות מלכים שכתב: וכל אלו הדברים וכיוצא בהן לא ידע אדם איך יהיו עד שיהיו . . . ולעולם לא יתעסק אדם בדברי אגדות ולא יארך במדרשים האמורות בענינים אלו וכיוצא בהן ולא ישימם עיקר וכו' אלא יחכה ויאמין בכלל הדבר וכו' ע"כ. ולא בעבור זאת אפגע באמונתי ח"ו או אטיל ספק בה, אדרבא אני מקיים אותה בשאלתי לדעת האמת, ונראה לי שיותר טוב ספקי מודאי.

When I received the first letters, I had doubted; with the recent arrival of the second letters that increase your belief and practically establish the matter as something definite that will occur shortly, I have come as one who questions . . . and I shall agree to the words of Maimonides at the conclusion of his laws of kings, who wrote, "but no one is in a position to know the details of this and similar things until they have come to pass . . . no one should ever occupy himself with the legendary themes or spend much time on Midrashic statements bearing on this and like subjects. He should not deem them of prime importance . . . one should wait (for his coming) and accept in principle this article of faith." Here end his words. For this [belief in Sabbetai Zevi], I shall not impinge my faith, heaven forefend, or cast doubt upon it; on the contrary, I uphold it [my faith] in my questioning to ascertain the truth, and it appears to me that doubt is more appropriate than certainty.[14]

A few lines later, Sasportas rejected the claims of the believers who declared him to be a sinner for not having believed in Sabbetai Zevi and Nathan of Gaza. He again pointed to Maimonides' code as the source of his doubt:

ואעפ"י שאם לא הייתי מאמין בזה האיש למלך המשיח לא הייתי חוטא כל עוד שלא ראיתי חזקתו כדברי הרמב"ם ז"ל בסוף הלכות מלכים וז"ל: ואם יעמוד מלך מבית דוד הוגה בתורה ועוסק במצוות כדוד אביו כפי תורה שבכתב ושבעפ"ה ויכוף כל ישראל לילך בה ולחזק בדקה וילחם מלחמות ה' הרי זה בחזקת שהו משיח ואם עשה והצליח ובנה מקדש במקומו וקבץ נדחי ישראל הרי זה משיח בודאי עכ"ל.

Even though I have not believed in this man [Sabbetai Zevi] as the king Messiah, I have not sinned as long as I have not seen his claims established according to the [standard] in Maimonides at the conclusion of the laws of Kings: "If there arise a king from the House of David who meditates on the Torah, occupies himself with the commandments, as did his ancestor David, observes the precepts prescribed in the written and Oral law, prevails upon Israel to walk in the way of the Torah and to repair its breaches, and fights the battles of the Lord, it may be assumed that he is the Messiah.

> If he does these things and succeeds, rebuilds the sanctuary on its site, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he beyond all doubt is the Messiah." Here end his words.[15]

To his colleagues in the Amsterdam rabbinate, Sasportas insisted that "skepticism is not a mark of disbelief in the coming of the Messiah, but rather the foremost duty of the learned," in the succinct articulation of Amos Funkenstein.[16] One may even push Funkenstein's formulation further. Skepticism regarding the Messiah was not only incumbent upon the learned; it was a legal obligation. Repeatedly throughout *Zizath novel zvi*, Sasportas clung to his doubt in the face of Sabbatian certainty. The Sabbatians pointed to experience, revelation, and prophecy as evidence of the Messiah. Sasportas countered with an authoritative law code that in his reading provided a clear series of necessary stipulations as the prerequisites for the proclamation of the Messiah. Following Maimonides, Sasportas subjected the doctrine of the Messiah to the demands of skepticism and to the rigors of the law.

Another letter to the rabbinate in Amsterdam written by Sasportas about six months later provides some indication of how central Maimonides was to his demand for skepticism:

> האם ראיתם בשום ספר שמחייב להאמין למשיח מי שאומר על עצמו משיחא אנא או אומרים עליו שזה מלך הכבוד קודם עשותו מעשה משיח כדברי הרמב"ם בהל' מלכים, ואעפ"י שיתן כמה אותות ומופתים אחרים האם כדאים להחזיקו למשיח . . . אבל משיח במעשיו הדבר תלוי ללחום מלחמת ה' ולבנות מקדש ולקבץ גלות, שאם לא כן כל הרוצה ליטול שם משיח יבא ויטול אם חסידותו מוכחת עליו וכפי החסידים ירבו המשיחים.
>
> Have you seen in a single book that one must believe in a Messiah about someone who says about himself, "I am the Messiah," or about whom they say, "this is the honored king," before he performs the deeds of the Messiah according to the formulation of Maimonides in the laws of kings; even if he provides several other signs and wonders, are these sufficient to establish him as the Messiah? . . . The Messiah's deeds are dependent upon him fighting the war of the Lord, the construction of the Temple, and the gathering of exile. For if this were not the case, anyone who wanted to take the name Messiah, would simply come and take it, as long as his piety served as proof. And there would be as many Messiahs as there were pietists.[17]

Like a good Maimonidean, Sasportas saw a legal imperative to believe in the Messiah—but none whatsoever to believe in Sabbetai Zevi. For Sasportas following in the footsteps of Maimonides, the messianic age would involve

no dramatic change in the observance of the law. In fact, the antinomianism of the Sabbatians was proof positive that the Messiah had not yet arrived. What was more, once Maimonides' code had been abandoned, Sasportas seemed to say, the way to messianic anarchy was open to all. If the Sabbatians could subvert the power of the written word according to the conduct of their Messiah and their prophet, what was there to stop any Jew who behaved in a particularly pious manner from claiming to be the Messiah?

If the code of Maimonides was the primary point of departure for Sasportas's response to Sabbatianism, he drew on a number of other works by Maimonides to buttress his arguments. He engaged in a protracted dispute with the Sabbatians and their moderate supporters such as Isaac Aboab da Fonseca as to whether the "Epistle to Yemen" justified their belief or his skepticism. He obliquely referred to *The Guide of the Perplexed* in his definition of belief and explicitly invoked it as a means to limit the scope of prophecy and to exclude Nathan of Gaza and other Sabbatians entirely from that category.[18] In his reading, *The Guide of the Perplexed* offered a stinging rebuttal of all the would-be prophets who claimed direct communication with the divine rather than authorization to engage in prophetic speculation. He drew on *The Book of Commandments* in a protracted legal dispute about the recitation of the priestly blessing in the public synagogue service of the Jews of Amsterdam.[19] From this array of sources, Sasportas conjured up a Maimonides who was sober, rational, and definitive. The law more than any other aspect of Judaism was the point of departure and the telos for all thinking about the Messiah. Sasportas's Maimonides had counseled patience to the Jews of Yemen and sought to attenuate their false expectations of the advent of the Messiah in the middle of the twelfth century.[20] In his legal code, Maimonides had formulated a set of criteria that all but ensured that the laws of Judaism would continue to be authoritative in the messianic age. To return to Funkenstein's reading of Maimonides once again, "the Messiah will not change an iota of the law. An antinomian attitude is the clearest indication of an impostor."[21]

But the Sabbatians were no less willing than Sasportas to give up on the authority of Maimonides. Isaac Nahar, a rabbi in Amsterdam who was swept up in the enthusiasm to such a degree that he made his way to Livorno on an intended pilgrimage to greet the new Messiah, invoked nothing less than Maimonides' law code in an attempt to convince Sasportas to keep quiet:

ואתה האדון לא ידעתי למה לא שמר הדברים בלבו ולמה פרסם הדברים בפני המון העם ההולכים בתמים ומחזיקים באומנתם . . . כן בעיננו ראינו במקום זה וכן בכל המקומות ששמענו שמעם לשמע שמועות אלו כלם שבים אל ה' בכל לבם, והוא אצלי א' מסימני הגאולה כמו שכתב רמב"ם בהלכות תשובה.

> I do not know why you have not remained silent. Why have you publicized your opinion among the people who walk innocently and uphold their faith. . . . For in all of the places where we have heard these rumors, people are returning to God with all their heart, and to me, this is one of the signs of redemption as Maimonides wrote in the laws of repentance.[22]

Sasportas was all for repentance, as he made clear in his response, but these seizures of penitential behavior were not indicative of the redemption or the correct interpretation of Maimonides. In a letter written to a believer, no less a Sabbatian authority than Nathan of Gaza invoked the very passage in Maimonides' laws of kings that Sasportas had cited in his rebuke of the Amsterdam rabbinate:

> ואף כי לא מצאנו רמז בפשטי התורה דבר זה כבר ראינו דברי חז"ל בענינים אלה כמה תמוהים ולא יכולנו להשיג סוף דעתם בשום דבר מדבריהם, כמו שהעיד ג"כ על דבר זה המאור הגדול הרמב"ם ז"ל, ולא יובנו דבריהם כי אם בשעת מעשה בע"ה.

> For although nothing of the kind is indicated in the plain sense of Scripture, yet we have seen that the sayings of the ancient rabbis on these [eschatological] matters are obscure and utterly inexplicable, and we have the testimony of the great luminary Maimonides [who declared] that the rabbinic dicta would become intelligible only after the event.[23]

What Sasportas had read as an authorization of his doubt and an imperative for skepticism, Nathan of Gaza embraced as the basis for the esoteric nature of his prophecies. For Sabbatians of all stripes, from an enthusiast such as Isaac Nahar to the very architect of the movement such as Nathan of Gaza, Maimonides had authorized their belief in Sabbetai Zevi as the fulfillment of their messianic hopes. In a certain sense, part of the dispute concerning the messianic claims of Sabbetai Zevi and his prophet Nathan of Gaza depended upon how one read Maimonides.[24]

Sasportas went to great lengths to convince his readers in the Western Sephardic diaspora that they had misconstrued Maimonides. He also sought to construct an anti-messianic tradition out of a number of medieval sources. As he had written to the Amsterdam rabbinate, "Have you seen in a single book that one must believe in a Messiah about someone who says about himself 'I am the Messiah'?" Sasportas seemed to prefer any book to the experiential evidence of the Sabbatians. In a long letter to Raphael Supino in Livorno that marked the first sustained articulation of his opposition to Sabbetai Zevi, Sasportas drew upon a passage in *Sefer Hasidim*, a work composed by the German pietists of the Rhineland and attributed to Judah the Pious (d. 1217). He

advised Supino to turn to passage 206, which espoused a messianic pacifism at odds with the active campaigning of the Sabbatians and their allies:

> אם תראה שמתנבא אדם על משיח דע כי היו עוסקים במעשה כשפים או במעשה שדים או במעשה המפורש ובשביל שהם מטריחים את המלאכים אומרים לו על משיח כדי שיתגלה לעולם על שהטריחו את המלאכים. ולבסוף יהיה לבושה ולחרפה לכל העולם על שהטריחו המלאכים. או השדים באים ולומדים לו חשבונות וסודות לבושתו ולבושת המאמינים בדבריו.
>
> If you see a man prophesizing about the Messiah, know that he is engaged in witchcraft or evil spirits as with the Ineffable Name. Angels will tell him [false things] about the Messiah so that he could be exposed to the world as [a fraud]. . . . In the end, it shall be shame and embarrassment to the entire world that he has disturbed the angels. Or the demons will come and instruct him in calculations and secrets that will redound to his shame and to the shame of those who believe in his words.[25]

It would be hard to imagine a medieval Jewish book further from Maimonides' code than *Sefer Hasidim*. Where Maimonides sought to compose a code that would represent the Oral Torah in its entirety, *Sefer Hasidim* sought to codify the will of the creator in a way that would define for the pietist precisely how to submit to the divine yoke.[26] If Maimonides' code argued that the advent of the messianic age would involve no change in the law, *Sefer Hasidim* argued that the pietist was in need of constant guidance that the traditional corpus of Jewish law could not provide; the messianic state of perfection was a moral imperative that was, perforce, unobtainable. Maimonides produced a normative legal guide for a lay readership; the German pietists wrote a work that taught the aspiring pietist how to transcend the law.

Sasportas mentioned this particular passage of *Sefer Hasidim* on no fewer than five occasions in *Zizath novel zvi*.[27] Any source, no matter how far from his own intellectual universe, was preferable to the experiential claims made by the Sabbatians about the arrival of redemption. He would choose messianic pacifism in any guise, even that of the supernatural, as long as it appeared in a written work that he could hold up as authoritative. Furthermore, it is conceivable that Sasportas identified a conservative tendency in the world of the pietists that was the antithesis of Sabbatian enthusiasm. As Haym Soloveitchik has shown, the pietists were fighting a rearguard—conservative—action against the rise of the dialectical method of Talmud study that came of age in twelfth-century France, which prized intellectual speculation at the expense of legal or moral adjudication.[28] The German pietist had to contend with a revolution in intellectual Jewish life that redefined the study of the Talmud, and he responded with a novel form of piety that went far beyond the bounds

of the law. Sasportas faced a very different type of revolution in Jewish life, a mass messianic movement, and he responded with a novel form of criticism that far exceeded the norms of rabbinic writing.

For all of the differences between *Sefer Hasidim* and the writings of Maimonides, Sasportas may have been attuned to affinities between these sources that have eluded modern scholarship. Both the pietists of *Sefer Hasidim* and Maimonides were unabashed elitists. Both placed enormous emphasis on the importance of the written word. Their elitism may have had different sources: Maimonides valued a certain type of philosophical contemplation completely foreign to the supernatural world of the German pietists. He put the spiritual use of reason at the center of his universe rather than the will of the creator. The pietists, by contrast, idealized the model of a spiritual superman and emphasized the rigors of physical discipline and penance. But both the pietist in *Sefer Hasidim* and Maimonides set themselves apart from their respective environments as morally corrupt and, perhaps, rendered degenerate by wrongheaded popular opinion. Sasportas too cultivated the posture of the critic and set himself apart from his addressees, whom he held to have betrayed the Sephardic learned ideal in the name of which he now spoke.

If Maimonides and *Sefer Hasidim* anchored Sasportas' anti-messianism in the Jewish textual tradition, he turned to a third source to justify his skepticism of Sabbatian prophecy: a legal responsum of the Iberian jurist Solomon ibn Adret (d. 1310). As Matt Goldish has shown, the possibility of reviving prophecy underlay many of the claims to authority made by the Sabbatians.[29] Nathan of Gaza and his fellow prophets invoked divine revelation as proof of their authority and sought to transform the charisma of learning that had long served to cement the alliance between the rabbinate and the lay oligarchy within Jewish communities. In a retort that paralleled his appeal to Maimonides in terms of his unbelief in the Messiah, Sasportas turned to a medieval legal discussion of prophecy to justify his unbelief in the Messiah's prophet. Writing to Joseph Halevi in Livorno, a preacher to the community of Sephardic Jews who was one of the few allies Sasportas had in his opposition, he pointedly invoked Ibn Adret:

> מי שמע כזאת שבעד דברים תלויים ברפיון נניח דברי תורה וקבלה ונחוש לדברי האומר כה אמר ה' לחייבני מיתה על העדר אמנותי בו ה' לא צוה. ולא ידע נתן המתנבא שבמנעו אות ומופת פטר את חלושי אמונתו וחייב את עצמו אם לא תתקיים נבואתו. ואם יאמר אומר שזמנו מוכיח עליו ובבוא דברו יודע כי נביא הוא, גם אני אודהו אבל יודה לי מיהת דעדיין לא חל עליו שם נביא. והנה מה טוב ומה נעים דברי הרשב"א בס' תקמ"ח על אותו נביא די אבילה.

> Whoever heard of such a thing, that while matters were still unclear we should set aside the words of Torah and Kabbalah and concern ourselves

> with the words of one who says "thus sayeth the Lord," to compel me to the punishment of death for my lack of faith in him. But God has not commanded. And does Nathan who prophesizes not know that his refusal to offer a sign and a wonder has justified those who are weak in their faith, and he has made himself liable, if his prophecy is unfulfilled. But should you say that time will justify him, and when his words are fulfilled it shall be known that he is a prophet—I too concede this. But you must concede to me that he has not yet attained the status of a prophet. How good and how pleasing are the words of Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret, responsum 548 about that prophet from Avila.[30]

Sasportas continued to cite Ibn Adret as justification for his skepticism of Nathan's claims to prophecy and directed his addressee to examine the passage himself. In the responsum, Ibn Adret had skeptically addressed claims about a possible prophet in Avila. He informed his reader that while prophecy was a theoretical possibility, it could only happen to someone who was particularly pious and living in Palestine. Ibn Adret was doubtful that the particular man in question was the prophet that he claimed to be: "But this shocked me, that a man who was neither a sage nor knowledgeable about books nor a servant to the sages should be who they said he was."[31] Like Sasportas several hundred years later, Ibn Adret held up knowledge of written texts as a requirement for the attainment of a certain rank within the religious hierarchy, in this case a prophet rather than the Messiah. Elsewhere in his writings, both in *Zizath novel zvi* and in his collection of responsa *Ohel Ya'akov*, Sasportas turned to Ibn Adret as a legal precedent in his rulings.[32] What is more, Sasportas felt an almost filial connection to him, as Ibn Adret had been a student of his ancestor Nahmanides. At one point in the midst of a vituperative exchange with Isaac Nahar, Sasportas pointedly invoked the protective merit of Nahmanides and Ibn Adret in the very same breath.[33]

Solomon ibn Adret can hardly be construed as a late medieval Maimonidean or as a German pietist. He belonged to a tradition of Sephardic jurisprudence that was adamantly opposed to the philosophical rationalism of *The Guide of the Perplexed* as well as the exegetical supernaturalism of *Sefer Hasidim*. On a number of occasions in the second controversy surrounding the writings of Maimonides that dominated Jewish intellectual life in Provence and Catalonia at the turn of the thirteenth century, Ibn Adret had scathing things to say about *The Guide of the Perplexed*.[34] Moreover, he appears to have been completely unaware of *Sefer Hasidim*, as recent scholarship has suggested that the work made few if any inroads into the Iberian Peninsula in the late Middle Ages.[35]

In addressing the Sabbatians and their supporters, Sasportas thus constructed a textual anti-messianic tradition out of sources that sat awkwardly

next to one another on his imagined bookshelf. Nonetheless, he used them to draw out a number of points that he sought to impress upon his correspondents. First, he turned to the stipulations for the Messiah's arrival in Maimonides' code to caution his readers about their certainty. Second, he drew upon both Maimonides and the German pietists to ask his readers to imagine the anarchy and disorder that would arise from a proliferation of Messiahs. Finally, he drew upon Maimonides and Ibn Adret to define prophecy in such a manner that would pointedly exclude Nathan of Gaza and his colleagues from that category. Important as each of these individual claims was, the total impact of Sasportas's argument amounted to a demand for provisional skepticism in the face of experiential certainty. Authority manifested itself in a text, whether it was a law code, a pietist manual, or a responsum, and in those who were invested with the power of interpreting those texts. Experience, feeling, spirituality should not enter into consideration when assessing the advent of the Messiah.

Yet it would severely limit the extent and scope of the disputes over Sabbatianism were one to reduce the conflict entirely into one of the written word as opposed to the experience of revelation. Sabbatian prophets and pamphleteers proved equally adept at invoking the authority of texts. We have already seen how central a role Maimonides played in the prophecy of Nathan of Gaza; as even the most avid Sabbatian knew, however, Maimonides' law code was hardly the ideal source upon which to build a robust messianic theology. The passages on the Messiah were too brief and too ambiguous to serve as the basis for a theory of an antinomian Messiah. Nathan of Gaza and other Sabbatian prophets understood that Maimonides' authority was such that he could not be circumvented; but he was not the easiest route to a Sabbatian theology. Over and above Maimonides' law code and its passages concerning the Messiah, the Sabbatians employed two strategies to invoke the authority of the written word. First, they turned to a work titled *The Book of Zerubbabel* as a prophetic description of the events they had witnessed. Second, they discovered hitherto unknown prophecies that predicted the advent of Sabbetai Zevi. Behind both strategies was the same intellectual impulse: an appeal to ancient texts, or those that purported to be ancient, as a justification for the conduct of their Messiah.

Let us examine the Sabbatian invocation of *The Book of Zerubbabel*, an early medieval Hebrew apocalypse in which God reveals secrets to the Persian governor Zerubbabel mentioned in the biblical prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Ezekiel.[36] Echoing a rabbinic tradition that appeared in the Babylonian Talmud, *The Book of Zerubbabel* develops the notion of two Messiahs, the Messiah son of Joseph and the Messiah son of Judah.[37] At the end of days, the Messiah son of Joseph would gather all of Israel in Jerusalem and offer sacrifices to the Lord. Armilos the son of Satan would come to rule the world and

kill the Messiah son of Joseph.[38] The Messiah son of Judah would then announce his arrival only to be mocked by the remaining sages of Israel. Nevertheless, the Messiah son of Judah would vanquish Armilos, raise the dead including the Messiah son of Joseph, and usher in the redemption. *The Book of Zerubbabel* survives in a number of different versions, many of which differ significantly from one another, and circulated among medieval Hebrew poets who cited it in their liturgical poetry.[39] Beginning with Israël Lévi in the early twentieth century, scholars have dated the work to the early seventh century prior to the Islamic conquest.[40] For our purposes, however, the crucial point has to do with how the Sabbatians related to it: they treated it as an ancient rabbinic text that formed part of the canon of rabbinic literature from antiquity. The Sabbatians had ample grounds for doing so, as the first and only early modern edition of the work had appeared as part of a collection of rabbinic midrashim printed in Constantinople in 1519 titled *Likutim Shonim*.[41]

One of the first instances in which a Sabbatian appealed to the authority of *The Book of Zerubbabel* appeared in a letter written by Hosea Nantawa from Alexandria to Livorno in the summer of 1666 prior to the conversion of the Messiah to Islam.[42] A fervent believer and skilled writer, Nantawa sought to justify the imprisonment of Sabbetai Zevi in Gallipoli to the faithful across the Mediterranean. At the end of a long letter that laid out an elaborate justification for the antinomian behavior of Sabbetai Zevi and his followers, Nantawa appealed to *The Book of Zerubbabel*, which he referred to as a prophecy rather than a book:

> מה אומר ובכן תדעו על ענין זה, הלא ענין זה של התפיסה היא כתובה בנבואת זרובבל, הלא היא אצלנו, שאומרת שגדולי וחכמי ישראל יכפרו במלך המשיח ויבזו אותו ויכו אותו ויהיה תפוס בתפיסה כאשר יראה הרואה שם.
>
> What shall I say? Indeed you should know about this. Behold the entire episode of his imprisonment is written down in the prophecy of Zerubbabel, which we have with us here. It states that the eminences and sages of Israel shall deny the Messiah, subject him to shame, and strike him down. He shall be taken prisoner, as anyone can see who looks there.[43]

For Nantawa, this ancient text offered a prophetic and authoritative account of contemporary events. Both the imprisonment of Sabbetai Zevi and his rejection by the rabbinate had a written precedent available to anyone who wanted to see it.

Sasportas, of course, would have none of this. In a direct response to Nantawa's letter, he exclaimed:

> והראיה על זה כי מעת לכתו לאיזמיר וחטאתו מלפפתו והולכת לפניו עד שהושם בבית הסוהר דיליה, כי נבואת זרובבל שאמרת שמדברת עליו אינה בעולם ולא נמצאת ומכ"ש פירושה.

> And concerning your proof about this—that from the moment he [Sabbetai Zevi] went to Izmir enveloped in the sin that preceded him to the point that he was placed in their prison—the prophecy of Zerubbabel about which you spoke is nowhere to be found and does not exist, all the more so such an explanation to it.[44]

When confronted by an ostensibly authoritative and ancient text, Sasportas reverted to a powerful and nearly irrefutable strategy: he denied its existence and implied that it was a forgery. Such a strategy could only work, however, if Sasportas understood himself and was understood by others to be a master of the textual tradition that he claimed to represent.

In an earlier comment to Joseph Halevi in Livorno, Sasportas had dismissed Nantawa's proof from *The Book of Zerubbabel* but added a telling aside:

> ועוד אמר הנוטה מדרך השכל כי תפיסה זאת כתובה בנבואת זרובבל הלא היא אצלו האומרת שגדולי וחכמי ישראל יכפרו במלך המשיח ויבוזו אותו ויהיה תפוס וכו', ושקר ענה ולא נמצא זה בשום ספר ובזוהר איתא בר"מ מענין זה אבל לא על מי שעדיין לא עשה מעשה משיח ולא סימנים הנראים ומוכיחים עליו.
>
> He who strays from the path of his intellect [Nantawa] further said: that this approach was written in the prophecy of Zerubbabel, which according to him, states that the sages and scholars of Israel shall deny the king Messiah, embarrass him, and put him into chains. . . .[45] He responded with a lie. One cannot find this in any book. There is a passage like this in the *Zohar*, but it does not concern someone who has not yet performed the deeds of the Messiah and the given signs that offer proof.[46]

Over and above his response to Nantawa, where he denied the very existence of *The Book of Zerubbabel*, here he denied that the theory of the fallen Messiah could be substantiated by any written text. In order to further buttress his argument, Sasportas mentioned a possible passage in the *Zohar* only to dismiss it as irrelevant to Sabbetai Zevi as a Messiah who had yet to substantiate his messianic pretensions. Sasportas's reaction to the invocation of *The Book of Zerubbabel* was to deny its existence. This was patently false, as Gershom Scholem gleefully exclaimed as early as 1942: "The words of Rabbi Jacob Sasportas are incorrect!"[47] *The Book of Zerubbabel* had appeared in print nearly a century and a half earlier and had been cited by liturgical poets nearly a millennium earlier. The Sabbatians were almost certainly not the only Jews in the seventeenth century who attributed the work to rabbinic antiquity. Sasportas's error, however, may have been an honest one; that is, he may have been unaware of the book's existence or of its citation in the liturgical hymns. In any

event, his strategy was quite clear: to repudiate its existence entirely. A text that does not exist cannot be authoritative.

Sasportas need not have responded this way. A Yiddish chronicle of Sabbatianism by Leyb ben Ozer, *Bashraybung fun Shabsai Tsvi* (Yid. The Story of Sabbetai Zevi), offers a valuable counterpoint to his denial.[48] Written by the sexton of the Ashkenazi congregation in Amsterdam in 1718, *Bashraybung fun Shabsai Tsvi* recounts a series of conversations and stories that the author had heard about the Sabbatian movement.[49] Sasportas and Leyb ben Ozer both discussed a somewhat shadowy figure named Nehemiah Hacohen, an Ashkenazi prophet who, as far as scholars have been able to ascertain, left no written works.[50] The two accounts agree that Nehemiah traveled from Poland on behalf of his coreligionists to the Ottoman Empire in the summer of 1666 with the express intention of interviewing Sabbetai Zevi and ascertaining whether he was the Messiah. Both agree that he spent three days in interviews with Sabbetai Zevi before departing in haste. Although he referred to Nehemiah on a number of occasions and repeatedly mentioned his series of conversations with Sabbetai Zevi, Sasportas gave little indication as to the content of their discussions.[51] Much of this may be the result of Sasportas's prejudice against him: at various points, he referred to him as a madman and a false prophet.[52]

By contrast, Leyb ben Ozer described him as a learned man and a kabbalist unlike any other in all of Poland.[53] Unlike Sasportas, who appears to have learned of Nehemiah from the reports of others, Leyb ben Ozer had met the Polish prophet and had hosted him for fourteen weeks in Amsterdam in 1690.[54] He recounted the contents of Nehemiah's conversations with Sabbetai Zevi in relative detail:

דען אנדרן טאג קומן בייא ש"צ אונ' מיט אים בגונן מפלפל צו זיין אויש ספרי הקבלה אונ' צו אים גזאגט : וויא זאגשטו דז דוא בישט משיח בן דוד דר גואל פון ישראל? פאלגנש אל אונזר ספרי הקבלה קאנשטו קיין משיח בן דוד זיין דען לפי דבריהם מוז משיח בן יוסף ערשטן קומן אונ' מלחמה האלטן מיט גוג ומגוג אונ' דיא ערשטי מלחמה ווער משיח בן אפירו גווינן אונ' צום צווייטן מול ווערט ער ווידר מלחמה מיט זיא הלטן זא ווערט משיח בן אפרים נהרג ווערן אין די פפורטן פון ירושלים.

On the second day, he [Nehemiah] returned to Sabbetai Zevi and began to engage with him in the dialectical study of kabbalistic books. He said to him: how can you say that you are the Messiah son of David, the redeemer of Israel? According to all our kabbalistic books, you cannot be the Messiah son of David, because they stipulate that the Messiah son of Joseph must precede him and wage war with Gog and Magog. In the first war, the Messiah son of Ephraim shall win; but in the second, he shall fight with them

> again and the Messiah son of Ephraim shall be slaughtered at the gates of Jerusalem.[55]

Leyb ben Ozer continued to recount the destruction of the Jews in the wake of the Messiah son of Ephraim's death and the redemption that would come only with the arrival of the Messiah son of David. In his account, Leyb ben Ozer referred alternatively to the Messiah son of Joseph or to the Messiah son of Ephraim without discriminating between them.[56] Nehemiah's crucial point as filtered through Leyb ben Ozer was quite clear: according to kabbalistic books the redemption would necessarily entail the coming of two, not one, Messiahs. Sabbetai Zevi and his followers were not sticking to the script, and, therefore, he was not the genuine Messiah. Sabbetai Zevi attempted to rebut Nehemiah's queries by claiming that one of his students had been Messiah son of Ephraim and had been killed, but Nehemiah remained unconvinced.

Leyb ben Ozer did not mention the titles of any of the kabbalistic books discussed by Sabbetai Zevi and Nehemiah.[57] Furthermore, the report of the conversation did not contain any mention of the sages mocking the Messiah son of David or of his subsequent imprisonment. Nevertheless, Scholem's assertion that Nehemiah was referring to *The Book of Zerubbabel* appears quite reasonable.[58] If Nehemiah was indeed referring to the work in his conversation with Sabbetai Zevi, he came to a very different conclusion about it than Sasportas. The Sephardic rabbi rejected the invocation of *The Book of Zerubbabel* as an authoritative text; the Polish prophet accepted its authority but argued that the events it described did not correspond to the events he was witnessing. Leyb ben Ozer leaves little doubt as to the centrality of the written word in the exchanges between Sabbetai Zevi and Nehemiah:

> זא דז דיזי צווייא גר שטארק קיגן אננדר ווארן אונ׳ איר פלפול אונ׳ טושיפ האט גדייארט דרייא טאג אונ׳ דרייא נאכט דז זיא אין דיא זעלביגי דרייא נאכט גר ווינג גשלאפן האבן אונ׳ אנדרשט ניקש גטאן אז איין ספר קבלה פור אונ׳ זד אנדרי דר נאך אפור גנומן

> Thus the two of them disputed fiercely with one another and their dialectic and dispute continued for three days and three nights, and they slept very little those three nights. They did nothing except take out kabbalistic books, one after the other, each man against the other.[59]

For three days Sabbetai Zevi and Nehemiah disputed the correct interpretation of a particular text, but neither one doubted that authority lay with the written word. In fact, their disputes took place in the presence of and concerning the contents of written books.

In all three accounts of Nehemiah Hacohen's visit to Gallipoli, his abrupt departure precipitated the interrogation of Sabbetai Zevi by the Ottoman sultan and the Messiah's conversion to Islam. In order to escape the throng of

believers surrounding the prison, Nehemiah hastily converted to Islam, informed upon Sabbetai Zevi to the Ottoman authorities, and returned to Poland where he reverted to Judaism. Nehemiah's visit may have triggered a moment of crisis within the Sabbatian movement, but the repeated invocations of *The Book of Zerubbabel* did not disappear. Quite the opposite: no less a figure than Nathan of Gaza appealed to the work to justify the Messiah's subsequent conversion to Islam. This conversion posed a profound problem for Nathan's career as a prophet.[60] The empirical fact of the Messiah as a Muslim appeared to contradict all of his earlier prophecies. But Nathan of Gaza worked hard to ensure that the contradiction was only apparent. One of his primary strategies for doing so was to seek textual precedents that spoke of a Messiah's conversion. Nathan of Gaza amassed a mélange of texts, some that referred to a Messiah's conversion to Islam, such as the diary of the sixteenth-century Sephardic Rabbi Joseph Taitazack, while others to a Messiah's conversion without specifying a religion. Nathan of Gaza then proceeded to apply these texts to Sabbetai Zevi. Among these he wrote:

> ועוד שנמצא בנבואת זרובבל שאומ' בפ' שלמלך המשיח יקראו משומד. וכן בספרי מהר"י לוא רבו של תוספת י"ט נושא ונותן הרבה בספריו ענין מ"ה שיהיה אדוק וקשור באומת ישמעאל.
>
> Furthermore it is found in the prophecy of Zerubbabel, which said explicitly that they shall call the King Messiah an apostate, and so too the books of Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, the teacher of Yomtob Lippman Heller, dealt extensively with the issue of the King Messiah who shall be bound and tied to the Ishmaelite nation.[61]

As Chaim Wirszubski noted, none of the extant versions of *The Book of Zerubbabel* contain a discussion of an apostate Messiah. Yet this may not have mattered to Nathan of Gaza. What was significant was the mere existence of a text such as *The Book of Zerubbabel* that he could invoke as authoritative. With this textual hodgepodge—the diary of a Spanish exile living in the Ottoman Empire (Taitazack), the theological treatises of a sixteenth-century Ashkenazi rabbi in Prague (Judah Loew), and a medieval apocalypse that had no apparent author (*The Book of Zerubbabel*)—Nathan hoped to fix upon any text as a source of authority. In this instance, unlike Hosea Nantawa's earlier invocation, the issue was not so much the antiquity of *The Book of Zerubbabel* but the mere fact of its existence. As long as Nathan of Gaza could construe the work as a possible source for Sabbetai Zevi's imprisonment and conversion, he could add it to a list of books.

Sasportas was apparently unaware of this fragment of Nathan of Gaza's writing, but one can easily imagine his response to it. *The Book of Zerubbabel* made one further and significant appearance in *Zizath novel zvi*. In 1669,

several years after Sabbetai Zevi's conversion, Sasportas corresponded with Jacob ibn Sa'adun of Salé, a town on the Atlantic coast of North Africa where Sasportas himself had lived a decade earlier.[62] Ibn Sa'adun defended the Jews of Salé who persisted in their belief in Sabbetai Zevi and cited Nantawa's correspondence with the Jews of Livorno as proof:

ועוד כי בא הכתב השלישית והכריעה לכף זכות והיא עמוד חזק שראוי לסמוך עליה שנמצאת בבית גנזיו של החכם השלם כמה"ר שאול סירירו נ"ע בפי"ס, והיא נבואת זרובבל שהעיד שהיה מדבר עם מטטרון שר הפנים כאשר ידבר איש לרעהו, ונוסח הנבואה הזאת ג"כ כמו שמצאנו כתוב בה אות באות תיבה בתיבה ככה באו שני נוסחת הנבואה ההיא א' מארץ ישראל ונסח אחר ממצרים, ונראה שגם החכם אשר השיב לו תלמידך גם הוא שלח לכם נסחה שהרי השיב על זה בהגהה ואמר כי נבואת זרובבל שאמרת שמדברת עליו אינה בעולם ולא נמצאת ומכ"ש פירושה, נמצא ששלח לכם נסחה. וכללות נבואתו ודבריו שנתן לו סימן מטטרון ש"ה לזרובבל, כי האיש אשר יצא שמעו בכל העולם ואחר כך יוציאו עליו דבה שנשתמד ויוציאו עליו כל תועבות אשר שנא ה' הוא הוא הגואל האמיתי, ובעון החכמים והרבנים שהוציאו עליו דבה רעה ישאר שמנה שנים מצומצמות במאסר לכפר על עונם.

Furthermore a third letter arrived and offered decisive evidence. It is a strong pillar that is certainly reliable, for it was found among the archives of the sage, Rabbi Saul Siriro of Fez, may he rest in paradise. It is the prophecy of Zerubbabel, which states that Zerubbabel spoke with Metatron, the ministering angel, just as someone would speak with his fellow man. The text of this prophecy was exactly the same, word for word, letter for letter. Two identical versions of the prophecy arrived, one from the land of Israel and one from Egypt. Apparently the sage [Nantawa], to whom your student [Joseph Halevi] responded, had also sent you a version of it. You [Sasportas] appended a note to it saying that the prophecy of Zerubbabel, which he [Nantawa] claimed spoke about him [Sabbetai Zevi], did not exist, all the more so with such an explanation. Apparently, he [Nantawa] had sent you [Sasportas] a copy of it. The principles of the prophecy and the things which Metatron the ministering angel told Zerubbabel are thus: the man whose name has gone out throughout the world and is pursued by the subsequent slander of apostasy, and who has received all the abominations hated by God, that man is the true redeemer. But because of the sins of the rabbis and the scholars who slandered him, he shall remain imprisoned for eight years in order to atone for their sins.[63]

Ibn Sa'adun claimed to have discovered a copy of the prophecy of Zerubbabel in the archives of a rabbi from Fez that made a similar prediction as the letter sent by Nantawa to Livorno. In his rendering, the prophecy of Zerubbabel

foretold not only that the Messiah would be subject to the mockery of the sages but also that he would be imprisoned for a period of eight years. This held out the possibility that Sabbetai Zevi, who was still very much alive in 1669, was still the Messiah. Ibn Sa'adun thus returned to *The Book of Zerubbabel*, which had been held authoritative both prior to the Messiah's conversion by Hosea Nantawa and subsequent to his conversion by Nathan of Gaza, as a source of still further hope for another five years.

Sasportas held his ground and insisted that *The Book of Zerubbabel* was a falsification. He then proceeded to identify inconsistencies between its supposed prediction of eight years' imprisonment and one of Nathan of Gaza's subsequent prophecies identifying the year 1670 as the year of redemption:

וראה נבואת זרובבל השקריית איך הכחישה דברי נת"ן כי הוא אמר שנת הת"ל והאחרת אומרת לאחר שמונה שנים למאסרו, ושניהם מוכחשים ומוזמים כי נת"ן בתחילה לא דיבר כלום מהמרתו ולא ממאסרו ולא נבואת זרובבל דיברה כלום מהמרתו וגם לא היה במאסר כל כך שנים, אם לא שנאמר על מאסר הנפש ולסוף הכרת תכרת עונה בה.

Look at the false prophecy of Zerubbabel, how it contradicts the words of Nathan: for he [Nathan] claimed that the year 1670 and the other [*The Book Zerubbabel* cited by Ibn Sa'adun] claimed after eight years of imprisonment [the redemption would come]. Both of them contradict each other and are completely false. For in the beginning, Nathan said nothing about his conversion or his imprisonment, and the prophecy of Zerubbabel said nothing about his conversion or his imprisonment for so many years. Unless you are referring to the imprisonment of his soul, and in the end "that soul shall be utterly cut off: his iniquity shall be upon him."[64] (Num. 15:31)

In this instance, Sasportas appeared to have anticipated Scholem's remark that not all references to *The Book of Zerubbabel* in the Sabbatian literature referred to the same text.[65] Ibn Sa'adun may have indeed possessed a prophecy that Sabbetai Zevi would be released after eight years of imprisonment and attached it to the tradition of the scorned Messiah associated with *The Book of Zerubbabel*. If this had occurred, Sasportas dismissed Ibn Sa'adun's invocation of *The Book of Zerubbabel* as inconsistent with the Sabbatians' own evidence.

Sasportas, however, was not finished. Ibn Sa'adun had impugned the name of a North African rabbinic luminary, Saul Siriro, and he could not let this pass unnoticed:

וחלילה לי להאמין כי נמצאת בבית גנזיו של האב"ד כמהו"ר שאול סירירו ז"ל כי אם אחד מחבירך בעלי אמונתך זו בדאה והמציאה ותלאה באילן גדול אחרי מותו.

> Heaven forefend that I should believe that it was found in the archive of the judge, our holy rabbi, Saul Siriro, of blessed memory; rather, one of your friends who subscribes to this faith of yours invented it and attributed it to the great figure after his death.[66]

Saul Siriro had served as a rabbi and judge in Fes for over half a century until his death in 1654.[67] His nephew and successor Emmanuel Siriro had consulted Sasportas on a question concerning Jewish marriage law some five years after his uncle's death when Sasportas was resident in Salé. Siriro and his colleague had asked Sasportas about a Jewish man who had pursued a woman to the point that he had betrothed her but did not want to marry her. Sasportas responded in no uncertain terms that the court should compel the man to marry her, lest the daughters of Israel be turned into concubines. To judge from the remaining half of the correspondence that appeared in Sasportas's responsa, the exchange had been sharp. At one point Sasportas exploded, "you are not a bath and I am not Aphrodite," alluding to a celebrated passage in the Mishnah (Avodah Zarah 3:4) about a pagan philosopher and Rabban Gamliel in Aphrodite's bath.[68] For all the vitriol between Sasportas and Emmanuel Siriro, however, they were fighting over a matter of Jewish law. Ibn Sa'adun had invoked the memory of Saul Siriro as an accessory to Sabbatian messianism, something Sasportas contemptuously referred to as "this faith of yours." This may be an allusion to the fact that elsewhere in *Zizath novel zvi*, Sasportas had gone to great lengths to distinguish between Sabbatianism as a new faith and a new Torah and consequently separate from Judaism.

"This faith" of the Sabbatians was built upon a different corpus of texts than the Oral and Written Torah held up as authoritative by Sasportas. The disputes over *The Book of Zerubbabel* point to the importance of an early medieval Hebrew book in the period before and after the conversion of Sabbetai Zevi to Islam. They are of far greater interest, however, for what they indicate about the role of textual authority in this episode of early modern messianism. Three different attitudes toward *The Book of Zerubbabel* appear in the Sabbatian controversies: the Sabbatians, Nehemiah Hacohen as recounted by Leyb ben Ozer, and Sasportas. To the Sabbatians, *The Book of Zerubbabel* was an authoritative text, full stop. It contained a relatively detailed picture of the advent of the Messiah as represented by Sabbetai Zevi. In addition, the book derived its authority for some of the Sabbatians from its antiquity. None of the Sabbatians offer a full-fledged theory of its authorship, but both Hosea Nantawa and Jacob ibn Sa'adun implied the work was ancient. Nathan of Gaza made no such claim, and he mentioned it in the same breath as two sixteenth-century works. He did not appear to be troubled or interested in the work's age. For all of

them, though, *The Book of Zerubbabel* served to authorize Sabbetai Zevi as the Messiah.

Nehemiah Hacohen agreed with the Sabbatians on one crucial point: the authority of *The Book of Zerubbabel*. In his interrogation of Sabbetai Zevi, Nehemiah confronted him with the doctrine of the two Messiahs as it appeared in "our kabbalistic books." Nehemiah did not mention their antiquity, but this seems a reasonable inference from the way in which he referred to them. If Nehemiah agreed with the Sabbatians about the authority of these kabbalistic books, he parted company with them concerning their interpretation, which he rejected in no uncertain terms. Their dispute focused on the correct exegesis of what they both agreed was an authoritative text. Nehemiah found the lack of a previous Messiah son of Joseph particularly damning; the Sabbatians found the story of a scorned Messiah particularly useful.

If the divide between Nehemiah and the Sabbatians focused on exegesis, the distinction between their position and that of Sasportas was epistemological. Sasportas was completely underwhelmed by the dispute over the correct interpretation of *The Book of Zerubbabel*; he claimed that the work was not an authoritative source and was the product of the Sabbatian imagination. Sasportas was wrong on the last account, as the Sabbatians had clearly not invented the book out of whole cloth.[69] But his error offers a crucial window into one of the tensions that undergirded the entire Sabbatian controversies. Sasportas and Nathan of Gaza argued over many things: the nature of prophecy, the doctrine of the Messiah, and the validity of the law, to name only a few. Their argument over *The Book of Zerubbabel* points to a conflict between two competing bodies of knowledge. For Sasportas, the corpus of rabbinic literature was authoritative. This corpus, which can roughly be identified with the Sephardic legacy he held so dear, was wide and variegated. It included the Mishnah and the Talmud, both Babylonian and Palestinian, Maimonides and the *Zohar*, Nahmanides and Solomon ibn Adret. It even went so far as to include *Sefer Hasidim*, a work of medieval German piety seemingly quite far from the learned Sephardic elite. But this corpus was not so porous as to include a book he had never heard of that posited a messianic doctrine that contradicted his own reading of the Talmud and Maimonides. The Sabbatians, by contrast, had opened up the corpus of the Oral Torah and treated *The Book of Zerubbabel* as if it were just as authoritative as Talmud and Maimonides. They were more than happy to draw upon *The Book of Zerubbabel* and were perfectly capable of explaining or explaining away any passage from Maimonides invoked by Sasportas or any other critic.

Medieval rabbinic literature served as the point of departure for Sasportas's reasoning. In his sobering anti-messianism he reacted with caustic erudition

to the anarchic enthusiasm of Sabbetai Zevi and his followers. At one point he rebuked the Sabbatians for using "the joy of redemption" as the ill-founded basis for verifying their prophecies.[70] Happiness, Sasportas seemed to say, was not a normative Jewish value. The law, as represented in the writing of prior rabbinic scholars rather than the ecstatic experience of contemporary prophets and their followers, was the standard by which events should be assessed. Sasportas had a manual, the law code of Maimonides and the totality of medieval rabbinic literature, and the experience of the Sabbatians did not correspond to the written description of the messianic age within these texts. *Zizath novel zvi* constituted an elaborate justification for his reading of these sources and his response to contemporary events. Sasportas's confidence in the textual traditions of rabbinic literature equipped him with a certain suspicion toward experience. This social hostility toward untutored sensibility emerged in his pronounced fear of the Jewish crowds that gathered to celebrate the news of the Messiah.

News of redemption spread throughout the Jewish world by way of the mail. Jewish communities in closer proximity to the Messiah in the Ottoman Empire sent letters to their coreligionists throughout Europe and North Africa. The network of Sephardic merchants that was such a central conduit for early modern commerce was quickly transformed into a messianic news corps. When letters from the Ottoman Empire or one of the intermediary ports of call such as Livorno arrived in Amsterdam or Hamburg, they were declaimed in public before a crowd eagerly awaiting news of redemption. In her memoirs Glickl bas Judah-Leib recalled the arrival of news in Hamburg:

> דיא שמחה וואז גיווען וען מאן כתבי' האט גיקראגין דאז איזט ניט זו בישרייבן. דיא מיינשטי כתבי' דיא קומן זיין, האבין דיא ספרדיי' ביקומן, זוא זענין זיא אלי צייט מיט אין איר בית הכנסת גנגין אונ' לשם גילייאיט. זענין טייטשי, יונג אונ' אלט, אך אין איר בית הכנסת גנגין. אונ' דער פורטיגיזין יונגי האט זיך איין גרינין בראטין זיידין באנד און אום זיך גיבונדין.
>
> The joy each time the letters were received is impossible to describe. Most of the letters that arrived were sent to the Sephardim; each time, they took them to their synagogue and read them aloud. Ashkenazim, young and old, also went along to their synagogue. Portuguese youth dressed up in their finest clothing.[71]

Upon hearing news of the Messiah, Glickl's own father-in-law sold his possessions and packed up in preparation for his emigration to Palestine.

Glickl expressed considerable empathy for those who believed in the news of the redemption but regretted the loss of property, foodstuffs, and, on an entirely different scale, hope caused by the eventual demise of the Sabbatian

movement. Sasportas, who witnessed similar scenes of jubilation in Hamburg, perhaps even the very same ones, drew a rather different and less empathetic conclusion:

> וכל אלו הדברים נכנסו באזני ההמון בלתי חקירה ודרישה, וקצת מבעלי תורה עמם מחזיקים ידיהם בלתי מטילים ספק בענין אף אם הם דברים רחוקים מהשכל, לפי שהיו אומרים כל המספק בזה הוא כופר ואין לו חלק באלק"י ישראל.
>
> All these prophecies entered the ears of the masses without any examination or investigation, and even some of the learned men among them accepted it as well, without casting any doubt on the rumors, even if they were things exceedingly difficult for the intellect to accept. They said whoever casts doubt on this is a heretic and has no portion with the God of Israel.[72]

Here and elsewhere in *Zizath novel zvi* Sasportas objected to the gullibility of the crowds, their willingness to accept the reports of redemption without thorough and careful consideration of what was actually contained in them. They failed to subject the news either to the critical rigors of their own intellects or, more importantly, to the sources of their tradition. Even worse, this enthusiasm of the crowd was infectious. Time and again, Sasportas lamented that the rabbinic elite, or those with knowledge of tradition, were caught up in the same enthusiasm. In this instance, the learned men of the Portuguese Jewish community in Hamburg went so far as to declare as heretics anyone who doubted the veracity of the Messiah. To Sasportas, the denial of doubt led to a confusion of categories on the part of the believers: they redefined those who upheld Mosaic Law as heretics.

The public celebration of the arrival of the Messiah in the synagogue and on the street, however, had consequences far beyond the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities in places such as Hamburg and Amsterdam. The crowd not only swept up the rabbinic elite in their enthusiasm, it made a mockery of the Jewish community in the eyes of the gentiles:

> ותהום כל עיר אמסטרדאם ותהי לחרדת אלקי"ם, הגדילו השמחה בתופים ובמחולות בשוקים וברחובות ובבית הכנסת ריקוד ומחול וספרי תורה כולם מוציאים להכיל בתכשיטין נאים בלתי שים על לב הסכנה של קנאת ושנאת האומות. ואדרבא היו מכריזים בפומבי ומגלים לאומות כל הנשמע ולשחוק היו בעיניהם.
>
> The entire city of Amsterdam shook with fright and they were terrified of the Lord. They increased their celebration with great joy in the markets and the streets. They danced joyously in the synagogue and carried out the

> Torah scrolls adorned with beautiful jewels without paying any attention to the jealousy and the hatred of the nations. To the contrary, they called out in public and announced it to everyone, and whoever heard about it, thought it was ridiculous.[73]

Sasportas continued to describe a similar although even more jubilant response in Hamburg upon the arrival of the news from Amsterdam. The gentiles, or this "jealousy and hatred of the nations," played an important role in Sasportas's criticism of the Sabbatians. Sasportas's sole concern with the gentiles, whom he elsewhere referred to as "our enemies," was what they would think about the public display of Jewish enthusiasm. Shame and embarrassment mark his discussion of the Jews in the eyes of foreign observers. He saw the public display of joy and celebration of the new Messiah as an invitation for the gentiles to mock Jewish gullibility and as a possible threat to Jewish safety, lest the declaration of a new Jewish king engender charges of rebellion against the Jews.

The anxiety about the effect of Jewish crowds upon gentile opinion stands out in terms of Sasportas's own intellectual trajectory within the early modern Sephardic diaspora. Sasportas was deeply concerned about the effects of Sabbatian enthusiasm on the gentile perception of the Jews; he thought his contemporaries were making fools out of themselves in public. At best, they would simply be the object of scorn and derision; at worst, they would generate anger and resentment that might jeopardize their all too tenuous position within host societies throughout western Europe and beyond. Sasportas betrayed no concern for the knowledge or the methods used in the contemporary European republic of letters. Not once throughout *Zizath novel zvi* did he indulge in that parade of erudition so central to the image of the *hakham kolel*, an attempt by his Jewish contemporaries to translate the notion of the universal man into a rabbinic idiom.[74] As his discussion of Maimonides, *Sefer Hasidim*, and Solomon ibn Adret indicated, Sasportas was quite confident that the Jewish tradition itself had the intellectual resources with which to handle the challenges of a messianic movement. If only his contemporaries could read Maimonides and other sources with the proper care and attention they deserved, then Sabbetai Zevi and Nathan of Gaza would be relegated to their proper place in the hierarchy of the Jewish community, those very margins that Sasportas chafed at occupying.

In this lack of concern for alien wisdom, either the content of European learning or the methods of historical criticism, and his nearly obsessive focus on the impact of Jewish crowds upon the image of the Jew in the eyes of the gentiles, Sasportas stood in marked contrast to other rabbinic intellectuals in his own milieu such as Menasseh Ben Israel, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, and

Joseph Solomon Delmedigo. Sasportas knew the former two quite well and cited the third at one point in *Zizath novel zvi*. To varying degrees, all these figures engaged with the world of European learning around them. Menasseh Ben Israel composed works in the vernacular as well as in Latin and devoted one of his most important books, *Conciliador*, to the reconciliation of discrepancies in the Hebrew Scriptures, a burning question in the European republic of letters.[75] Isaac Aboab da Fonseca translated Abraham Cohen de Herrera's kabbalistic treatise *El Puerto del Cielo* from Spanish into Hebrew and amassed an impressive library of which Judaica was only a small fraction.[76] In his wanderings throughout Europe and the Ottoman Empire, Joseph Solomon Delmedigo sought to translate Kabbalah into the terms of Neo-Platonism and expressed sustained interest in the new science of the seventeenth century.[77] By contrast, Sasportas did not adduce a single non-Jewish source throughout the pages of *Zizath novel zvi*. He had neither desire nor claim to be current with the latest developments in European learning. Prior to the outbreak of Sabbatian enthusiasm, one of his few forays into print had been an index to the sources of the Palestinian Talmud, a learned and forbidding work that did little to establish him as a household name in the communities of European learning. Rather than the image of the heresy hunter favored by prior scholars of Sabbatianism, Matt Goldish has suggested that the more accurate analogue for Sasportas was the contemporary critic of enthusiasm, intellectuals such as Henry More and Meric Casaubon studied by Michael Heyd.[78] Like Sasportas, a considerable part of their criticism was what Heyd has called a theological criticism. Yet even this analogue has limits: if More and Casaubon turned to Seneca via Justus Lipsius and the newly issued editions of the Church Fathers, Sasportas drew upon Maimonides seemingly without any cognizance of them or their sources.

Sasportas differentiated himself from a number of distinct but sometimes overlapping groups. He rejected the Sabbatians and the Sabbatian prophets in no uncertain terms; he stood apart from his educated colleagues in the Sephardic diaspora; and he distanced himself from his would-be constituents, the lay members of the Jewish community that he contemptuously referred to as the crowd (Heb. *Hamon*) and the masses (Heb. *Hedyotot*). In *Zizath novel zvi* he sought to invent a normative Jewish textual tradition that would regulate both the lives of laypeople and the intellectual habits of the elite. The Jewish laity he found guilty of indiscriminate enthusiasm. They seized every piece of news as cause for celebration and made fools out of themselves before gentile witnesses who were at best indifferent to their joy and at worst extremely suspicious of such public gatherings by a questionably useful minority population. The elites, those rabbis who by his account should have served as his allies in his campaign to defer the Messiah, had forgotten their training. Instead

of studying Maimonides and *Sefer Hasidim* and Solomon ibn Adret, they had drunk deeply from the wells of European learning. In a period of peace and security, Sasportas would not have had any problem with such wide reading and diverse interests, as one can discern from his enduring friendship with the Portuguese poet Miguel Levi de Barrios. But the middle of the 1660s were not normal times. The intellectual promiscuity of his colleagues had left them woefully unprepared to counter the claims of redemption with skepticism and doubt, which Sasportas saw as the principal obligation of a Jewish intellectual in the service of the Jewish textual tradition and the law. Instead of turning to the sources, they had abandoned their learning and joined with the crowd. The behavior of his colleagues was a particularly damning symptom of the decline in the authority of the rabbinate, of the expanding power of ignorant but often wealthy laypeople, and of the decreasing emphasis on a core set of Jewish texts that Sasportas deemed authoritative.

Sasportas's embattled and competitive relationship with the Sephardic intellectual elite points to a central paradox of *Zizath novel zvi*. In his criticism, Sasportas was relentlessly elitist and relentlessly egalitarian at one and the same time. He wrote an appallingly difficult Hebrew whose allusive learning has exhausted readers from Graetz to Scholem. The level of training required to understand his prose all but assumed a thorough and grueling rabbinic education. His message, however, was fundamentally anti-plutocratic. Every Jew, rabbi or lay, elite or common, had an obligation to turn to the sources of the medieval past and draw upon them in the affirmation of doubt, because textual mastery was the summum bonum of Judaism. All Jews were equally subordinate to the hegemony of the text. The sources, for all of their disparity, would allow his colleagues and his constituents to combat the gullibility of the masses, to face down the testimony of experience with the authority of the written word.

137. Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 171B, fol. 353 recto, where parts of the passage quoted by Parker are underlined in red.

138. Matthew Paris, *Historia maior*, Praefatio, sigs. † iii verso–† iiii recto.

Chapter 2

1. Gerson D. Cohen, "Messianic Postures of Ashkenazim and Sephardim," in *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures* (Philadelphia, 1991), 271–97.

2. Elisheva Carlebach, "The Sabbatian Posture of German Jewry," in *The Sabbatian Movement and Its Aftermath: Messianism, Sabbatianism and Frankism*, ed. Rachel Elior (Jerusalem, 2001), 2:6. See also Carlebach, "Between History and Hope: Jewish Messianism in Ashkenaz and Sepharad," *Third Annual Lecture of the Victor J. Selmanowitz Chair of Jewish History* (New York, 1998). On this debate, see David Berger, "Sephardic and Ashkenazic Messianism in the Middle Ages: An Assessment of the Historiographical Controversy," (Hebrew) in *Rishonim ve-Ahronim: Mehkarim be-Toledot Yisrael Mugashim le-Avraham Grossman*, ed. Joseph Hacker, B. Z. Kedar, and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem, 2010), 11–28. While Berger significantly qualifies Carlebach's revision of Cohen's thesis, it seems that he agrees with this identification of Sephardic rabbinic conservatism underplayed by Cohen. See his discussion of Sasportas on 14 and 20.

3. On Maimonides and Nahmanides, see below. On Solomon Beit ha-Levi, see Leon Wieseltier, "A Passion for Waiting: Liberal Notes on Messianism and the Jews," in *For Daniel Bell*, ed. Wieseltier and Mark Lilla (n.p., 2005), 141–42; for mention of Sasportas, see 133. On Hagiz, see Elisheva Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy: Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian Controversies* (New York, 1990). On Hakham Zvi Ashkenazi, who was not Sephardic but ministered to a Sephardic congregation for a time, see Jacob J. Schacter, "Motivations for Radical Anti-Sabbatianism: The Case of Hakham Zevi Ashkenazi," in *The Sabbatian Movement and Its Aftermath*, ed. Elior, 2:31–49. For mention of Sasportas, see 34–35n5.

4. See Joel L. Kraemer, "On Maimonides' Messianic Postures," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 2, ed. Isadore Twersky (Cambridge, MA, 1984), 109–42. David Berger, "Some Ironic Consequences of Maimonides' Rationalist Approach to the Messianic Age," (Hebrew) *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 1–8, reprinted and translated in his *Cultures in Collision and Conversation: Essays in the Intellectual History of the Jews* (Boston, 2011), 278–88; for mention of Sasportas, see 282–84. Israel J. Yuval, "Moses *Redivivus*: Maimonides as the Messiah's Helper," (Hebrew) *Zion* 72 (2007): 161–88.

5. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, trans. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton, 1973).

6. Ibid., 262, 528, and passim.

7. Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Nazir, 23b. See Gershom Scholem, "Redemption through Sin," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), 110.

8. See Gershom Scholem, "Tradition and New Creation in the Ritual of the Kabbalists," in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism* (New York, 1965), 144–45.

9. Allegations of sexual improprieties surfaced in the period of peak Sabbatian enthusiasm between 1665 and 1666; however, it turned into a leitmotif in the anti-Sabbatian literature of the eighteenth century. See Ada Rapoport-Albert, *Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai, Zevi 1666–1816* (Oxford, 2011); and Paweł Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816* (Philadelphia, 2011).

10. Jacob Sasportas, *Zizath novel zvi*, ed. Isaiah Tishby (Jerusalem, 1954), 229. Hereafter cited as Sasportas, *ZNZ*. On Mercado, see Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi*, 784.

11. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Persecution and the Art of Printing: Hebrew Books in Italy in the 1550s," in *Jewish Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of David B. Ruderman*, ed. Richard I. Cohen et al. (Cincinnati and Pittsburgh, 2014), 102; Aaron Ahrend, "The Study of the Mishnah and Mishnah Circles in the Modern Period," (Hebrew) *JSIJ* 3 (2004): 19–53. On the Mishnah in the Sephardic diaspora, see Yosef Kaplan, "Jews and Judaism in the Hartlib Circle," in *Studia Rosenthaliana* 38–39 (2006): 197–200.

12. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 144n4.

13. On the rabbinate in Amsterdam and Sabbatianism, see Yosef Kaplan, "The Attitude of the Sephardi Leadership in Amsterdam to the Sabbatian Movement, 1665–1671," in *An Alternative Path to Modernity* (Leiden, 2000), 211–33, discussion of Sasportas on 211, of Sasportas and Da Fonseca on 220–21. On Da Fonseca, see Kaplan, "The Libraries of Three Sephardi Rabbis in Early Modern Western Europe," (Hebrew) in *Sifriyot ve-osfe Sefarim*, ed. Moshe Sluhovsky and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem, 2006), 225–60, discussion of Da Fonseca on 229–36; on his attitude toward the *Herem* in a text written in 1680, see Anne Oravetz Albert, "The Rabbi and the Rebels: A Pamphlet on the *Herem* by Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 104 (2014): 171–91.

14. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 18. The ellipses in the quotation from Maimonides are those of Sasportas. For the source of the citation, see Maimonides, *Book of Judges*, Laws of Kings, 12:2.

15. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 18–19. Maimonides, *Book of Judges*, Laws of Kings, 11:4.

16. Amos Funkenstein, "Maimonides: Political Theory and Realistic Messianism," in *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, 1993), 135; for mention of Sasportas, see note 11.

17. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 102.

18. For the oblique references, see Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 51, 82, 92, 342; for the explicit citation, where Sasportas referred to *The Guide of the Perplexed* as "his [Maimonides'] book," see Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 364.

19. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 217.

20. For the text, see Moses Maimonides, *Igeret Teman*, ed. Abraham S. Halkin (New York, 1952). On this work, see Mordechai Akiva Friedman, *Ha-Rambam, ha-Mashiah be Teman vehashemad* (Jerusalem, 2002). Prior to Sabbetai Zevi, the "Epistle to Yemen" had appeared in print on two occasions, the first as part of Joseph Solomon Delmedigo, *Ta'alumot Hokhmah* (Hanau, 1629–31) and second as an appendix to Maimonides, *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* (Amsterdam, 1660). On the latter, see L. Fuks and R. G. Fuks-Mansfeld, *Hebrew Typography in the Northern Netherlands, 1585–1815: Historical Evaluation and Descriptive Bibliography* (Leiden, 1984–87), entry 379, 2:309–10.

21. Funkenstein, "Maimonides: Political Theory and Realistic Messianism," 136.

22. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 25.

23. Ibid., 260. As translated by Werblowsky in Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi*, 741. For further discussion of this passage, see Berger, "Some Ironic Consequences of Maimonides' Rationalist Approach to the Messianic Age," 284.

24. Nathan of Gaza and Isaac Nahar were hardly the only Sabbatians to invoke Maimonides. For repeated discussion of Maimonides in a letter justifying the conversion of Sabbetai Zevi, see "The Letter *Magen Avraham* from the land of the West," (Hebrew) in Gershom Scholem, *Mehkere Shabtaut*, ed. Yehuda Liebes (Tel Aviv, 1991), 146–81. The author of the letter invokes

Maimonides' commentary to the Mishnah (149) as well as his epistle to Yemen (155). In an appendix to Scholem's article (179–81), Yehuda Liebes concludes that the author of this letter was Abraham Perez. Furthermore, Abraham Miguel Cardozo discusses Maimonides at considerable length in a letter written in 1669. See "A Letter from Abraham Miguel Cardozo to the Judges in Izmir," in Gershom Scholem, *Mehkarim u-mekorot le-toledot ha-Shabtaut ve-gilguleha* (Jerusalem, 1974), 298–331.

25. *Sefer Hasidim* (Bologna, 1538), par. 206, 30b; Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 81, 94. A version of this passage appears in the Parma edition. See *Sefer Hasidim*, ed. Jehuda Wistinetzki, with an introduction and index by Jacob Freimann (Frankfurt, 1924), par. 212, 76–77. On the complicated textual history of this work, see Haym Soloveitchik, "Piety, Pietism and German Pietism: 'Sefer Hasidim I' and the Influence of Hasidei Ashkenaz," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 92 (2002): 455–93. See also the *Sefer Hasidim* database available at https://etc.princeton.edu/sefer_hasidim/. Sasportas was apparently unaware of *Sefer Hasidim*, ed. Wistinetzki, par. 1543, 378. For discussion of this passage, see Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Medieval Rabbinic Conceptions of the Messianic Age: The View of the Tosafists," in *Mea'ah She'arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, ed. Ezra Fleischer et al. (Jerusalem, 2001), 156n17.

26. On the code, see Moshe Halbertal, "What Is the *Mishneh Torah*? On Codification and Its Ambivalence," in *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*, ed. Jay M. Harris (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 81–111. On the will of the creator as a central issue in *Sefer Hasidim*, see Haym Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the *Sefer Hasidim*," *AJS Review* 1 (1976): 311–25.

27. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 81, 94 (letter to Supino), 113 (letter to the Venetian rabbinate), 115 (letter to the Viennese rabbinate), 298 (response to Cardozo). His emphasis on this passage may have served as a precedent for Moses Hagiz, who scolded Moses Hayim Luzzatto while invoking this very passage. Hagiz advised Luzzatto to study this passage, and the preceding one, as a form of therapy for his messianic pretensions. See the letters from Hagiz to Luzzatto and from Isaiah Bassan (Luzzatto's teacher) to his student, both in *R. Moshe Hayim Luzzatto u-venei doro*, ed. Simon Ginzburg (Tel Aviv, 1937), 79, 86. As cited and discussed in Carlebach, *The Pursuit of Heresy*, 326–27n45; on Hagiz's pregnant silence about Sasportas, see ibid., 150 and Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude*, 46.

28. Soloveitchik, "Three Themes in the *Sefer Hasidim*," 352.

29. Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

30. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 145–46. On Levi, see Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi*, 486.

31. Solomon ibn Adret, *She'elot u-Teshuvot* (Venice, 1545–46), no. 548, 89b–90a. For other invocations of this responsum by Sasportas, see his letter to Aaron Zarfati of Amsterdam, *ZNZ*, 31–33 and his letter to Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, *ZNZ*, 46. For Samuel Aboab's, see Meir Benayahu, "News from Italy and Holland on the Beginning of Sabbatianism," (Hebrew) *Erez Yisrael* 4 (1956): 198. On Ibn Adret's response in the early modern period, see Simcha Emanuel, "Manuscripts of the Responsa by Ibn Adret in the Writings of Scholars between the Fifteenth through Nineteenth Centuries," (Hebrew) *JSIJ* 13 (2015): 1–46.

32. Sasportas, *Ohel Ya'akov*, 14b, responsum 11; 14b, responsum 12, where in an issue of Jewish marriage law, Sasportas sides with Ibn Adret and Jacob ben Asher against Nahmanides.

33. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 51.

34. On Ibn Adret and Maimonides, see David Berger, "Judaism and General Culture in

Medieval and Early Modern Times," in his *Cultures in Collision*, 70–78 and the literature cited there. On his criticism of Maimonides' code, see Michael A. Shmidman, "Rashba as Halakhic Critic of Maimonides," in *Turim: Studies in Jewish History and Literature Presented to Dr. Bernard Lander*, ed. Michael A. Shmidman (New York, 2007), 257–73.

35. For the possibility, see Israel M. Ta-Shma, "German Pietism in Sepharad: Rabbi Jonah Gerondi, the Man and His Work," (Hebrew) in *Keneset Mehkarim Iyunim be-Sifrut ha-Rabanit be-yeme ha-benayim: Sepharad* (Jerusalem, 2004), 2:109–48. For a rebuttal, see Soloveitchik, "Piety, Pietism and German Pietism," 473–79.

36. For editions of the Hebrew text, see Solomon Wertheimer, *Batei Midrashot* (Jerusalem, 1954); Israël Lévi, *Le Ravissement du Messie à sa naissance et autres essais*, ed. Evelyne Patlagean (Paris, 1994), 173–227; a reprint of "L'Apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès," *REJ* 68 (1914): 129–60; 69 (1919): 108–21; 71 (1920): 57–65; and Yehudah Even-Shmuel, *Midreshe Geulah* (Tel Aviv, 1943), 53–88, 353–70, 379–89. For an annotated English translation, see Martha Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel," in *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature*, ed. David Stern and Mark J. Mirsky (New Haven, 1990), 67–90.

37. For the passage in the Talmud, see BT *Sukkah* 52a. For discussion of whether the Book of Zerubbabel was dependent upon the Talmud for this tradition or both derived it from a third source, see Martha Himmelfarb, "*Sefer Zerubbabel* and Popular Religion," in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, ed. Eric F. Mason et al. (Leiden, 2012), 2:621–34. On the Messiah son of Joseph, see Martha Himmelfarb, "The Messiah Son of Joseph in Ancient Judaism," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ra'anan S. Boustan et al. (Tübingen, 2013), 2:771–90; and Israel Knohl, *Be-ikvot ha-Mashiah* (Tel Aviv, 2000), 68–80.

38. On the spelling of Armilos versus Armilus, see Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel," 81n3. On the identification of this figure, see David Berger, "Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus," in his *Cultures in Collision*, 253–77. The essay first appeared in *AJS Review* 10 (1985): 141–64.

39. For a number of the variants, see Even-Shmuel, *Midreshe Geulah*. For some of the challenges posed by Even-Shmuel's edition, see Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel," 82n15. For citations of the work in liturgical poetry, see Lévi, *Le Ravissement du Messie*, 215–26; for its impact in the Middle Ages, see Joseph Dan, *Ha-Sippur ha-Ivri bi-Yemei ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem, 1974), 43–46.

40. For an attempt to place it a century earlier, see Hillel Newman, "Dating *Sefer Zerubavel*: Dehistoricizing and Rehistoricizing a Jewish Apocalypse of Late Antiquity," *Admantius* 19 (2013): 324–36.

41. On the scarcity of this edition, see Even-Shmuel, *Midreshe Geulah*, 67n71.

42. Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi*, 490.

43. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 157.

44. Ibid., 182.

45. Ellipses in the original.

46. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 154.

47. Gershom Scholem, "New Sabbatian Documents from the Book *To'ei Ruah*," (Hebrew) *Zion* 7 (1942): 184; reprinted in *Mehkere Shabtaut*, 43.

48. For the Yiddish text and a Hebrew translation, see Leyb ben Ozer, *Sippur Ma'asei*

Shabbtai Sevi: Bashraybung fun Shabsai Tsvi, trans. Zalman Shazar and ed. Shlomo Zucker and Rivka Plesser (Jerusalem, 1978). On the significance of this work and the challenges posed by the edition, see the review by Chava Turniansky, *Kiryath Sefer* 54 (1979): 161–67. For a French translation, see *La beauté du diable: Portrait de Sabbataï Zevi*, ed. and trans. Nathan Weinstock (Paris, 2011). The work is currently the subject of a master's thesis being completed by Irrit Shapira at the Hebrew University.

49. Paul Ira Radensky, "Leyb ben Ozer's *Bashraybung fun Shabsai Tsvi*: An Ashkenazic Appropriation of Sabbatianism," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 88 (1997): 43–56.

50. Scholem, *Sabbetai Sevi*, 658–68; Scholem, "The Sabbatian Movement in Poland," (Hebrew) in *Mehkarim*, 74–76; for a powerful challenge to Scholem's reconstruction of Nehemiah and Sabbetai Zevi, see Isaiah Sonne, "Sabbatian Matters in the Notebook of R. Abraham Rovigo," (Hebrew) *Sefunot* 3–4 (1960): 62–67.

51. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 77, 172, 174, 345.

52. Ibid., 174: "He had never been a prophet, but in Poland he was crazy and spoke utter madness."

53. On Nehemiah's sojourn with Leyb ben Ozer in Amsterdam, see L. Fuks, "Sabatianisme in Amsterdam in het Begin van de 18 Eeuw: Enkele Beschouwingen over Reb Leib Oizers en zijn Werk," *SR* 14 (1980): 24. For skepticism about Nehemiah's capabilities as a kabbalist, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 658.

54. Leyb ben Ozer, *Sippur Ma'asei Shabbtai Sevi*, 165. Sasportas was in Amsterdam at the time and could have met either or both of them; however, I have found no trace of any such meeting.

55. Leyb ben Ozer, *Sippur Ma'asei Shabbtai Sevi*, 96–97.

56. See the discussion in Berger, "Three Typological Themes," and Himmelfarb, "*Sefer Zerubbabel* and Popular Religion," as well as Joseph Heinemann, "The Messiah of Ephraim and the Premature Exodus of the Tribe of Ephraim," *Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1975): 1–15.

57. In the third account of the exchange between Nehemiah Hacohen and Sabbetai Zevi, Barukh of Arezzo described Sabbetai Zevi as sitting with tractate *Hullin* of the Babylonian Talmud and the *Zohar*. See Barukh of Arezzo, "Memorial to the Children of Israel," (Hebrew) in *Inyene Shabetai Tsevi*, ed. Aron Freimann (Berlin, 1912), 53. An English translation appears in David J. Halperin, *Sabbatai Zevi: Testimonies to a Fallen Messiah* (Oxford, 2007), 48.

58. Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, 661. Scholem also includes *Othoth Mashiah*, a text not mentioned by Sasportas or his correspondents.

59. Leyb ben Ozer, *Sippur Ma'asei Shabbtai Sevi*, 98.

60. Chaim Wirszubski, "The Sabbatian Ideology of the Messiah's Conversion," (Hebrew) in *Ben ha-Shitin* (Jerusalem, 1990), 126; the article first appeared in *Zion* 3 (1938): 220.

61. Ibid., 138–39. Scholem republished the text as "Nathan of Gaza's Letter on Sabbetai Zevi and His Conversion," (Hebrew) *Kovez al Yad* 14 (1966): 419–56. The article was reprinted in Scholem, *Mehkarim*. Quotation on 245.

62. On the Jews of this community during the period of Sasportas's residence, see Jonathan I. Israel, "Piracy, Trade and Religion: The Jewish Role in the Rise of the Muslim Corsair Republic of Saleh (1624–1666)," in Israel, *Diasporas within a Diaspora* (Leiden, 2002), 291–311.

63. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 333.

64. Ibid., 357.

65. Scholem, "New Sabbatian Documents from the Book *To'ei Ruah*," 187, reprinted in *Mehkere Shabtaut*, 47.

66. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 357.

67. Haim Bentov, "The Siriro Family," (Hebrew) in *Fes ve-arim aherot be-moroko*, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher, Moshe Amar, and Shimon Sharvit (Ramat Gan, 2013), 337–38.

68. Sasportas, *Ohel Ya'akov*, 5b. On the passage in the Mishnah, see Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, 2001), chap. 5; and Azzan Yadin, "Rabban Gamliel, Aphrodite's Bath, and the Question of Pagan Monotheism," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96 (2006): 149–79.

69. See the references to Lévi, *Le Ravissement du Messie* and Himmelfarb, "Sefer Zerubbabel."

70. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 350.

71. Glickl, *Zikhronos 1691–1719*, ed. and trans. Chava Turniansky (Jerusalem, 2006), 152–5, as cited by Tishby in Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 17n3 with reference to *Die Memorien der Glueckel von Hameln (1645–1719)*, ed. David Kaufmann (Frankfurt, 1896). On this passage, see Elisheva Carlebach, "Die messianische Haltung der deutschen Juden im Spiegel von Glikls 'Zikhroynes,'" in *Die Hamburger Kauffrau Glikl: Jüdische Existenz in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Monika Richarz (Hamburg, 2001), 238–53; and Carlebach, "The Sabbatian Posture of German Jewry," 26–27.

72. Sasportas, *ZNZ*, 17.

73. Ibid.

74. On the *hakham kolel*, see David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton, 2010), 120, 200 and the literature cited there.

75. See the studies in *Menasseh Ben Israel and His World*, ed. Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan, and Richard H. Popkin (Leiden, 1989).

76. See Kaplan, "The Libraries of Three Sephardi Rabbis in Early Modern Western Europe."

77. For Sasportas on Delmedigo, see *ZNZ*, 147. On Delmedigo, see David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Thought and Scientific Discovery in Early Modern Europe* (New Haven, 1995), chap. 4.

78. Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets*, 149; Michael Heyd, *"Be Sober and Reasonable": The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995).

Chapter 3

1. L. Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus: The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism* (Oxford, 2002), 38–48, and more recently M. Bermúdez Vázquez, *The Skepticism of Michel de Montaigne* (Berlin, 2014).

2. Popkin would give this skeptical sylloge a progressively prominent position, increasingly underscoring its centrality to the development of Western doubt and skepticism, until in his final edition of his history of skepticism, he would discuss Estienne's Empiricus in the introduction itself. R. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford, 2003).

3. See W. Cavini, "Appunti sulla prima diffusione in Occidente delle opere di Sesto Empirico," *Medioevo* 7 (1977): 1–20; G. M. Cao, "Savonarola e Sesto Empirico," in *Pico, Poliziano e l'umanesimo di fine Quattrocento*, ed. P. Viti (Florence, 1994) and his *Scepticism and Orthodoxy: Gianfrancesco Pico as a Reader of Sextus Empiricus. With a Facing Text of Pico's Quotations from*

Formations of Belief

HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO RELIGION AND THE SECULAR

EDITED BY
PHILIP NORD, KATJA GUENTHER,
& MAX WEISS

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON & OXFORD