

Sabbatai Zevi and the Lost 10 Tribes of Israel

By Mikkel S. Kragh

Sabbatai Zevi (1626-76) was a false Jewish messiah who succeeded in convincing approximately 2/3 of all Jews of his time that he was their long-awaited messiah. During his very short ministry where he openly proclaimed himself to be the messiah, 1665-1666, many of his followers produced reports claiming that the Lost 10 Tribes of Israel were returning to the land of Israel to be reunited with the Jews of the House of Judah, which, according to the Jews of that day, only consisted of the two Israelite tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

Since Sabbatai Zevi obviously was not the messiah, why is this interesting when it comes to identifying where the Lost 10 Tribes of Israel are today? It is interesting because it shows that the Jews of the 17th century assumed that the 10 Tribes of Israel were not a part of the Jewish people, but that they were somewhere out among the goyim (the Gentiles) and existed as a separate ethnic group distinct from the Jews.

According to all Jewish sources and holy books before the 17th century, the 10 Tribes of Israel had been deported from the land of Israel by the Assyrian Empire around 721 BC and were not a part of the Jewish people, which descended from the Kingdom of Judah, which consisted mainly of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, as well as many of the priestly tribe of Levi.

In the Old Testament book of 2nd Kings, we read how the Assyrians removed the 10 Tribes of Israel out of the land of Israel and settled them in northern parts of the Assyrian Empire:

“Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. ... Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day.” (2 Kings 17:5-6, 23)

2nd Kings also makes it crystal clear that it was the great majority of the 10 Tribes that were removed from the land of Israel, and that only the tribe of Judah remained:

“Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.” (2 Kings 17:18)

According to all ancient non-Biblical Jewish texts, the 10 Tribes of Israel were not a part of the Jewish people, but lived somewhere in the world among the Gentiles. This includes the apocryphal Book of Tobit (c. 3rd-2nd century BC), the Apocalypse of Baruch (c. 70-130 AD), 2nd Esdras (c. 100 AD) and the famous Jewish historian Flavius Josephus who wrote:

“So the ten tribes of the Israelites were removed out of Judea nine hundred and forty-seven years after their forefathers were come out of the land of Egypt, and possessed themselves of this country...” (Flavius Josephus: *Antiquities of the Jews*, IX, XIV, 1, p. 211)

The holy book of Judaism is called the Talmud. Religious Jews interpret the Hebrew Bible (which Christians call the Old Testament) through the eyes of the Talmud, just like Christians interpret the Old Testament through the eyes of the New Testament. Every single time the 10 Tribes of Israel are mentioned in the Talmud, the rabbis of the Talmud take it for granted that the 10 Tribes of Israel are NOT a part of the Jewish people, but are somewhere out in the world among the goyim. The rabbis of the Talmud do not even discuss whether or not the 10 Tribes of Israel were a part of the Jews, because in their eyes it was an indisputable fact that the 10 Tribes has disappeared a long time ago.

When looking for the whereabouts of the 10 Tribes of Israel, the Talmud is a valuable source. First of all, it reflects the views of mainstream Judaism of the 3rd to 6th centuries AD when it was written down. Secondly, the Talmud has been preserved almost unchanged since it was finished in the 6th century AD. The Talmud is the view of almost all Jews of that time, and not just the view of a single Jewish rabbi.

Likewise, the beliefs about the 10 Tribes of Israel that spread among the Jews around the time of Sabbatai Zevi say almost as much about what the bulk of Jews believed in the 1660s, because between 1/3 and 2/3 of all Jews believed that Sabbatai Zevi was the messiah.

Rabbi Baruch Gad, an emissary who had left Jerusalem for Persia in 1641 wrote that he had met a certain warrior of the 10 Tribes called Malkiel of the tribe of Naphtali. Malkiel told Rabbi Baruch that the 10 Tribes lived with great freedom and that his message was to “our brethren, the children of Israel of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.” (Gershom Scholem: *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*, pp. 337-338) Needless to say, whoever wrote this letter was of the conviction that the Jewish people consisted only of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

According to the bulk of the Jewish people that followed Sabbatai Zevi in the mid-17th century, the 10 Tribes of Israel were NOT a part of the Jewish people. The followers of Sabbatai Zevi produced numerous reports about rumours that the 10 Tribes of Israel about to be reunited with the Jews in Palestine. These reports that the 10 Tribes of Israel had re-appeared were produced not only by Jews that followed Sabbatai Zevi, but also reproduced by Christians sympathetic to the Jews.

Since Jews from the 8th century BC to the 17th century AD have taken it for granted that the 10 Tribes of Israel were not a part of the Jewish people, it is obvious that we should look for the whereabouts of the 10 Tribes of Israel somewhere outside the Jewish people.

Who was Sabbatai Zevi?

Before delving into what Jews at the time of Sabbatai Zevi believed concerning the 10 Tribes of Israel, we must first have a look at Sabbatai and the movements he inspired.

Sabbatai Zevi (1626-76, also spelled Shabbatai/Shabsai Tzvi) was born in Smyrna (Izmir) in the Ottoman Empire. He taught that the redemption of the Jewish people would come through breaking Jewish Law, and therefore he was expelled from many Jewish communities in the Eastern Mediterranean, including his home town of Smyrna.

Sabbatai was at first viewed simply as a heretic by most of his fellow Jews, but this changed in 1665 when he met the Kabbalist Nathan of Gaza, who was convinced that Sabbatai was the messiah.

Nathan of Gaza spoke and published fervently about the newly discovered messiah, and the following year it is believed by most scholars that between 1/3 and 2/3 of all Jews in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa believed that Sabbatai Zevi was actually the messiah.

The belief in the messiahship of Sabbatai was so widespread among Jews in 1666 that the Jews that did not believe Sabbatai was the messiah had to keep silent or face violent opposition from the Sabbatean Jews.

Sabbatai taught that as the messiah, the Turkish sultan would be his servant. In February 1666 the Sultan, therefore, arrested Sabbatai and gave him the choice between conversion to Islam or the death penalty. Sabbatai chose to convert to Islam and lived the rest of his life in house arrest in Albania, where he died in 1676.

Sabbateans and the Young Turks

The followers of Sabbatai Zevi are known as the Sabbatean Jews. The most infamous group of Sabbateans were the Dönme that were founded in Thessaloniki, Greece. Like their messiah, the Dönme also converted to Islam but kept their beliefs in Judaism and Kabbalah. Many claim that the Dönme were the driving force in the Young Turks that overthrew the Ottoman Empire, carried out the Armenian Genocide and established the secular Republic of Turkey in 1923. The leader of the Young Turks and the founder of the Republic of Turkey was Kemal Mustafa Atatürk, who was born in Thessaloniki.

Sabbateans and the Nazi Party

Many students of the ancient mystery religions, such as Freemasonry and the Illuminati, make the claim that the German Nazi Party was also born through the influence of Sabbateanism. The German occultist Rudolf von Sebottendorf (1875-1945) travelled to the Ottoman Empire in 1908, converted to Islam, and studied Sufist Islam and Freemasonry. He was closely involved with the Termudi family, a family of Sabbatean Jews from Thessaloniki that were also members of the Masonic Rite of Memphis-Misraim and connected to the Young Turks.

Back in Germany, von Sebottendorf founded the occult Thule Society in Munich in 1918. In January 1919, two members of the Thule Society, Anton Drexler and Karl Harrer, founded the German Workers' Party (German: *Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*, DAP). In September 1919 the German Workers' Party got a new member by the name of Adolf Hitler, who transformed the party into the National Socialist German Workers' Party (the Nazi Party, in German: *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP).

In 1933 Rudolf von Sebottendorf published the book *Bevor Hitler kam* ('Before Hitler Came'), where he wrote that he and the Thule Society were instrumental in the founding of the National Socialist Party. In 1934, after the Nazis had taken power, the book was banned.

The claim that the Young Turks and the National Socialist Party of Germany were inspired by Sabbateans is certainly a valid argument, but it cannot be proven.

Jacob Frank and the Sabbatean Frankists

The second chapter of the Sabbatean Movement started when Jacob Frank (1726-91) from the region of Podolia in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (today western Ukraine) claimed that he was the messiah, as well as a reincarnation of Sabbatai Zevi. Like Sabbatai, Jacob Frank taught that the redemption of the Jewish people would come through transgressing Jewish law. Frank and his followers, therefore, practised orgies and incest and spread the blood libel against their fellow Jews.

Like Sabbatai and his followers had converted to Islam but remained crypto-Jews, Jacob Frank and his followers converted to Catholicism in 1759 while remaining crypto-Jews.

A widespread theory claims that many sinful Jews, such as Jeffrey Epstein, were Sabbatean Frankists. They also claim that many non-Jews are, in fact, Sabbatean Frankist crypto-Jews. These claims are almost always made without any kind of documentation. That, however, does not mean that the Sabbatean Frankists do not play a role in the world today. It only means their role is hard, if not impossible, to prove.

Rabbi Marvin Antelman

You may wonder if I have gotten this theory from anti-Semitic sources, but that is not the case. In fact, most writers who have exposed the Sabbatean movement and the later Frankist movement have been non-Sabbatean Jews, i.e. ordinary Orthodox and secular Jews.

According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b), the Messiah would only come when the Jewish people are extremely righteous or extremely unrighteous. Therefore, the Sabbatean Frankists concluded that since all of the Jewish people are never going to be saints, they might as well become great sinners. That was the twisted logic that motivated the Sabbatean Frankists.

This is superbly documented in Rabbi Marvin Antelman's two-volume book *To Eliminate the Opiate: An in-depth study of Communist and conspiratorial group efforts to destroy Jews and Judaism* (1974), published by the Zionist Book Club, Jerusalem, Israel.

What Jews of the 1660s believed about the 10 Tribes of Israel

Now that we have described the history of Sabbatai Zevi and the Sabbatean Frankists, we can finally take a look at what the Jews that lived in the years 1665-1666 and afterwards believed concerning the 10 Tribes of Israel. Since it is estimated that between 1/3 and 2/3 of all Jews of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa believed that Sabbatai was the messiah, what his followers wrote concerning the 10 Tribes of Israel obviously reflects the general belief among the Jews of that age. Their statements about the 10 Tribes of Israel were not outliers among Jews of that time. They represented the mainstream view.

The Maharal on the Lost Tribes of Israel

According to Ezekiel chapter 37, the reunification of the House of Israel and the House of Judah will only take place at the coming of the Messiah the Son of David. Christians believe Him to be Jesus, who has already come and will come back, while Jews believe that He will come sometime in the future. According to Judaism, the Jewish people will only be reunited with the 10 Tribes when the Messiah comes and not before that.

Rabbi Yehuda Loew was one of the most highly respected Jewish religious thinkers of his age. He lived ca. 1525-1609, shortly prior to Sabbatai Zevi. He is also known as the Maharal of Prague, or simply the Maharal. According to Rabbi Loew, it is God Himself who is preventing even the knowledge of the Lost 10 Tribes to become wide-spread. The reason is, according to Rabbi Loew, that the 10 Tribes of Israel and the Jews are going to be reunited at the coming of the Messiah. Therefore, God is holding back even the knowledge of the whereabouts of the 10 Tribes until the coming of the Messiah.

The Chabad Lubavitch, one of the largest Orthodox Jewish organizations, explains on their website that Rabbi Loew “taught that we will never discover the tribes by searching. He explained that the exile of the ten tribes is a divine decree that will not be rescinded until the messianic era. Even knowing their whereabouts would already be a measure of reunification, and G-d has decreed that there not be reunification until the time of the final redemption. In other words, ultimately it is G-d’s decree that is holding us back from discovering the ten lost tribes.” (Yehuda Shurpin: “Where are the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel?”)

And yet, when the majority of Jews believed that Sabbatai Zevi was the Messiah who had finally come, it was also a logical reasoning of them to expect that the 10 Tribes would make their appearance on the world scene to be reunited with the Jewish people, because that was what the Bible and Judaism taught.

Even though Sabbatai obviously was not the Messiah, it was a logical reasoning for someone who believed that he was to also believe that the 10 Tribes would be revealed as well.

Sabbatai Zevi and Nathan of Gaza on the 10 Tribes

The message about the 10 Tribes of Israel was not prominent in the ministry of Sabbatai Zevi himself. Nathan of Gaza, Sabbatai’s false prophet, touched on the subject when he wrote that “all nations shall submit to his [i.e., Sabbatai’s] rule. He will take the Turkish king alone to the countries which he will conquer, and all the kings shall be tributary unto him, but only the Turkish king will be his servant. ... The ingathering of the exiles will not take place at that time, though the Jews shall have great honor, each in his place.” (Gershom Scholem: *Sabbatai Sevi, the Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*, p. 273)

In the same letter, Nathan of Gaza explained that King Sabbatai would go to the river Sambatyon and marry the daughter of the resurrected Moses, while Sabbatai’s present wife Sarah – a woman of ill repute – would be reduced to a mistress. In Jewish legends, the 10 Tribes of Israel lived beyond the river Sambatyon and could not cross the river because it flowed with stones and only stopped flowing on the Sabbath, where they were prohibited from crossing because they followed the Law of

Moses. The quotes in this article are from the most authoritative biography of Sabbatai Zevi written by Gershom Scholem: *Sabbatai Zevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676* (1973) Gershom Scholem notes that “the ‘children of Moses’ and the Ten Tribes (who are not explicitly mentioned, but obviously implied)...” (*ibid.*, p. 289) In other words, Nathan of Gaza, was, indeed, referring to the 10 Tribes.

Even though Nathan of Gaza only touched on the subject of the 10 Tribes, reports about the 10 Tribes of Israel returning to Israel to be reunited with the Jews proliferated among Jews. But, according to Gershom Scholem, these reports appear to have originated from Christian writers, and yet they spread like wildfire among Jews.

According to Scholem “oriental Jewish communities” produced many letters which spoke of the 10 Tribes marching up from Africa towards Morocco, and according to other letters from November-December 1665 the tribes of Gad and Reuben, and according to other sources, the tribes of Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh were marching on Gaza (*ibid.*, pp. 332-333).

Peter Serrarius of the Netherlands

Peter Serrarius (1600-1669, born Pierre Serrurier) was a Dutch Protestant Millenarian theologian born in Wallonia, the French-speaking part of Belgium. Serrarius had a keen interest in all things Jewish and in particular the Lost 10 Tribes of Israel. He was a close friend of the Dutch Jew Manasseh ben Israel, who shared the interest in the 10 Tribes and managed to let Jews get residence in England again. Between 1665 and until his death in 1669 Serrarius even believed that Sabbatai was the Jewish messiah, even though that belief seems hard to harmonise with Reformed Christianity.

Serrarius wrote to the Scottish theologian John Dury that he had heard reports that the 10 Tribes of Israel were marching up the Arabian Peninsula and had laid siege to Mecca:

“I shall inform you of what seems to be credible. The city of Mecca, the seat of the Mohammedan superstition, is now besieged by a people calling themselves the children of Israel and saying that they were merely the vanguard of the army of their brethren who were following them.” (*ibid.*, p. 346) These reports continued, and for every report the number of the Israelites grew, from tens of thousands to 1.1 million.

John Dury of Scotland

John Dury was a Scottish Protestant theologian who unsuccessfully tried to unite Reformed and Lutheran theology. He was also a philo-Semite, met Manasseh ben Israel and advocated that the Jews should be allowed to settle in Britain, and also had a keen interest in the 10 Tribes of Israel.

John Dury corresponded with Peter Serrarius of the Netherlands and commented on the rumours of the 10 Tribes:

“Mr. Serrarius, in letters from Amsterdam of September 15 and October 1, tells marvellous news of the Ten Tribes of Israel. ... They have already made their appearance at the borders of Arabia,

conquered Mecca, where the tomb of Mohammed is, and other cities, and put to death all the inhabitants except the Jews." (*ibid.*, pp. 335)

Jacob ben Aron Sasportas

Jacob ben Aron Sasportas (1610-1698) was a Sephardic Jew born in Oran, Algeria, was imprisoned by the King of the Moors in 1646 and escaped to the Netherlands in 1653. Sasportas was the main Jewish opponent of Sabbatai Zevi's claim to be the messiah.

While Sasportas lived in London and was the rabbi of the small Sephardic community of Jews in that city, he heard rumours to the effect that "multitudes of Israel had come by the way of the desert to Mecca, the burial place of the prophet of the Muslims, which they had despoiled. When the Grand Turk marched against them with a mighty army they wrought vengeance on him and laid siege to the great city called Mocca. These rumours were even accepted by Christians in England, and 'the voice waxed stronger.' Some said that [these Israelite armies] were the sons of Jonadab b. Rechab who had preceded the Ten Tribes." (*ibid.*, p. 336)

A report from the Jewish community in Sousse, Tunisia, dated 1665 wrote that the 10 Tribes of Israel were moving up along the west coast of northern Africa:

"The tidings of the 15. of July, concerning the March of our Brethren, the Ten Tribes of Israel, is now from several places confirmed to Us, all Things being so full of wonder, that for some few days we could scarcely believe, or give credit to it, from the City of Sus [Sousse], otherwise called Santa-Crew. But now We have certain Information, that they are on the side of the Desert, and move from several places to the said Desert Goth of Morocco, being not far from Cap de Ver [Cape Verde], but more within the land." (*ibid.*, p. 340)

Other reports claimed that armies of the 10 Tribes had were coming in through Persia and were waiting in the Caucasus Mountains.

Yet another claimed that "In the north of Scotland a ship had appeared with silken sails and ropes, manned by sailors who spoke Hebrew. The flag bore the inscription 'The Twelve Tribes of Israel'." (Harry Charles Lukach: *The City of Dancing Dervishes and Other Sketches and Studies from the Near East* (1914), pp. 189–190.)

Why did Jews believe in fictitious reports about the 10 Tribes?

All these reports about the 10 Tribes advancing towards the land of Israel from Morocco, the Arabian Peninsula and Persia were, needless to say, false rumours. Why then did they proliferate among the Jews of the 1660s?

The answer to that question is twofold:

First of all, ever since the exile of the 10 Tribes in the 8th century BC, Jews had believed that the 10 Tribes were not a part of the Jewish people and existed somewhere among the goyim.

Secondly, the prophets of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) were very specific that the Jews (Judah) would only be reunited with the 10 Tribes at the coming of the Messiah.

For example, the prophet Ezekiel wrote about this in the parable of the two sticks of Judah and Ephraim-Israel that would be united when the Messiah the Son of David would arrive:

“The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying,

Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim and for all the house of Israel his companions:

And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand.

And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these?

Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand.

And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes.

And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:

And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all.

Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.” (Ezekiel 37:15-25)

Since the Sabbatean Jews believed that Sabbatai Zevi was the messiah, it was, therefore, a logical conclusion that the 10 Tribes of Israel would also emerge now that the messiah had emerged.

Conclusion

We can, therefore, conclude that the Jews of the 1660s took it for granted that the 10 Tribes of Israel were not a part of the Jewish people, and that the 10 Tribes would be reunited with the Jewish people when the messiah would come. They did not know where the 10 Tribes were, but many people have since then traced the 10 Tribes of Israel to Europe, where they today make up the bulk

of the nations of north-western Europe and their daughter nations across the world, including the United States of America.

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