

**THE SABBATEANS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE 19TH
CENTURY: BETWEEN KABBALAH AND SUFISM**

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the relationship of the Sabbatean community with two Sufi branches, Mevlevis and Bektashis despite coming from a Kabbalistic background. Although the followers of Sabbatai Zvi converted to Islam in the 17th century, they continued their Jewish rituals and belief systems. The study focuses on the religious hybridity of the Sabbatean community that amalgamated various beliefs, rituals, and practices of mystic branches of two different religions which are Islam and Judaism. To reveal this melting process, this thesis examines the works of the Sabbateans such as hymns, journals, biographies, and religious rituals. Despite the challenges of this study due to the silence of the community about their identities and keeping their inner-life practices secretive, the results revealed that the Sabbatean community could find a place to blend the teachings of Sufism and Kabbalah. The study concludes that the Sabbatai could converge both Sufism and Jewish tradition at some point. At the expense of the Kabbalistic belief, Sabbateanism mostly intertwined with “heretical” practices at the expense of transgression Judaic laws. These accusations have alleged displays of sexual antinomianism and violations of the rules of Halakha, suggesting a departure from traditional Kabbalistic beliefs in favor of practices considered heretical.

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INTRODUCTION

Sabbateanism refers to the religious faith shared by the followers of Sabbatai Zvi, an Ottoman Jew who declared himself the messiah in the 17th century. The Sabbatean community has been known under different names such as *Dönme*, *Avdeti*, or *Sazanikos* by the outsiders, but they were calling themselves *ma'amin*, "believers".¹ The belief system of Sabbateanism is a hybrid religion that embraces two different Abrahamic faiths. In pursuit of the conversion of Zvi and his followers to Islam, the mysticism of the community prevails itself in its affinity with the Kabbalistic doctrine and Islamic Sufism. Looking beyond the hybrid identity of the Sabbatean community, it could be said that they have tried to appear intertwined with Turkish society not to be excluded from the society. Since the Jewish population in Turkey, other non-Muslim communities, and converts have been persecuted in different periods, the Sabbateans might have chosen to be a closed community. Leyla Neyzi explains the silence, secrecy, and practice of dissimulation of some descendants of the Sabbatean community due to fear, assimilation under Turkish Republic, and their social exclusion.² İlber Ortaylı touches upon another way of assimilation and says that, "The exceptional cases of intermarriage with Muslim Turks in the 20th century marked the beginning of the assimilation of the Sabbateans."³ Unlike these views, it is hard to argue that the Sabbatean community have been totally assimilated into the Turkish culture in terms of religion, language, marriages, and etc. They have continued their hybrid identities in the Republican period, although it is hard to mention a monolithic community today.

¹ Leyla Neyzi, "Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity and Subjectivity in Turkey." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 2002), 137.

² Ibid, 147.

³ İlber Ortaylı, "Ottoman Modernisation and Sabetaism" in *Alevi Identity: Cultural, Religious and Social Perspectives*, ed. T. Olsson, E. Ozdalga, C. Raudvere, Routledge, 1999.

Based on their experiences, cultural and religious interactions, it can be said that the Sabbateans in the Ottoman Empire have had a hybrid culture, which does not necessarily mean that it is deprived of a unique aspect. Cengiz Şişman and some other scholars put a number of studies about the hybrid identity of the Sabbateans. In this regard, Şişman addresses how the Sabbateans preserved their enigmatic identity throughout the centuries, “in my previous works I argued that the Sufi world provided them with a safe spiritual haven where they created a hybrid Kabbala-Sufi identity”.⁴ This enigmatic identity included combined elements from Kabbalah and Sufism which was different from Judaism, Islam, or any other existing religion. Namely, the community has not only an eclectic, mosaic-like identity but also, it has had its own belief system which cannot be simply reduced into the principles of Islam and Judaism. The term “hybridity” has been mostly used to define things which are mixed character. Provided by *Oxford Lexico*, hybrid refers “a thing made by combining two different elements; a mixture.”⁵ In its origin, this term defined the offspring of a freeman and a slave in the 17th century.⁶ Within the developments in the area of biology in the 19th century, the term began to be used to describe the offspring of two different kinds of plants or animals. In the later period, it was adopted by the postcolonial theorist to characterize the cultural forms that arose as a result of colonial encounter.⁷ Cultural historian Peter Burke explains hybridity as “examples of it are to be found everywhere, not only all over the globe but in most syncretic religions, eclectic philosophies, mixed languages and cuisines, and hybrid styles in architecture, literature or music.”⁸ This can be applied this to the Sabbateans' case since they have a flexibility by including and blending different religious practices and rituals in it. Leyla Neyzi, an Oral historian and currently studies on Sabbateanism, defines the structure of the

⁴ Cengiz Şişman, “Osmanlı’da İlm-i Tasavvuf”, (İsar Yayınları, 2018), 828.

⁵ “Hybrid”, Retrieved from <https://www.lexico.com/definition/hybrid>,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Hybridity”, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social-reform/sociology-general-terms-and-concepts/hybridity>.

⁸ Peter Burke, *Cultura Hibridityl*. (Polity Press, 2009), 13.

community as a “double identity”.⁹ Yet, describing the hybrid identity of the Sabbateans as double identity would be deceptive since the character of the community varies in different centuries and rather, they blend the doctrines of different identities.

In the Ottoman domains, the Sabbateans were called “Sazanikos” which refers to a fish species that changes its color according to its environment.¹⁰ They practiced Islamic ritual, while they adhered to Sabbatean Kabbalah without manifesting their faith. However, it seems that Sabbateanism also had a certain degree of practice and ritual, as the conserved liturgic texts suggest. Hybridity involved a composite faith, doctrine, and ritual. The Sabbateans were first among the Muslims to adopt and spread western modernity (or global cosmopolitanism, in Baer's terms), therefore Turkish conspiracy literature denounces modernization and secularism as a secret Jewish plot, and the academic research on the Sabbateans also focuses on their conversion to secular culture.¹¹

In the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the Sabbatean community developed an interest in Sufism, especially in Salonica which was famous for its Sufi culture and Sufi lodges. Salonica was the fourth city of the Ottoman Empire but the least Islamized one in the 19th century. Different from the Sufi lodges in Anatolia, the Salonica Sufis, living in a non-Muslim environment, were purportedly open to heterodox, shamanistic, cryptoChristian, and also westernizing and modernist trends. This topic can nonetheless be regarded as an understudied subject, since the Sabbatean community has been mostly targeted to conspiratorial works, and this misrepresentation has been perpetuated within the very hostile and threatening public culture as it is demonstrated by the conspiracies about the community.

⁹ Leyla Neyzi, “Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity, and Subjectivity in Turkey”, pp. 137 – 158.

¹⁰ Rifat Bali, *A Scapegoat for All Seasons: the Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey*, The ISIS Press, 2008.

¹¹ Marc D. Baer, “Globalization Globalization, Cosmopolitanism, and the Dönme in Ottoman Salonica and Turkish Istanbul”, *Journal of World History*, Vol.18, No.2, 2007, 141-170.

In the literature, the Sabbatean issue in Turkey has attracted the attention of several researchers such as Marc D. Baer,¹² Cengiz Şişman, Gershom Scholem,¹³ Leyla Neyzi,¹⁴ İlber Ortaylı, and Rifat Bali.¹⁵ Hence, it is no wonder that they maintain a low profile and the community has been silent about their identities.

They have kept their Sabbatean identities secret for centuries, and the conspiracy theories mostly deal with uncovering who has a Sabbatean background in contemporary Turkey. Despite the rarity of academic publishing about the community, there are substantial and stimulating academic studies which focus on the historical background, or the political impact of the Sabbateans. When we review the previous research, they mostly based the cultural hybridity of the Sabbatean community, but their religious hybridity has less drawn attention which is the central topic of this thesis. The community has become the center of attention for many researchers who are mostly outsiders in the sense of being non-Sabbateans. At this point, this thesis will contribute to the area of studies on the Sabbateans by comprehending both perspectives from the inside and outside of this closed community. In addition to this, the research will focus on the hybrid identity of the community. The fact that it includes both a Kabbalistic and a Sufi background is mostly neglected in the literature. Different from previous studies, this thesis will focus on religious hybridity which depicts the collective and melted beliefs, rituals and practices of mystic branches of two different religions which are Islam and Judaism. They practiced Islamic ritual without believing in its religious doctrine, while they adhered to Sabbatean Kabbalah without manifesting their faith. This research endeavors to explore the phenomenon of religious hybridity within the context

¹² Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2010).

¹³ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*. Translated by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (Princeton University Press, 1973).

¹⁴ Leyla Neyzi, "Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity, and Subjectivity in Turkey," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 1 (2002): 137–58.

¹⁵ Rifat N. Bali, *A Scapegoat for All Seasons: The Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey* (Isis Press, 2008).

of Islamic and Jewish mysticism. Specifically, it aims to investigate the syncretic practices and beliefs emerging from the convergence of mystic branches of Islam and Judaism, notably those pertaining to Islamic ritual practice devoid of doctrinal adherence and the adherence to Sabbatean Kabbalah without explicit religious manifestation. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical texts, cultural artifacts, and empirical data, this study seeks to elucidate the complex interplay between these two religious' traditions, shedding light on the mechanisms by which individuals negotiate their religious identities and spiritual experiences within these hybridized contexts. Hybridity involved a composite faith, doctrine, and ritual. The close link between Sabbateanism and Sufism has received less attention, and this topic will be the focus of this thesis.

Regarding the primary sources, I intend to examine the Sabbatean hymns and songs in the 19th century which include both Sufistic and Kabbalistic elements. Since the thesis will ask how the Sabbatean community could embrace different religious projects, it is significant to understand the roots of the aforementioned affinity. In this regard, a manuscript has been recently found at Harvard University including several hymns and songs from the 18th century, which would also give clues about the religious, social, and cultural interaction of the community.¹⁶ At this juncture, the Sabbateans' hymns would demonstrate how they blended Jewish Kabbalism and Islamic Sufism. These hymns would also demonstrate the familiarity of the Sabbateans with Islamic rituals. Moreover, Mehmed Esad Dede (1841-1911) is also an important person since having a Sabbatean (Dönme) origin he was initiated into the Mevlevi order in the 19th century. He was appointed sheikh of the Yenikapı lodge and then Kasımpaşa Mevlevihanesi besides his father Receb Efendi being one of the founders of the *Terakki* Schools in Salonica.¹⁷ Besides those, a journal named *Gonca-i Edep* was published

¹⁶ Cengiz Şişman, "Dönme Şarkı ve İlahileri," (*Tarih ve Toplum*, July 2002), 12–15.

¹⁷ Ibid, 12-15.

by some Sabbatean intellectuals in the late 19th century is useful in understanding the religious motives of the descendants of the Sabbatean community. In addition to these, there exist memoirs of some important political Sabbatean figures such as Sabiha-Zekeriya Sertel (1890-1980) and Ahmet Emin Yalman (1888-1972) in the early Republican period despite the silence of the Sabbateans about their identities. In their memoirs,¹⁸ they give crucial details about their life stories, family structures, political careers, ideologies, and worldviews. While Sabiha Sertel gives attention to her family's Sabbatean living style in Salonica, Yalman stands out with his community's affinity to the Bektashi order. Regarding this issue, Yıldız Sertel mentions several prominent Sabbateans were Freemasons and Sufis, which made it easier for them to join the CUP.¹⁹ She mentions "Bektashi, Mevlevi, and Masonic lodges in the same sentence in which she describes the Dönme New Mosque in Salonica".²⁰ These aspects have their importance in terms of interpreting their positions in Turkish society, both in the political and the cultural sense.

The thesis will mainly focus on the religious lives of the Sabbatean community. The intention of this research is to understand how the Sabbateans made decisions that led them to embrace different religious, ideological or cultural projects such as Sufism and Kabbalah in the 19th century despite their seemingly incompatible identities. For this purpose, this research will examine the various roles of the members of the Sabbatean community in the late Ottoman period and the Early Republican period of Turkey. Despite the widespread perception of this community as maintaining Jewish rituals and beliefs in private, they have also been believers in Islam. The fact that the community followed Muslim practices does not allow to argue that they did not observe anything else. The history of this group shows that its members could practice Sabbatean Hebrew liturgies, Islamic public worship, and elements of

¹⁸ Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Yakın Tarihte Gördüklerim, Geçirdiklerim* (What I Have Witnessed Through the Recent History), Rey Yayınları, 1970.

¹⁹ Yıldız Sertel, *Annem Sabiha Sertel Kimdi Neler Yazdı?*, 35.

²⁰ Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 94.

modern culture simultaneously, even investing personal conviction into all of these. As an interesting consequence, some of the members of the Sabbatean community had different religious affiliations, including Sufism long before the foundation of the Republic. In the early republic, they had secular approaches when the Sufi orders were banned. Yalman even called the Sabbateans an outdated 'tarikat', particularly referring to the Karakaş group.²¹

The examples mentioned above have also demonstrated that the perception that the community is practicing both religions has been sustained in the 20th century, namely the early Republican years of modern Turkey.²² Different from the late Ottoman Period, the positions of some of the members of the Sabbatean community changed within the emergence of the Turkish Republic, as they embraced secularist, positivist, and nationalist ideals. It is interesting because, as Feroz Ahmad explains in his words, “Turkey did not rise phoenix-like out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. It was ‘made’ in the image of the Kemalist elite which won the national struggle against foreign invaders and the old regime”²³. As the founders of Turkish Republic, the Kemalist elite has constructed its modernity program based on a Turkish nation-state with a population majority of Sunni Muslims. As a contradiction, the Sabbateans were among the founder elites of the Turkish Republic, although they, as being converts, do not fit the project of Kemalism. One probable consequence would be the Sabbateans were very useful as long as they strengthened the Turkish minority in Salonica, while they were perceived as unwelcome competitors in a majority situation in Istanbul and Ankara.

²¹ Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 204.

²² In this regard, Ilgaz Zorlu, a former member of one of the leading families within the community, talks about how his grandmother strictly maintained her affinity with the Sabbatean faith and says: ‘When I was a kid, I was with my grandmother's group of friends. My grandmother's group was practicing religious rituals. Ladies used to come together at homes. We had a relative called Aunt Fatma. Suddenly she used to take out a book and say a prayer on ‘Sabbatai Zvi’. The Ladies used to say that ‘Oh, Fatos, let no one hear that’, the curtains would close, I would be taken to bed. These people still believed in Sabbatai Zwi, but they were hiding that.’ For more details, see; “Evet Ben Selanikliyim”. Retrieved from <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/evet-ben-selanikliyim-39039068>

²³ Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey, The Making of the Middle East Series* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993).

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SABBATEAN COMMUNITY

One historian has described Sabbateanism as “the most important messianic movement in Judaism since the destruction of the Second Temple.”²⁴ Especially, after the expulsion from Spain, and within the impact of the pogroms in Eastern Europe, the Jews were expecting the imminent coming of the Messiah as it was heralded in the biblical prophets. In Jewish tradition, the Messiah is expected to open an era of freedom and peace by bringing the children of Israel back to their homeland, but in kabbalistic doctrine, he is also a metaphysical savior who triumphs over evil. This expectation led the way to the appearance of several claims to be the Messiah in the Judaic world around the 16th and 17th century. In 1665, Sabbatai Zvi proclaimed that he was the long-awaited messiah by relying on the support and propagandistic efforts of his prophet Nathan of Gaza.²⁵ One year later, he converted to Islam under duress, together with many of his followers. A group among Sabbatai's believers followed him in his conversion. Therefore, the Messianic arguments of Sabbatai were a theological challenge to normative Judaism. After Sabbatai's conversion, the Sabbatean movement became a challenge to theological barriers, and the Ottoman state issued a license to the rabbinical authorities to police the Jewish community's religious and social barriers.²⁶ He was imprisoned in Constantinople after Jewish Rabbis expressed concerns about Sabbatai's claims during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed IV, the repression of the movement in 1666 was decided and handled by the grand vizier, Ahmed Köprülü. Thereupon, Sabbatai Zvi was called up because of his inappropriate actions and comments that were disturbing public life. In addition the members of this group due to their incomplete integration into society, such as their practice

²⁴ Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816*. (Jewish Culture and Contexts.) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2011.

²⁵ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Bollingen Series, No. 93), 1976, xxx.

²⁶ Cengiz Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*. Oxford: Oxford to the Jewish community's dissatisfaction with the Sabbateans and their heretical acts, the Muslim community harbored suspicions towards University Press. 2015, 55.

of endogamy and their use of Ladino. There were many groups that have practiced endogamy in the late Ottoman and modern Turkey such as Alevis, Jews, Circassians, etc., but when we look at the Sabbatean case, despite they converted to Islam several centuries ago, they continued their secretive religious practices, upholding strong familial and kinship ties and practicing strict endogamy.²⁷ Compared to other endogamous societies, such as the Sabbateans, whose in-group marriages have a religious basis, practice endogamy, which is similarly influenced by religious beliefs as well as language and cultural considerations.

This suspicion towards the community turned into the emergence of conspiracies in later periods. In the Ottoman Empire, the Sabbateans have taken distinct names such as *Dönme*, *Avdeti*, or *Sazanikos*. While *Dönme* refers to the ones who converted to Islam, *Avdeti* means those who converted twice. To be more precise, the Sabbateans were suspected of not having entirely converted to Islam, rather they were still Jews who pretended to be Muslim. The survival of the belief that the Sabbateans are the crypto-Jews of Turkey, demonstrates that they have always been suspect for the Muslim community. Coming to the Republican period, "The structure of the Sabbatean community, along with their political rise and significant economic power in Turkey, paved the way for the proliferation of conspiracy theories regarding their 'secret' life and religious practices. These conspiracies persist in contemporary Turkey.

Conversion of Sabbatai Zvi to Islam created some identity and religion problems among the society. Martin Jacobs names it as "the Sabbatean crisis" which refers to blurring the well-established boundaries between Islam and Judaism.²⁸ This problematic lasted nearly a century, but the impact that it created continued due to the formation of new sects after the

²⁷ Rıfat Bali, *Model Citizens of the State: The Jews of Turkey During the Multi-Party Period*, (Lexington Books, 2012), 18.

²⁸ Martin Jacobs. "An ex-Sabbatean's remorse? Sambari's polemics against Islam." *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 97, no. 3, (Summer 2007), 347.

death of Sabbatai Zvi. He converted to Islam in the presence of the Sultan avoid execution. Instead of being executed, the intention of suggesting that Sabbatai chose to convert to Islam might have been to prevent him from becoming a hero or martyr in the eyes of his followers. Many of his followers were amazed by his conversion to Islam. It caused most of the followers to diverge their ways.²⁹ Nevertheless, a number of his followers from Smyrna, Salonica, and Constantinople also converted to Islam. Nathan of Gaza (1644-1690) who is mostly described as an ‘unwearying propagandist’³⁰ has an important place in the success Sabbatai of gathering thousands of people from different places. After the expulsion in 1492, there were efforts to systematize and popularize Zohar in the Middle East since Kabbalistic literary production had been abundant in Spain.³¹ Nathan played a crucial role in the creation of the community and became Sabbatai's foremost theologian. The Prophet also benefited from this movement by supporting and encouraging Sabbatai Zvi to proclaim he was the messiah. Therefore, considering the narration of Maimonides, Sabbatai had fulfilled the former's passage on the Messiah by gaining popularity, and he was believed that long-awaited messiah:

And if a king shall arise from among the House of David, studying Torah and being occupied with commandments like his father David, according to the written and oral Torah, and he will impel all of Israel to follow it and to strengthen breaches in its observance, and will fight God's wars, this one is to be treated as if he were the anointed one.³²

Besides this belief, Nathan also justified the conversion of Zvi based on the Lurianic doctrine of ‘repair’.³³ Repair basically refers to the Hebrew concept of *Tiqun* which means “mending”, “restoration”, or “reintegration”, and it is the process by which the ideal order is

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ ‘Nathan of Gaza’, Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism/The-LurianicKabbala#ref299683>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Maimonides, “Mishneh Torah, Sefer Sho'etim, Melachim UMilchamot- Chapter 11,” trans. Eliyahu Touger, Chabad, Last Accessed (29 June 2021), https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1188356/jewish/Melachim-uMilchamot-Chapter-11.htm.

³³ “Judaism- The Lurianic Kabbalah: Shabbetaianism”. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Edinburgh: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. Retrieved 6 October 2020.

restored, but the lights of the divine emanation are incapable of bringing it about by themselves.³⁴ In this regard, Şişman argues that Islam should be viewed as the necessary and penultimate step in the process of redemption up until that point. As a result, in Sabbatean cosmology, conversion to Islam was not seen as a "punishment" necessary for tiqqun but rather as a "great mystery."³⁵ Based on this argument, it can be said that conversion to Islam is not problematic in the Kabbalistic doctrine. It also provides flexibility in transition to various religious affiliations for the followers of Sabbatai Zvi. On the same issue, Scholem says that "Nathan was reputed to be able to identify a person's "soul root," as Isaac Luria had done, and to prescribe a special practice or chant for the Tiqqun (Healing) the soul required."³⁶ According to Mark Zion, the Sabbatean messianic secret, then, is that the Messiah by suffering the outward humiliation and scorn for his apostasy performed the ultimate Tiqqun Olam. By taking the appearance of evil he became a central ethic of radical Sabbateanism.³⁷

It would not be wrong to assert that, thanks to Nathan's efforts, Zvi could form his community in the following years. As mentioned above, following the death of Sabbatai Zvi, the movement led to the emergence of three different sects which are Karakaş, Yakubi, and Kapancı. While the Sabbatean sect is regarded as a monolithic community by the outsiders, Sabbatai Zvi's death resulted in the formation of these three sects. The Sabbateans lived as Muslims but for centuries-maintained Hebrew and Ladino, a separate group identity, a strict endogamy, and secret kabbalistic liturgy and creed.

The official documents and records in the Ottoman archives have significance to understand the period of Sabbatai Zvi, his conversion process, and its aftermath. Regarding these issues, Erhan Afyoncu gathered various documents from the Ottoman archives in his

³⁴ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, 37.

³⁵ Cengiz Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, 94.

³⁶ Ibid, 249.

³⁷ Mark N. Zion, "Sabbatianism: The Ruin of Purity," *Japanese Journal of Policy and Culture* (24 March 2016), 19.

book titled *Sahte Mesih: Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Dönmeliğin Kurucusu Sabatay Sevi ve Yahudiler*.³⁸ His book gives place to the issues discussed in the Divân-ı Hümâyûn about the fate of Sabbatai Zvi and the provisions passed out of this council. These relevant documents have particular importance in understanding the process of Sabbateanism in the Ottoman Empire. The next part will examine the official documents and records to have sight about the conversion of Zvi which is important for this thesis in terms of the transformation of the Sabbatean community.

1.1. A Review of Sabbatai Zvi's Last Years Through Documents

Despite the rarity of documents on Sabbatai Zvi, a significant amount of secondary literature is available. However, even though the followers of Zvi lived in the Ottoman lands for more than 300 years and took part in the economy and administration, there are few documents available that mention both Sabbatai Zvi and his followers. In addition to this, any documents related to the Sabbatean community are valuable since this converted community has lived in secrecy and not revealed their identities for centuries. In the literature, there are some documents such as Sabbatean hymns, recipes, monuments, prayers, architectural masterpieces, and photographs. However, the documents belonging to the Zvi period are still waiting to be discovered.

Sabbatai Zvi grew up in Izmir, then lived in Salonica and Egypt, and the first time he proclaimed himself as the Messiah was in 1665 in Gaza. The Sabbateans' departure from traditional Jewish teachings not only contributed to the growing dissatisfaction within the Jewish community but also raised suspicions within the Muslim community,³⁹ as they

³⁸ Erhan Afyoncu, *Sahte Mesih: Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Dönmeliğin Kurucusu Sabatay Sevi ve Yahudiler*, Yeditepe Yayınevi, 2013, 200-219.

³⁹ Cengiz Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, 44-82.

practiced rituals from both religions. This dual suspicion stemmed from the Sabbateans' perceived deviation from established religious norms and practices. The document below that Erhan Afyoncu published in his book shows the disturbances among the outsiders:

Customs Officer Mahmud Ağa,
A Jew came to Marmara Island from Izmir and spoke some vain words. It was commanded to send some men that wherever the aforementioned Jew is, you should bring him [saying] Give me the tazkira of six thousand coins. Tazkira is issued at 27 R [10]76.

Back side: The one brought for the Jew was ordained⁴⁰

This document demonstrates the Sabbatai's statements created an atmosphere of uneasiness. It could be said that it has gone beyond being just a religious issue and has become a matter of state. Notably, the Ottoman authorities began to take precautions against Sabbatai's proclamations, and, in the end, they forced him to convert his religion. As indicated above, in the wake of these events, the movement experienced a significant fracture, leading to a dispersion of its once-unified followers and the emergence of various splinter groups.

Sabbatai's conversion to Islam caused a chaos among his followers and resulted in many splits from the community. Despite his conversion, Sabbatai and his followers continued practicing the rituals of both Islam and Judaism. However, his conversion opened a new era in his life by taking the name of Aziz Mehmed Efendi b. Abdullah at the Edirne palace in 1666.⁴¹ On this issue, Cengiz Şişman says that "The messiah chose life over death, and "turned Turk," receiving a handsome salary and honorary position at the palace at the expense of abandoning his disillusioned followers outside."⁴² Prior to his conversion, in 1666 the

⁴⁰ "Gümrük Emini Mahmud Ağa,

İzmir cânibinden Marmara Cezîresi'ne bir Yahudi gelüp,
ba'zı beyhûde söz söylemiş.

Âdem göndertip, mezbûr Yahudi her nerede ise getürdesin [deyü] buyuruldu

Altı bin akçe tezkiresi verile. Tezkire dâde fi 27 R [10]76.

Arka tarafı: Yahudi için getirile olan buyuruldu" (BOA, ARSK, File section, nr. 31/113).

⁴¹ Cengiz, Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 9.

⁴² Ibid, 44.

Ottoman state issued a license to the rabbinical authorities to police the Jewish community's religious and social barriers.⁴³ In this regard, the grand vizier, Ahmed Köprülü took some actions concerning to provide service pay for the converts in the Ottoman Empire:

May Allah Subhanahu and Ta'ala protect the existence of my gracious and majestic sultan from mistakes and make him a mature person on the throne of sultanate, amen. This is the desire of your servant, that my gracious and majestic sultan, may these servants of yours be blessed with the honor of sergeant to increase the honor of being religious believers in the presence of my glorious sultan. Eternal right of edict and beneficence belongs to my sultan.

Your servant Ahmed

21 Ramadan 1077

Above. Mehmed IV's imperial edict: I gave ten coins to the sergeant.

(BOA, ARSK, File Section, nr. 30/67)⁴⁴

On the basis of this document, it could be asserted that conversion to Islam included many social and political strategies in it for both sides.⁴⁵ From Sabbatai's side, conversion would be a necessity for the social and political advancement of his community. Even though he converted to Islam, putting him on a salary might be helpful for him to control him and make him dependent on the state, like other Muslim religious leaders, or from an optimistic view to protect his own followers. Regarding this issue, there is available a petition that indicates the desire one of Sabbatai's friends, who was also converted to Islam, to be a sergeant.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid, 44-45.

⁴⁴“Hakk Sübhânehu ve Te'âlâ hazretleri ve şevketlü, mehâbetlü padişahımın vücûd-ı şerîflerini hatâlardan hıfz idüp serîr-i saltanatında kemâl-ı pir eyleye âmin. Arzihâl-i bende budur ki, benim inâyetlü ve kerâmetlü pâdişâhım bu bendeleri şeca'âtlü pâdişâhımın huzûr-ı hümayûnlarında dîni mübîn ile müşerref olmağın mezîd-i inâyetlerinden çavuşluk ulûfesiyle behremend buyurula. Bâki emr ü fermân ve lütf u ihsan kerâmetlü pâdişâhımdır.

Bende Ahmed 21 Ra 1077

Üstte IV. Mehmed'in hatt-ı hümayûnu: On akçe çavuşluk verdim.” (BOA, ARSK, Dosya Kısmı, nr. 30/67)

⁴⁵ Tijana Krstić, *Contested Conversions to Islam: Narratives of Religious Change in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*. Stanford, (Stanford University Press, 2011), 226.

⁴⁶ Retrieved from: Erhan Afyoncu, *Sahte Mesih: Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Dönmeliğin Kurucusu Sabatay Sevi ve Yahudiler*, 217.

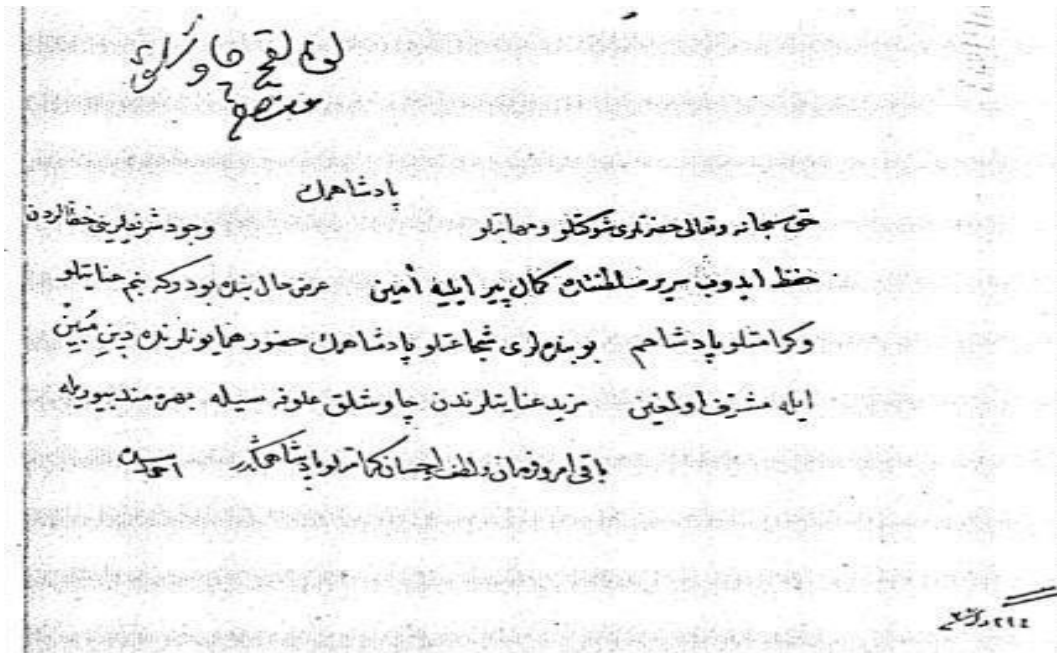


Figure 1- (BOA, ARSK, Dosya Kısmı, nr. 30/67)

Furthermore, Sabbatai's salary would have been instrumental in meeting his material needs in order to make the call of messiahship in different regions. From the empire side, the Ottoman authorities along with the Jewish rabbis were disturbed by the "heretical" behaviors and doctrines of the Sabbatean community. The Ottoman authorities considered Sabbatai's messianic spiritual pursuits as "fitne" in the 17th century, and this concept was used to refer to social disturbance.⁴⁷ In addition to the aim of eliminating the heresy of the Sabbateans, the conversion of Zvi seems to fit the Kadızadeli reform agenda that intended to convert many people to Islam.⁴⁸

In Sabbatai's case mentioned above, he continued to receive a salary from the *ruznâmçe* kalemi until his death.⁴⁹ The document below demonstrates the amount of Sabbatai's salary:

Retired leaders of Enderun

Firstly, the obligatoriness of Mehmed for the community of retired registrars of Enderun annexation and edict. With this edict, happiness is achieved. For this reason, he is honored with

⁴⁷ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2011, 78-141.

⁴⁸ Cengiz, Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, 34.

⁴⁹ Erhan Afyoncu, *Sahte Mesih: Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Dönmeliğin Kurucusu Sabatay Sevi ve Yahudiler*, 176.

Islam under the supervision of Dîvân Council. Agreeably, the head of the council Hüseyin Efendi, the head of the scribes of Dîvân Council. Happened 16 Ramadan Hijri 1077/ (1666)

Daily wage: 150

Only one hundred and fifty coin is given as charity.

ABOVE: Missing service pay- year 77, from the head of provincial treasury.

Service pay-year 77, from the head of provincial treasury.

Service pay-year 77. Registered.⁵⁰

Following the conversion of Sabbatai, on September 18, 1666, a priest also converted to Islam and he was given a job earning a wage of 25 aspers per day.⁵¹ However, there are some speculations on the job given to Zvi in exchange for his conversion to Islam. For instance, Gershom Scholem mentions that “the Sultan graciously accepted the convert, ... to the honorary office of *kapıcı bashi* (keeper of the palace gates). A royal pension of 150 aspers per day was added to the honorary appointment”.⁵² Similarly, Şişman argues that “the sultan granted him a post of gate-keeper, *kapıcı* at the palace, with a daily wage of 15 aspers. Different from these claims, Marc Baer says that “The Sultan deemed that from his exalted graciousness, a salaried position at the Middle Gate valued at 150 silver coins was proper for him”.⁵³ As a matter of fact, Baer’s argument seems accurate since the Ottoman administration

⁵⁰ “Ağayân-ı Müttekâ'idin-i Enderûn
İbtidâ mevâcib-i Mehmed ki be-cema'ât-ı ağayân-ı müttekâ'idîn-i enderûn ilhâk şuden fermûde.
Bâ-hatt-ı hümâyûn-ı sa'adet-makrûn. Ez-ân sebab ki der-huzûr-ı hümâyûn bâ-şeref-i İslâm
müşerref bûde. Ber-mûceb-i ruûs-ı hümâyûn-ı Hüseyin Efendi, ka'immakam-ı reisülküttâb-ı
divân-ı âlî. El- vâki' fi 16 Ra sene 1077.
Fî yevm: 150
Yalnız yüz elli akçe ile sadaka buyurulmuşdur.
ÜSTTE: Kusûr-ı Masar sene 77, an-cânib-i defterdâr.
Recec-Reşen sene 77, an-cânib-i defterdar.
Lezez sene 77. Mezbûr”.

⁵¹ Abdi Pasha, *Vekayiname*, 57b-58a; Raşid, *Tarih-i Raşid*, I: 94–95.

⁵² Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, 681.

⁵³ Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 2.

put Sabbatai Zvi on a salary called *Kapu ortası* (retirement pay),⁵⁴ which is confused with gate-keeper (*kapıcı*).

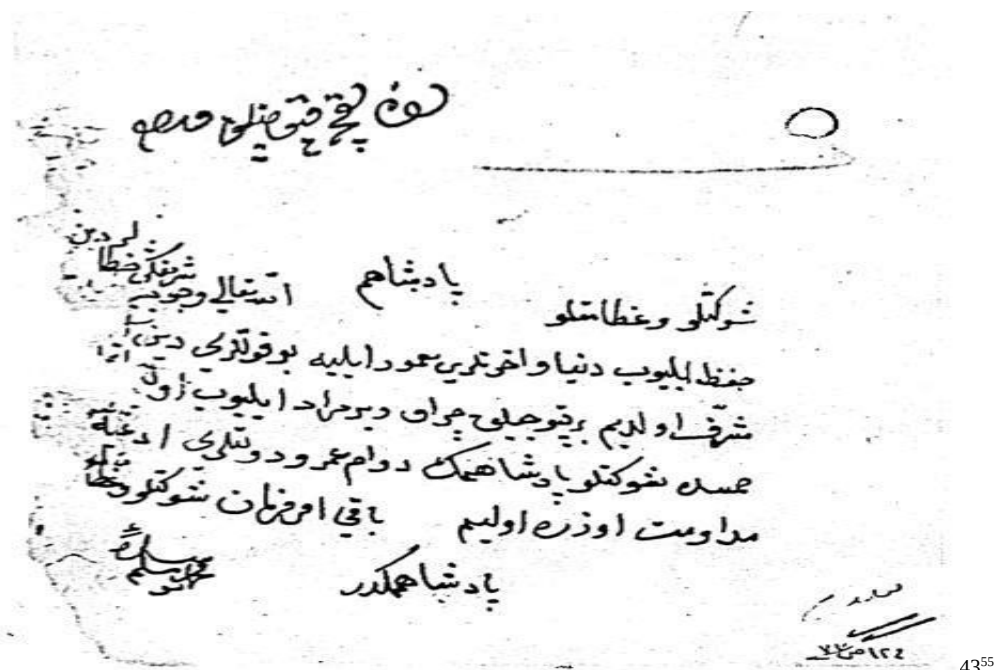


Figure 2- (BOA, A.RSK, Dosya Kısmı, nr. 30/67)

From the documents that Afyoncu published, it could be said that there is no specific information in the Ottoman sources that Zvi was granted the job of gate-keeper (*kapıcı*) at the palace contrary to arguments of Scholem and Şişman.

Lastly, other uncertain issue about Sabbatai's life includes his exile years and death. Despite his conversion to Islam, Zvi's life ended in a hybrid identity which means he continued to practice the new "syncretic" religion that includes combined elements from

⁵⁴ "Müslüman olarak Mehmed ismini alan bir "Nev-Müslim'e" 10 akçe ile kapıcılık verimesi için arzuhal üzerine hattı hümayûn" in Erhan Afyoncu, *Sahte Mesih: Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Dönmeliğin Kurucusu Sabatay Sevi ve Yahudiler*, 210.

⁵⁵ *Yeni Müslüman olark Mehmed ismini alan bir "Nev-Müslim'e" 10 akçe ile kapıcılık verilmesi için arzuhal üzerine hattı hümayûn* in Erhan Afyoncu, *Sahte Mesih: Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Dönmeliğin Kurucusu Sabatay Sevi ve Yahudiler*, 200.

Sufism and Kabbalah, and his exile in Albania in 1676.⁵⁶ Some researchers have argued whether the place of his death was Berat or Ülgün. Rifat Bali states that Zvi continued his messianic claims and “heretical” behaviors and eventually the Sultan distanced him from his followers by exiling him to Ülgün (Ulcinj, Dulcigno) in 1673, and he died there after three years.⁵⁷ Similarly, Baer narrates that “The most important tomb for many Dönme (Sabbateans), especially the Yakubi and Kapancı, was that of Shabbatai Tzevi in Ulcinj in what is now Montenegro”.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, according to Hakham Zvi, Sabbatai died in Arnaut-Belgrade and was buried on the Day of Atonement.⁵⁹ Likewise, Alaaddin Gövsa mistakenly records that Zvi died on September 30, 1675.⁶⁰ Notwithstanding all these arguments, according to the documents, the news of Sabbatai’s death was reported by the *dizdar* (castle) warden as it was Ülgün, where Sabbatai Zvi spent the last years of his life.

Retired leaders of Enderun

Mehmed

Day 150

Above the name: Recec-Reşen (The one that belongs to the months of service pay named rebiyulahir, jamaziyelevvel and jamaziyelahir, which is given to the Janissaries every three months) year 87,

It happened with the request of Mahmud, who passed away, during the guard of the Ulgun castle and the supreme edict in 19 Shaban year 87.⁶¹ (BOA, KK, nr. 3418, s. 51).⁶²

The information about his death was recorded as 19 Shaban in 1881 (27 October 1676).⁶³ This record clearly shows that the place of death of Sabbatai Zvi was Ülgün and until his death, his salary was paid, and the müteveffa (deceased) record was deducted upon his death.

⁵⁶ Cengiz, Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, 9.

⁵⁷ Rifat Bali, *A Scapegoat for All Seasons: the Dönmes or Crypto-Jews of Turkey*, The ISIS Press, 2008, 22.

⁵⁸ Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 205.

⁵⁹ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, 921.

⁶⁰ İbrahim Alaaddin Gövsa, *Sabatay Sevi*, Ağaç Kitabevi Yayınları, 2009, 53.

⁶¹ Erhan Afyoncu, *Sahte Mesih: Osmanlı Belgeleri Işığında Dönmeliğin Kurucusu Sabatay Sevi ve Yahudiler*, 201.

⁶² Ibid, 201.

“Ağayan-ı Mütcka'idin-i Enderun

Mehmed

Yevm 150

İsmin üstünde: Recec-Reşen sene 87,

Müteveffâ bâ-arz-ı Mahmud, dizdâr-ı kal'a-i Ülgün ve bâ-fermân-ı âlî el• vâki fi 19 Ş sene 87.”

(BOA, KK, nr. 3418, s. 51)

⁶³ Ibid.

To conclude, as one of the understudied subjects due to the rarity of primary documents, biographies of Sabbatai Zvi during his conversion and the Sabbatean community includes many speculations. However, the documents that Erhan Afyoncu revealed from the Ottoman archives may provide a more consistent state narrative of this community and light the way for Sabbateanism research.

CHAPTER 2: SABBATEANS IN SUFI LODGES IN THE 19th CENTURY

2.1. Descendants of Sabbatai Zvi in Mevlevi Lodges

In the 19th century, the Sabbatean community in the Ottoman Empire developed an interest in Sufism, especially in Salonica which was famous for its Sufi culture and Sufi lodges. The reason for focusing on Salonica is that it was the fourth city of the Ottoman Empire but the least Islamized one: in the nineteenth century, the population was about 55% Jewish, 25 % Muslim, and 20% Christian. Almost half of the Muslims were Sabbateans, an estimated 10,000-15,000 persons in the early 20th century.⁶⁴ While the Jews mainly inhabited the harbor area and the Muslims the Upper City, the Sabbateans had their lanes on the slope in between. Different from the Sufi lodges in Anatolia which were full of Christians and diversereligious groups, including crypto-Christians and numerous Islamic groups, the Salonica Sufis, living in a non-Muslim environment, were purportedly open to heterodox, shamanistic, crypto-Christian, and also westernizing and modernist trends. Cengiz Şişman argues that “during their formative period, the Sabbatean communities borrowed some "forms" from Sufi practices such as the master-disciple relationship, *takiyye* (dissimulation), and *zikr* (mystical recitation)”.⁶⁵ Based on this, it is possible to see the impacts of Sufism’s elements in the

⁶⁴ Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews 1430-1950*, HarperCollins, 2006.

⁶⁵ Cengiz Şişman, “Osmanlı’da İlm-i Tasavvuf”, *İsar Yayınları*, 2018, 829.

foundation of Sabbatean mysticism in the 19th century. Among them, the Kapanci sect that emerged right after Sabbatai's death were more likely to be in connection with the Mevlevi order. When it comes to the late 19th century, Sabiha Sertel (1890-1980) from the Kapanci sect who is also one of the first Turkish women journalists, indicates that she had education of Sufism in her Dönme high school in Salonica.⁶⁶ Sabiha is the granddaughter of Celal Derviş Deriş (1882-1951) who comes from the descendants of Derviş Ali, one of the high-ranking dervishes of the Salonica Mevlevi House.⁶⁷ A narrative that Sabiha's daughter shares in her biography depicts Sabiha's family's relationship with Sufism. In this narrative, Sabiha's cousin talks to his uncle about a Hodja's views on religion:

- Uncle, Hodja Effendi told me that Man is the shadow of God on earth. That there is no God but man.
 - Who is this Hodja Effendi?
 - Şerafeddin Hodja.
 - Ha! ... That Bektashi dervish. He teaches you Sufism. According to them, man is a part of God's beauty, a light from God. When God created man, he gave him his own light. The Bektashis see God in the universe, in things and people, they say, "To look at things is to look at God." Actually, both the Bektashis and us, the Mevlevi, say, "To reach Allah, one must love him." With this love of Allah, man unites with Allah. Read Sufism well, understand it well.
- All eyes were on Nazmi Efendi (the father of Sabiha) in the room. Mecdi (the brother of Sabiha) was looking at his father in amazement. Sabiha was thinking to herself. "There are so many things to learn ... Dervishes, Dönmes, Bektashis, Mevlevi, Sufism".⁶⁸

Apparently, in some Sabbatean families in the 19th century Salonica, Sufism and Sabbateanism intertwined. Based on the quotation above, they described themselves as Mevlevi or Bektashi and used the creation interpretations of Sufism in figuring their believing system such as light (ışık). When we look at the believing system of Kabbalah, Tikkun involves the process of gathering of divine lights that had fallen into the Qelipot's realm as a result of the "breaking of the vessels."⁶⁹ Seemingly, the restoration or mending process in Kabbalah to reach the 'ideal order'⁷⁰ could come through the light, same as in Sufism. From this

⁶⁶ Yıldız Sertel, *Annem Sabiha Sertel Kimdi Neler Yazdı?*, Can Yayınları, 2018, 49.

⁶⁷ Ferda Balancar, "Dönmeler Dönmeliklerini Unutsa Bile Devlet Asla Unutmuyor", Last Access (1 March 2022), <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/25378/donmeler-donmeliklerini-unutsa-bile-devlet-asla-unutmuyor>.

⁶⁸ Yıldız Sertel, *Annem Sabiha Sertel Kimdi Neler Yazdı?*, 31.

⁶⁹ "Tikkun in Lurianic Kabbalah", Retrieved from <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tikkun-in-lurianic-kabbalah/>, Last Access 15 April 2021.

⁷⁰ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah* (Bollingen Series, No. 93), 1976.

point, it would not be coincidence that the Sabbatean schools such as *Feyziye Mektepleri*, later took the name of “Işık” High school in 1885. There were also some Sabbatean Mevlevi Sheiks and dervishes such as Ishak Efendi (1774-1835) and Mehmed Esad Dede (1843-1914) in Salonica. Mehmed Esad Dede is a significant figure due to having a Sabbatean origin from the Kapancı sect⁷¹ and initiating into the Mevlevi order in the 19th century. His daughter-in-law, Nermin Bezmen (1954-), writes about her first meeting with Esad Dede:

I encountered him on my journey with the wings of my mind. My wings settling on the steps draw my attention to the Mevlevi Grandfather sitting on his fur. This is Mehmet Esad Dede. I have never seen him, but I know him. Pamir's great uncle, son of Recep Efendi from Salonica. He turned his head with reliance (tevekkül) to the gray concrete square lying in front of us. I go to your side with a few light steps. Despite the snow-white beard that adorns the beautiful, shining face, his face is of no age.⁷²

Nermin Bezmen is known by her marriage with a Sabbatean figure, Pamir Bezmen. Her description demonstrates her devoutness and radiance of Esad Dede. Nermin Bezmen's statements include some Sufi concepts such as *tevekkül* (reliance) and she shows her admiration to him. Esad Dede was appointed as the Sheikh of the Yenikapı lodge and then *Kasımpaşa Mevlevihanesi* besides his father Receb Efendi being one of the founders of the *Terakki* Schools in Salonica. Some Mevlevi sheikhs from the Kapancı branch appeared in Sabbatean schools' opening ceremonies.⁷³ Esad Dede's influential role as the Sheikh of the Yenikapı lodge and the Kasımpaşa Mevlevihanesi, as well as his father's involvement in founding the Terakki Schools in Salonica, underscores the intertwining of Sabbatean and Sufi influences in the region. The participation of Mevlevi sheikhs from the Kapancı branch in Sabbatean schools' opening ceremonies further suggests a connection between Sabbateanism and Sufism in Salonica during this period.

⁷¹ Marc D. Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, Stanford University Press, 2010, 59.

⁷² “Esad Dede ile Buluşma”, Nermin Bezmen, <http://urumeliler.blogspot.com/2009/02/mehmet-esaddede.html>, Last Access 16 April 2021.

⁷³ Mehmet Ö. Alkan, *Terakki Vakfı ve Terakki Okulları İmparatorluk'tan Cumhuriyet'e Selanik'ten İstanbul'a*, Boyut Yayın Grubu, 2003.

2.2. Sabbatean Literature: *Gonca-i Edep*

The Sabbatean community has been silent about its hybrid identities and religious lives from its earliest days. There are two main factors behind their silence based on concerning their positions in society and their Kabbalistic doctrine. Since the outsiders were suspicious and speculative about the religious practices of the community, the followers preferred to be a closed and secret community for centuries. In addition to this, Cengiz Şişman argues that their silence was also a religious requisite. Due to their silence, it is hard to obtain information from the inside about how the Sabbateans blended Sufism and Kabbalah into their religious discourse. Concerning this issue, a journal named *Gonca-i Edep* (The Rosebud of Literature) demonstrates to what extent the Sabbatean literature included Sufistic and Kabbalist elements. This journal was published between 1883 and 1884.⁷⁴ The importance of *Gonca-i Edep* derives from its being the first journal published by a group of young, well-educated Sabbatean intellectuals who wrote about arts, science, literature, philosophy besides religious and moral issues.⁷⁵ In addition to Ottoman Turkish, some Italian, French and Sufi words and expressions were used together in the journal. Such openness to numerous cultures and linguistic traditions demonstrates the capability of the Sabbateans in merging different ways of expressing themselves within a unique form of discourse at the same time.

In the first volume of the journal, Fazlı Necib who is the leading authors of *Gonca-i Edep*, states the vision of the journal by saying “The lexical meaning of the word *edep* means to treat people kindly and gracefully. It cannot be denied that literature serves morality and helps language to be developed. Is it possible to imagine the body of a rational person who will not surrender this? No matter which whichever nation gave importance to literature and

⁷⁴ For more information see; Şeyda Oğuz and Sevgül Korkmaz, *Selanik'te Osmanlı Matbuatı: Gonca-i Edep*, İstanbul: Turkuaz, 2009.

⁷⁵ Cengiz Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, 226.

in the Ministry of Tithes of Salonica, an article written by the master of the Sufi lodge opened in the market in Salonica, and an article written in the Mevlevi lodge there.⁷⁹ There is a poem written on the sign and this poem demonstrates the affinity of the Sabbateans with the Sufi liturgy.⁸⁰



Figure 4- "İfade" (Statement)

From the texts above, it can be clearly understood that the authors tended to write about scientific, literary, and philosophical issues. Besides these enlightening and modern ideas, it is quite interesting that they were also inclined to write about moral and religious matters by mostly referring to divan literature. Alternatively, it could be argued that their emphasis on Islamic and

⁷⁹ Marc D. Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 57.

⁸⁰ Feyz-bahşâ-yı dil ü cândır nigâh-ı Mevlevî
Tâc-ı fahr-ı kudsiyândır bu külâh-ı Mevlevî Merkez-i
irşâda Mevlânâ komuş perkârını
Mühr-i gerdûn resmin almış devirgâh-ı Mevlevî

⁸¹ *Gonca-i Edeb*, No.1 (1 February 1884), 9.

moral values alongside modern and progressive ideas stemmed from a significant degree of integration within their cultural and intellectual milieu. Surprisingly, Sabbateanism is not advocated in the journal and even Sabbatai Zvi is sometimes described as a charlatan. According to another claim, the term “charlatan” caused great distress in the Sabbatean community and the young people who published the journal were expelled from Yakubi sect.⁸² Ilgaz Zorlu also made similar statements on this subject.⁸³ He claimed that those who united around this journal brought concrete criticism against the Sabbatean idea, and that this movement also embraced assimilation in their relationships with the outsiders of the community.⁸⁴ Notably, the aim to be assimilated might be the motive of the young Sabbatean intellectuals in the 19th century.

2.3. Sabbateans and the Bektashi Order

Sabbateans were not alienated from the Muslim circles because they were outwardly Muslims.⁸⁵ Even though it is not possible to designate the degree of Muslimness of someone, a considerable part of the Sabbatean community were practicing Muslims. However, this does not exclude the presence of Sabbateans who have maintained a strong commitment to Judaism. Sabbatai Zvi had an interest in Sufism and interchanged some mystical thoughts with his other mystical contemporaries. He contacted some Muslim figures who were also seeking esoteric. To give an example, reincarnation has been one of the most popular topics among the Jewish Kabbalists and the Bektashi theosophy also referred to reincarnation at times.⁸⁶ Scholem argues that the early kabbalists had described the messiah as a reincarnation of Adam’s soul.⁸⁷ Besides that, some of the followers of Sabbatai Zvi also believed that Osman

⁸² Abdurrahman Dilipak and Ilgaz Zorlu, *Şişli-Terakki Davaları*, (İstanbul: Zvi Geyik Yayınları, 2001), 161.

⁸³ Ilgaz Zorlu, *Evet, Ben Selanikliyim: Türkiye Sabetaycılığı*, (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1999), ⁷² Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, 836.

⁸⁴ Ilgaz Zorlu, *Evet, Ben Selanikliyim: Türkiye Sabetaycılığı*, (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1999).

⁸⁵ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, 836.

⁸⁶ Marc Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 5.

⁸⁷ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, 405.

Baba (1676-1721), who was the founder of the Karakaş sect that was a breakaway from the main Sabbatean group.⁸⁸ Compared to the other Kapanci and Yakubi sects, the Karakaş had the lowest class status worked as workers, barbers, artisans, and loaders. These three sects lived in separate neighborhoods and remained separate in economic, cultural, and religious terms.⁸⁹ In the 19th century, their *Feyziye* schools became educational center in Istanbul. The Karakaş sect believed the reincarnation of Zvi and he had a duty of completing Sabbatai's mission.⁹⁰ According to the Karakaş sect, Sabbatai Zvi was reincarnated in Osman, who was born nine months after his death and as the son of one of the members of the community.⁹¹ Osman Baba was elevated to the rank of Dede in the Bektashi sect, and his tomb is located in the south-west of Khaskovo village in Bulgaria.⁹² Ahmed Emin Yalman, a journalist who also comes from a Sabbatean family, had an affinity with the Bektashi order.⁹³ In regard to this issue, Şişman states that, there were several prominent Sabbateans among the Bektashis at the end of the 20th century.⁹⁴ This situation may also stem from local Muslim population of Salonica belonging to the Bektashi order in that period alongside Albania.⁹⁵ To look closer the relationship between the Bektashi order and Sabbateanism, both orders had been suspected of their loyalty. The Bektashi Sufi order was one of the most popular Sufi orders in Anatolia and the Balkans and played a significant role in the integration of the newly conquered areas into the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁶ However, although Bektashis played an important role in state institutions and in the ruling elite, their relationship with the Sunni-Muslim authority and

⁸⁸ Yitzchak Kerem, "Paper on Sabbatean Crypto-Jews", Institute of Crypto Jewish Studies, (Netanya College, 2015).

⁸⁹ Ibid, 2.

⁹⁰ Cengiz, Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, 141.

⁹¹ "Dönme", Retrieved from <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/donme>, Last Access 25 June 2021.

⁹² Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 8.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Cengiz, Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*.

⁹⁵ Giorgos Mavrommatis, "Bektashis in the 20th Century Greece," *Turcica* 40 (2008): 219–51.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 6.

majority had been unstable during the 19th century. On one occasion, many Bektashi leaders were executed or exiled.⁹⁷ As John A. Norton says that “[d]oubts about their political loyalty plus their disregard for standard Islamic observances, while at the same time indulging in heretical practices, led to their being persecuted.”⁹⁸ These asserted heretical practices included following a heterodox Islam that combines "Islam," shamanism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, and other "non-Islamic" beliefs.⁹⁹ From the reign of Selim I, the Safavid-supported Kizilbash elements, including Alevis and Bektashis, had been persecuted, as they were perceived to pose a threat to the political and economic integrity of the empire.”¹⁰⁰ Following the abolishment of the Bektashi order, their lodges were closed and the Bektashis were prohibited and persecuted.¹⁰¹ The relationship between the Bektashis and the Sabbateans is a bit different from the Mevlevis’ until the 1860s when they regrouped and reopened their lodges. While the common point of the relationship of the Sabbateans with the Bektashis is being accused of religious heresy and suspicion from the outsiders, their relationship with the Mevlevis seems to be based on reaching social, cultural, and political advancement through Mevlevi orders.¹⁰² From the very beginning, the Sabbateans were accused of heresy. For example, the Jewish Rabbis expelled Sabbatai from Istanbul. He enraged the rabbis and alarmed the Muslims because he attempted to construct a syncretic religion that merged Judaism with a fascination with Christianity and Islam.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Ibid, 6.

⁹⁸ John A. Norton, “Bektashis in Turkey” in *Islam in the Modern World*. Eds. Denis MacEoin and Ahmed AlShahi, Volume 7, (London & New York: Routledge), 73-87.

⁹⁹ Mohammad Sagha, “The Bektashi Shi’as of Michigan: Pluralism and Orthodoxy within Twelver Shi’ism”, Retrieved from <https://shiablog.wcfia.harvard.edu/blog/bektashi-twelver-shi'-and-diversity-shiism>, (February 15, 2020).

¹⁰⁰ Albert Doja, “A Political History of Bektashism from Ottoman Anatolia to Contemporary Turkey”, *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 48, No. 2, (Spring 2006), 434.

¹⁰¹ Cengiz, Şişman. *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*.

¹⁰² Esin Eden & Nicholas Stavroulakis, “Salonika: A Family Cookbook”, Talos Press: Greece (January 1, 1997), 36.

¹⁰³ Przemyslaw Batorski, “The false messiah. Who was Sabbatai Zevi?”, Retrieved from <https://www.jhi.pl/en/articles/the-false-messiah-who-was-sabbatai-zevi,4472>, Last Access: May 1, 2022.

The Sabbatean education is a felicitous example of how the members of the Sabbatean community merged education and religious aspects of Mevlevi order. The approaches of *Terakki* and *Feyziye* Schools to education were intertwined with Sufism. In fact, the children of the Mevlevi sheikhs were receiving free education at the *Terakki* School. In addition to this, Esin Eden, a Turkish actress who is known with her Sabbatean background, wrote a cookbook titled *My Mother's Cookbook: Salonica, Munich, Brussels, Istanbul* in 2001. Born in Brussels in 1935, Eden completed her primary education at *Şişli Terakki* High School that was initially established to only educate the youth of the Sabbatean community, though contemporarily it was an open school for everyone. The book that is contained of her mothers' cookbook is a significant source for understanding how food extends memory practices to the everyday life of the Sabbatean community. The recipes of the Sabbateans also depicts their mystical food culture. In her cookbook, Eden also wrote about her family life including a photograph called "Family photograph of a child in Mevlevi clothing".⁸⁵ Notably, it was normal for the members of the Sabbatean community to influence from different traditions. This situation also demonstrates that many Sabbateans pursued sufism as a religious path.

Due to Sabbatai's theosophy and hybrid identity, his followers, the Sabbateans have been open to the influence of other mystical religions such as Sufism. Sufism was widespread in the late Ottoman empire and a large percentage of the population was involved. Hence for many being a Muslim meant being a Sufi. Sabbatai could converge both Sufism and Jewish tradition at some point in the 19th century. Sufism had many impacts on Sabbatean beliefs, culture, and literature. His followers continued this hybrid identity until the end of the 19th century. It could be asserted that the descendants of Sabbatai Zvi had affinities with some Sufi orders thanks to their flexibility to include and blend the rituals and practices of different religions. Coming to the 20th century, the community went through an assimilation process

due to the secularist path of Turkey. They adopted a more non-religious appearance not to contradict with the state policies.

2.4. “Song of songs” and Sufism

Focusing on the social and cultural history of the movement, Sabbateanism included religious syncretism through blending the religious systems of two Abrahamic religions and it led the way of a new religious belief system. In the previous chapters, the Sabbateans in the 17th century were the focus, and it would be asserted that the Kabbalistic elements were more dominant among the followers in the framework of ‘divine love’ which can be defined by the unity with the Divine. However, when it comes to the 18th and 19th centuries, the Sabbateans living in the Ottoman lands formed a new identity that included Ottoman and Islamic elements. Intriguing the relationship between Kabbalah and Sufism, the Sabbatean hymns may provide information more about the cultural and religious aspects of this period. Prayer books, hymns, architectural masterpieces, graveyards, tombstones, photographs, and cuisines were among the visible and unseen “texts” that Sabbateans in the Ottoman Empire which they were permitted to transmit their memories.¹⁰⁴ As evidence of transmitting memoirs, Ilgaz Zorlu who is one of the descendants of the Sabbatean community in the 21st century, narrates that:

I was with my grandmother's group of friends when I was a child. My grandmother and her friends were practicing religious rituals. Ladies would come together. We had a relative we call Aunt Fatma. Suddenly she took out a book and started to read a hymn called "Sabbatai Zvi". All they said, "Oh, Fatoş, let nobody hear it", the curtains were closed, I would be taken to the bed. These people would still believe in Sabbatai Zvi, but they were hiding it.¹⁰⁵

From this narration, it could be interpreted that there is still a continuity of Sabbatean identity in secrecy through hymns. In this context, Cengiz Şişman published a manuscript

¹⁰⁴ Cengiz Şişman, *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015), 5.

¹⁰⁵ Ilgaz Zorlu, “Evet Ben Selanikliyim”, Retrieved from <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/evet-benselanikliyim-39039068>, Last Access 23 April 2021.

has been recently found at Harvard University including several hymns and songs from the 19th century, which would also give clues about the religious, social, and cultural interaction of the community.

Your spirit is like a rosebud to me
 Your word is like a nightingale evoking
 the spirit That's why I sacrifice myself for
 you
 I fell in love with you, oh, young man!
 For you I cry, oh, [?]¹⁰⁶

This piece of liturgy refers to some Sufi concepts as well as it can be interpreted in accordance with the Song of Songs and biblical sacred marriage. Song of Songs depicts the mystical sexual desire and a love gift from God. It also demonstrates a certain level of acculturation with Ottoman-Turkish poetry and Sufism. These hymns would also indicate the familiarity of the Sabbateans with Islamic rituals. In some hymns, it is also possible to come across with many similarities for the use Sufi liturgy in the melodies of Sabbatean hymns. Cengiz Şişman shares a personal communication with one of the descendants of the community that a famous melody of an Islamic chant, takbir, written by the famous seventeenth-century Turkish composer Itri, was converted into a Sabbatean hymn. He narrates that “instead of ‘Allahu Ekber Allahu Ekber La ilahu İllallah u Allah u Ekber,’ the Sabbatean prayer goes with the same melody as ‘Sabbatai Sevi Sabatay Sevi esparamos a ti/Sabatay Sevi Sabatay Sevi no esun otro komo a ti’”.¹⁰⁷ This anecdote demonstrates besides adopting Sabbatean hymns into Sufi liturgy, melodies have been also converted into Turkish way of singing.

¹⁰⁶ Cengiz Şişman, “Dönme Şarkı ve İlahileri (Dönme Songs and Hymns)”, (*Tarih ve Toplum*, 2002), 40. In Turkish version:

*Meramı andelibi vasl-ı güldür
 Sen şehin-şah-ı cihansın
 Senin aşkınla suzanım
 Aşkınla yanar ağlarım
 Ayırma beni senden yaradan.*

¹⁰⁷ Cengiz Şişman, *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönme*, 181.

Considering the encounters between Sufism and Kabbalah, there seem many parallels for the use of Kabbalistic elements in Sufi liturgy. Şişman says that “Dervish Efendi’s devotional hymns refer to spiritual love as well as physical love for the beloved, the messiah, and the Shekhina”.¹⁰⁸ There is a fruitful Sabbatean hymns and songs belong to different periods of Sabbateanism. For instance, in the first years of Sabbateanism, when Sabbatai Zvi was in Izmir in December 1665, he turned the Spanish love song "Meliselda" into his favorite piece of liturgy, interpreting it in accordance with the Song of Songs and biblical sacred marriage.¹⁰⁹ "Meliselda",¹¹⁰ a Spanish erotic romance, refers to the Emperor’s Daughter,” to which Sabbatai used this song in his mystical interpretations and during his mystical marriage to Torah.

Despite the allegation of the outsiders, it is also possible to observe that the Sabbateans have had a flexibility to embrace and blend various religious doctrines such as Sufism thanks to their hybrid identity. The hymn below may be also useful in understanding the way of melting different doctrines in the same pot.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ For detail information; see Scholem, part 4, chapter 5; Gad Nassi, "Meliselda: The Sabbatean Metamorphosis of a Medieval Romance," *Los Muestrs* 48 (2002): 38–41; Eliezer Papo, "'Meliselda' and its Symbolism for Sabbatai Sevi, His Inner Circle and His Later Followers," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 35 (2016): 113-132; Id., "From Lucretia to Don Kr[e]nsia, or, Sorry, I Just Had to Convert: The Karakaş Sabbatian Oikotype of a Medieval Romance," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 24,1 (2016): 31–59; Id., "From Messianic Apologetics to Missionary Counterattack in the Sabbatian Sacred Romancero", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 107, 4 (2017): 476-505.

¹¹⁰ *To the mountain I ascended
To the river I descended
Meliselda I met there,
The king’s daughter bright and fair.
There I saw the shining lass
As she came up from the bath.
Her arched brow dark as the night
Her face a gleaming sword of light
Her lips like corals red and bright,
Her flesh as milk, so fair and whit*

The gate of paradise Made out of jewelry
That will be opened by Joseph

Konvenyamos konverdad Sabbatai,
the crown of my head
Oh, Sabbatai, the crown of my head

Rows of mighty candles
These we will see
Whoever sees them
Will see God

Wish to attain the day to see Wish to see our Lord
Wish to realize our desire

The qelippot will perish
The world will be ours
The Davids will dance and celebrate¹¹¹

In the first lines of the verse, it is stated that the “jewelry” (*cevahir*) gate was opened by a person named Joseph with the desire to enter the Paradise. There are two probable answers

¹¹¹ Ibid. Retrieved from; Cengiz Şişman, *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman Turkish Dönmes*, 180. Turkish version of the hymn:

*Cennetin Kapısı,
Cevahirdir yapısı
Yosef Açar kapısı,
Konvenyamos konverdad
Başımın tacı Sabetay
Hey başım tacı Sabetay
Direk mumları
Görecegiz onları
Kim görürse onları
Görecektir Allah'ı hey
Refrain
Gün olsa biz de görsek
Efendimizi görsek
Muradımıza ersek
Refrain
Klipalar ölecek
Dünya bize kalacak
David'ler oynayacak*

about who Joseph is. In the first phase, it could be imagined that Joseph mentioned here is the Prophet Joseph. According to Jewish belief, the Messiah will come from the lineage of Prophet David (son of David).¹¹² Despite this option seems reasonable, another possibility is, Joseph here is presumably known as Yusuf (or Joseph) Çelebi. Cengiz Şişman introduces Raphael Joseph Çelebi as “the head of Egyptian Jewry and the *Sarrafbashi*, director of the Ottoman treasury of Egypt, who had developed a deep interest in Jewish mysticism and messianism”.¹¹³ Sabbatai Zvi traveled to Cairo several times to make income for the impoverished Jews living in Jerusalem between 1663-65. In Cairo, Zvi became protégé in the mystical circle of Çelebi.¹¹⁴ It is clear that Çelebi helped the development of the Sabbatean movement in Cairo and this place became one of the centers of messianic propaganda.¹¹⁵ Thus, Çelebi fits more likely to the context of the hymn since he played an important role in the spread of the movement.

The second verse begins with the ladino slogan "Konvenyamos konverdad" (say) which means "Dönmeler (Sabbateans) unite!". This verse glorifies Sabbatai Zvi and attributes him as a unifier role. In the beginning and at the end of the hymn, there are more likely Judaic elements. Afterwards, there is "pillar candles" part which demonstrates the hybrid structure of this hymn. The candle is used in Jewish and Christian rites, and it is also sacred in other faiths. For instance, in Judaism *menorah* symbolizes the ideal of universal enlightenment. It can be represented by seven-lamp candles (the creation of the universe in seven days) or

¹¹² “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’”, Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5-6.

¹¹³ Cengiz Şişman, *The Burden of Silence: Sabbatai Sevi and the Evolution of the Ottoman-Turkish Dönmes*, 29.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 29.

¹¹⁵ Gerschom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, 641.

nine-branched candles which is associated with Jewish holiday of *Hanukkah*.¹¹⁶ In Kabbalah, *menorah* is associated with the spiritual process of the enlightenment which is called *Tiqqun*. Hence, it manifests the salvation from the darkness and symbolizes the light that gives hope to obtain complete devotion to God. This item also has a place in Sufi culture especially in Alevi-Bektashi branch. Beyond its utilization as a practical object, candle symbolizes the divine light which is associated with the Prophet Mohammed as its bearer in Sufi culture. This revelation manifests itself through the Light of Mohammed in Sufi cosmology (*nur-ı Muhammed*).¹¹⁷ Sharing symbols such as using candles raises the possibility that they developed a common practice in terms of rituals beyond the Jewish and Muslim symbols.

Notably, coming to the 19th century, the descendants of Sabbatai Zvi continued to sing such hymns and songs which some belong to the period of Zvi. Based on this, Scholem says that “It consequently acquired great sanctity in the eyes of the Sabbatean believers, who sang it at their meetings, as is proved by its inclusion in the hymn book of the Dönme (Sabbatean) in Salonica”.¹¹⁸ Apparently, these Sabbatean hymns and songs have provided a cultural and religious continuation among the members of Sabbatean community. At this juncture, it could be said that the Sabbateans' hymns would demonstrate how they blended Jewish Kabbalism and Islamic Sufism.

¹¹⁶ Chanan Morison and Abraham Isaac Kook, *Gold from the Land of Israel: A New Light on the Weekly Torah*, (Urim Publications, 2006), 239.

¹¹⁷ Mark Soileau, “What Comes to Light When a Lamp is Lit in Bektashi Tradition”, (*Islam Through Objects*, 2021), pp. 113-117.

¹¹⁸ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, 313.

CHAPTER 3: SABBATEAN KABBALAH

As a hybrid religion, Sabbateanism has had a unique understanding of mysticism. As "the most important Messianic movement in Judaism since the Second Temple was destroyed".¹¹⁹ The former chapter demonstrated the Sabbateans had connections with some Sufi orders in the 19th century. It is somewhat interesting since the Sabbatean community comes from Kabbalistic background. Although they proclaimed themselves as they converted to Islam from Judaism, they continued believing in Kabbalah and practicing Jewish rituals. However, it would be impossible to consider them as Muslims, Jews or a community having a double identity. The Sabbatean community have had a unique characteristic since they could blend different cultures and worldviews in their hybrid identity.

This chapter explores the Kabbalistic doctrine of the Sabbatean community within the impact of Sufism in the framework of divine love. In terms of the internal distinction between human and divine love, the Sabbateans regarded eroticism as ritualized transgression, which would be a bridge between them. The erotic love in Sabbateanism has led to different polemics since it paved the way for "heresy" such as exceeding the Judaic laws and accusations of inappropriate sexual behaviors. Besides Jewish rabbis, the Ottoman authorities complained about the heresy of the Sabbatean community, and they considered his messianic spiritual pursuits as "fitne" in the seventeenth century, which is used to refer social disturbance.¹²⁰ Within this aim, this part will analyze the secondary literature to understand the entanglements of kabbalistic speculations with Ottoman Sufism. It is interesting to look at the relation between the Kabbalah, Sufism, and the Sabbateans because the literature mostly focuses on

¹¹⁹ Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 6.

¹²⁰ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing, 2011, 78-141.

the cultural, political, and the historical aspects of this community. Among recent studies, there is a tendency to ignore “heretical” Sabbateanism, which this part focuses on.

3.1. Accusations of Heresy

Starting with the ritual acts of indecency practiced by Sabbatai and his followers, both among the Ottoman Sabbateans and the Polish Frankists, Gershom Scholem defines the indecency of the Sabbateans as “antinomianism”, which refers to the rejection of traditionally and religiously accepted rules. The acts of Sabbatai and his followers were inappropriate for traditional Judaism. Probably for this reason, the Sabbateans’ identities, acts, and rituals were deliberately hidden from the outsiders. Although the followers of Sabbatai were outwardly wrapping in a *tallit* in the synagogue or wearing a *fez* in the mosque,¹²¹ they were against the Jewish law and teaching; in Scholem’s words “the holiness of sin” was common among the Sabbateans.¹²² The Sabbateans believed that the Bible and the Talmud were referring to pre-Messianic times, and for this reason, they amended the religious interpretations. Under the leadership of the messiah and on Kabbalistic doctrines, the Sabbateans intended to exceed the Judaic laws which they found as passive in the name of redemption.

The heresy of Sabbateanism has led to many disputes among Jewish Rabbis and scholars. In 1751, one of the most significant controversies about the heresy of the Sabbateanism generated between Rabbi Jacob Emden and Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz, over Eybeschutz’s alleged to be a Sabbatean. Alleson Gerberd narrates the discussion between Emden and Eybeschutz¹²³ that in his *She’elat Ya’avez*, Emden accused Eybeschutz for being a Sabbatean heretic, “cannibal”, and preparing some amulets. Shai A. Alleson-Gerberg shares

¹²¹ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, 2011, ix.

¹²² *Ibid*, 110.

¹²³ Shai A. Alleson-Gerberg, “The Sabbatian Who Devoured His Son: Jacob Emden’s Anti-Sabbatian Polemics of Cannibalism”, *AJS Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1, (April 2019).

the comments of Emden whose cannibalistic imagery aimed to demonstrate Eybeschutz's pieces of amulet:

“Manipulating the names in order to deviate the public is described as a ruthless, bloodthirsty orgy: after he slept with a Lilith-like demonic woman, murderess of children, the father draws out the fruit of her womb, dissects the fetus into pieces, flays it and finally, “‘opens his mouth in slaughter’ [Ezekiel 21:27] ...and eats the flesh of the tender child [ve-’okhel besaro shel yeled rakh]” under the melancholy light of Saturn.”¹²⁴

Associating Sabbateanism with “cannibalism” seems to be peculiar to the Jewish perception of heresy of the Sabbateans. These violent accusations about the Sabbateans in the early modern period signalize the transnational confrontation about the legitimacy of traditional rabbinic authority.¹²⁵ The discourse and accusation of heresy of the Sabbateans probably emerged due to movement's gaining acceleration in various Christian and Islamic lands. The movement was regarded as a threat to the traditional orthodox religious authorities in various geographies. In the passage above, there are two main theological themes. Firstly, it could be observed that Emden establishes a Christian-Jewish proximity through the Sabbatean theological heresy by drawing an analogy from Lilith's murdering children and cannibalism. Secondly, because they broke certain rules of Judaism, they seemed to have the potential to do all kinds of heretical acts. Moshe Idel argues that Sabbatai Zvi's deep affinity for Saturn (kokhav Sabbatai) played a major role in his public acceptance.¹²⁶ In some Jewish texts, there is a phenomenon about the planet of Saturn which is mostly attributed to ‘Sabbatai’. The astrological themes have perpetuated the messianic ideas about Zvi.¹²⁷ These kinds of Christian and Jewish mystical and astrological explanations might intensify the senses about the Messianic ‘heresy’ of Sabbatai Zvi.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 30.

¹²⁵ “Emden-Eybeschütz Controversy”, Retrieved from https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-jewish-history-and-culture/emden-eybeschutz-controversy-COM_0201?lang=en, Last Access: August 2022.

¹²⁶ Moshe Idel, “Saturn and Sabbatai Tzevi: A New Approach to Sabbateanism,” in *Towards the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 173-202.

¹²⁷ Moshe Idel, “Saturn's Jews On the Witches' Sabbath and Sabbateanism,” 47.

3.2. Sexual Antinomianism

In the context of divine love and mysticism, the Sabbateans were accused of breaking the rules of *Halakha*, and they received the kabbalistic speculations on the bi-gendered personality of God unlike the masculine nature of Judaism. There are accusations that the Sabbateans transgressed some religious prohibitions such as including a piece of pork and cheese in their Sabbath meal, tolerating illicit sexual practices, and substituting the new Torah Sabbatai Zvi for the Torah of Moses following his conversion.¹²⁸ It is valuable to investigate the sexual heresy and erotic love between the members, and to question how the sexual intercourse in marital relations was among the members of community which have been mostly neglected in the literature and silenced by the members of the community. On the level of Sabbatai's personal mythology, there is an element of sacred marriage in the personality of Shabbat Meir, a Polish Jewish woman of ill repute, who travelled from Italy to Cairo in 1664 after Sabbatai had called her to be his bride. According to *Jewish Encyclopedia*, Sabbatai claimed that such a consort was promised to him in a dream because he was destined to form a relationship with an unchaste woman as the Messiah.¹²⁹ Behind the affection of Sabbatai from his wife who is reputed as "Sarah the harlot" would stem from his intention of the restoration of woman to her original freedom.¹³⁰ He approved his wife's past and present immoral behaviors as a part of "acts of tiqqun". As Gershom Scholem argues, "Sabbatai married her precisely for that reason, so as to imitate or fulfill the words of the prophet Hosea(1: 2), 'take unto thee a wife of whoredoms'".¹³¹ He might have followed the model of the prophet Hosea and acclaimed his wife as the *Matronita*, the mystical wife of God.¹ Moreover, it is asserted

¹²⁸ Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755–1816*. (Jewish Culture and Contexts.) Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, 33.

¹²⁹ Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Sabbateanism", Retrieved from <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/sabbateanism>, Last Access: 23 April 2021.

¹³⁰ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, Bollingen Series (City: publisher 1976), 404.

¹³¹ Ibid, 196.

¹³² Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 89-97.; Ada Rapoport-Albert, *Women and the Messianic Heresy of Sabbatai Zvi, 1666-1816* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2011), p. 175-178.

that thanks to Sarah's beauty and eccentricity, Zvi gained many new followers; and even her past unchaste life was regarded as an additional confirmation of his Messiahship.¹³³ It could be also argued that Sabbateanism reconceptualized the status of women and offered a drastic shift in the Judaic perceptions of woman spirituality.¹³⁴

According to their adversaries, besides the unconventional marriage of Sabbatai Zvi, certain rituals within the community were deemed as examples of sexual antinomianism. Allegations extend beyond the Sabbateans to the Frankists in Europe, who, as inheritors of Sabbatai's messianic doctrine, purportedly mirrored the antinomian sexual behaviors of their predecessors. These behaviors, including adultery, are alleged to have been falsely elevated to the status of ritual within the community, thus contributing to the proliferation of rumors and accusations against them. The Sabbateans were not a monolithic community; the death of Sabbatai Zvi paved the way for the emergence of three distinct sub-communities: the Kapancıs, the Karakaş, and the Yakubis. Despite the differences among these groups, all of them are accused of adhering to rituals involving unique sexual behaviors. Cengiz Şişman explores their sexual rites and presents the sexual festival of the Sabbateans as "the Kapancı's 'Lamb Festival' was called the *Bahar Bayramı* (Spring Festival) among the Yakubi and *Dört Gönül Bayramı* (Festival of Four Souls) among the Karakaş".¹³⁵ Based on the rumors, it is alleged that husbands exchanged their wives following the feast during the festival, and it was believed that the child born from such sexual intercourse was deemed sacred.¹³⁶ However, it should be noted that these claims are also considered libelous accusations.

¹³³ Kaufmann Kohler & Henry Malter, "Shabbethai Zebi B. Mordecai", Retrieved from <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13480-shabbethai-zebi-b-mordecai#anchor5>, Last Access: 21 April 2021.

¹³⁴ Cristina Ciucu, "A female Messiah? Jewish mysticism and messianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries," *Clio* 44,2 (2016): 63-94.

¹³⁵ Cengiz Şişman, "The Redemptive Power of Sexual Anarchy," *AJS Perspectives*, Spring 2017: The Transgression Issue; <http://perspectives.ajsnet.org/transgression-issue/the-redemptive-power-of-sexualanarchy/>, Last Access, 21 April 2021.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Some claim to be witnesses to the deviant sexual behaviors of the members of the Sabbatean community of such as orgies, inappropriate sexual rites, and swinging. To give an example, Şişman narrates the memoirs of an Israeli politician and historian Yitzhak Ben Zvi, who visited the Sabbatean communities several times in the first half of the 20th century. Ben Zvi noted that: "The candles are put out in the course of the dinner which is attended by orgies and the ceremony of the exchange of wives."¹³⁷ In view of the fact that Ben Zvi is an Israeli politician and may have his own political agenda, these attributions are suspicious. As a matter of fact, the orgy slander has been standard against Bektashis, Sabbateans, Ismailis, etc. in the late Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey.

In an earlier date than Yitzhak Ben Zvi, Ahmed Safi gives one of the first publications about the ritual and religious practices of the Sabbateans in Turkish literature. As an Ottoman bureaucrat in Salonica, Safi published a booklet in 1879 that subjected the sexual antinomianism and he made a study about the Sabbateans, who were the majority in this city. The author's handwritten notes consisted of 18 volumes and 3350 pages, which were simplified and published under the name of *Dönmeler Adeti* (The Customs of Dönmes)¹³⁸ in 2006. Safi narrates that, young girls and boys were gathering in special houses and the feats were accompanied by songs, hymns, prayers, drinks, and almost fifteen people were having sex.¹³⁹ The claim of Safi may include prejudices or false interpretations since he was an outsider. Safi was an Ottoman bureaucrat and similar to Ben Zvi, he might have his own political agenda towards this community. Since the Sabbatean community was regarded as a threat by the Jewish and the Islamic authorities as being a closed and messianic community, most of the time they were associated with heretical and inappropriate acts.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ahmed Safi, *Dönmeler Adeti*, Kapı Yayınları, 2006.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

As another example, a Sabbatean from the Karakaş group disclosed the secrets of the community who kept their identities secret for centuries to the newspapers as a result of a dispute in 1924 and he wrote a letter to Atatürk to complain about the heresies among his community. After 1980s, there have been some instances who attempted to reveal the secrecy of the Sabbatean community in Turkey. However, Karakaş Rüştü incident is quite early when the threatening circumstances for the minority groups at that time are considered. Therefore, it is substantial to understand the motivation of Karakaş Rüştü in revealing and accusing his community. Karakaşzade Rüştü blames his community for practicing sexual hospitality and tries to reveal some moral problems arose among the community. This incident took place at the end of 1923 on the occasion of Rüştü's lodging a petition about the heresies of his community to the Turkish parliament which was founded around those days. Mehmet Rüştü from the Karakaş sect, wrote a petition about his community's customs, traditional beliefs, antinomianism, and heretical acts and delivered to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

Karakaşzade Rüştü asked for the assimilation of his community, and he believed that all the Dönme traditional beliefs and customs should be abandoned within the Republican period.¹⁴⁰ Marc Baer discusses this polemic figure extensively and presents his biography.¹⁴¹ Rüştü was from the Karakaş branch of the community and graduate of the *Feyziye* school in Salonica. He was a Sabbatean merchant who held stores and properties there as late as 1915 as well as in Berlin and Istanbul, utilizing the group's global connections. He had been married and divorced multiple times. Based on his life experience, Baer asserts that his outburst against the community may have been motivated by his personal problems, or he could have been paid to reveal the group's secrets. As Baer suggests, Karakaşzade Rüştü was ousted from the

¹⁴⁰ Cengiz Şişman and Muharrem Varol, "Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemi Sabetaycılık Tartışmaları: Türk Sesi Gazetesi'nden 1924 Tarihli Bilinmeyen Bir Tefrika," *Türkiyat Mecmuası*, 2015.
<https://doi.org/10.18345/tm.49572>.

¹⁴¹ Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 157.

community as a young person and it is probable that he might hold a grudge against his community and want to damage the community. However, this suggestion still does not explain why he preferred to condemn his community as sexual antinomian rather than economic or political reasons. He might have believed this speculation would make an overwhelming impression among the outsiders. Following that event, some speculations and conspiracies arose about the Sabbateans and the community was buried into silence about their identities for decades.

Divine love in Sabbateanism mostly intertwined with “heretical” practices at the expense of transgression Judaic laws. The “heretical” behaviors and such festivals demonstrate both the spiritual and mystical love and erotic¹⁴² love for the messiah, and the Shekhina¹⁴³ through the love for the beloved partner. These can be also seen as a symbolic expression of the abolition of all sexual taboos and prohibitions. Sabbatai Zvi was mostly criticized by Jewish rabbis for the transgression of Jewish religious orders, before his conversion to Islam.

Pawel Maciejko lists the inappropriate actions of Sabbatai such as “breaking the Sabbath and dietary laws, shifting the dates of religious festivals, and abolishing fasts.”¹⁴⁴ Esin Eden’s book, which was mentioned earlier, depicts that the Sabbateans began to include pork and cheese in their Shabbat meals.¹⁴⁵ For instance, the hybridity of the Sabbateans caused upheavals among the Jewish rabbis since the followers were not watching the Judaic instructions such as, “Consuming unclean foods, eating on fast days, celebrating holidays, not in the Jewish calendar, and rejecting the commandments of the Torah.”¹⁴⁶ In addition to these, the messianic claims of Sabbatai disturbed the Judaic theological issues such as: “there is One

¹⁴² Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, Yale University Press, 2005.

¹⁴³ “Shekhina”, in Jewish theology, the presence of God in the world, Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shekhina>, Last access: 21 April 2021.

¹⁴⁴ Pawel Maciejko, *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement*, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Esin Eden & Nicholas Stavroulakis, “Salonika: A Family Cookbook”.

¹⁴⁶ Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 14.

God in the Trinity, and the Fourth Person is the Holy Mother”. As one of the most criticized implementations of the Sabbateanism are that the replacement of the Torah of Moses replacement by the new Torah of Sabbatai Zvi. From this point of view, it could be said that the Sabbateans do not practice normative Judaism. The inappropriate behaviors of Sabbatai Zvi and his followers have been subjected to harsh criticisms and allegations such as cannibalism and a source for *fitne* by both Jewish and Ottoman authorities which made the followers be silent about their identities. However, despite the allegation of the outsiders it is also possible to observe that the Sabbateans have had a flexibility to embrace and blend various religious doctrines such as Sufism thanks to their hybrid identity.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, The Sabbatean community which have been mostly subjected to conspiracy theories in Turkey can be considered having a hybrid identity. The Sabbatean community have had a unique characteristic since they could blend different cultures and worldviews in their hybrid identity. The Sabbateans could adopt different religious practices and lifestyles and blend them into their identities. This research tried to explore how a community could embrace and internalize different ideologies and religious practices and in what ways the Sabbateans have had a hybrid characteristic. However, this The Sabbatean community has not been a monolithic community at all. Some members of the community participated in spiritual life of Sufi orders. They even obtained high leadership positions after they converted. Nevertheless, there are some examples that some Sabbatean figures continued to practice Judaic and Kabbalah rituals and teachings even after their conversion to Islam as this thesis examined through hymns and memoires. It is not possible to melt different Sabbatean experiences in the same pot since the community has survived centuries in different

geographies, periods, circumstances, and they have had various encounters. Despite all those diversities and assimilations, there is a fact that if the existence of this community is still mentioned even today, and if it constitutes a phenomenon both on the outsiders and on the inside of the community, it is not possible to a complete assimilation and extinction process. However, one of the conclusions that this research has arrived is that experienced different practices may stem from the aim of assimilation of this community and led the way of continuing hybrid identities.

The hybrid identity of the Sabbatean community is not restricted with their religious affiliations with Kabbalah and Sufism. In the 19th century, thanks to its hybrid character, the Sabbatean community had been at the forefront of the Turkish modernization process by embracing secularism, individualism, and other modernity ideas. The Sabbatean community has internalized the principles of modern secularism that Jews promoted the values of Age of Enlightenment and its Jewish equivalent the *haskalah*.¹⁴⁷ Especially, in the 19th century, the Sabbatean community could have a commercial and cultural relationship with Europe. The impact of globalization and the geographical position of Salonica that had a connection with Europe as a port city, helped the Sabbateans to transform Salonica into a cosmopolitan city¹⁴⁸. In addition to this, the Dönme schools were giving a Western type of education which reinforced the network between with the Western companies. The Sabbateans could be integrated into modernization by promoting the newest innovations in trade and finance, urban reform, and modern education, combining morality and science, literature, architecture, and local politics.

The Sabbatean community has been silenced about their identities for centuries due to their Kabbalistic doctrine or the perceptions of outsiders towards the converted-Jews. The

¹⁴⁷ M. Avrum Ehrlich, "Sabbatean Messianism as Proto Secularism". *Turkish Jewish Encounters* (Haarlem, December 2007), 278.

¹⁴⁸ Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, x.

publications explaining the history, culture, and religious beliefs of the Sabbatean community, written by the descendants, may shed light on the research on the community for the outsiders.¹⁴⁹ In this respect, the works of this community such as hymns, recipes, prayers, architectural masterpieces, and photographs have quite significance in terms of prevailing the rituals of the Sabbatean community who were keeping their inner-life practices secretive. Depending on Sabbatai's theosophy and hybrid identity, his followers, the Sabbateans have been open to the influence of other mystical religions such as Sufism. Sabbatai could converge both Sufism and Jewish tradition at some point.

This thesis aimed to understand how the Sabbatean community could embrace Sufism despite coming from a Kabbalist background. For this thesis, I examined the relationship of some figures who had a Sabbatean background such as Mehmed Esad Dede with Sufism. While some descendants of Sabbatai Zvi such as Sabiha Sertel's family and Bezmen family had affinity with the Mevlevi orders, some others, especially Karakaş sect stands out with his affinity to the Bektashi order. These aspects have importance in terms of interpreting their positions in Turkish society, both in the political and the cultural sense.

Lastly, examining the Sabbatean Kabbalah, their understanding of divine love mostly intertwined with "heretical" practices at the expense of transgression Judaic laws. The inappropriate behaviors of Sabbatai Zvi and his followers have been subjected to harsh criticisms and allegations such as cannibalism and a source for fitne by both Jewish and Ottoman authorities which made the followers be silent about their identities. However, despite the allegation of the outsiders it is also possible to observe that the Sabbateans have had a flexibility to embrace and blend various religious doctrines such as Sufism thanks to their hybrid identity.

¹⁴⁹ Marc David Baer, *The Dönme: Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, 245.

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