



Sabbatai Zevi: Testimonies to a Fallen Messiah (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)

David J. Halperin

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Sabbatai Zevi (1626-1676) stirred up the Jewish world of the mid-seventeenth century by claiming to be the messiah, then stunned it by suddenly converting to Islam. His story, and that of the movement he created, is a landmark event in early modern Jewish history and a dramatic example of what can happen when mystic dreams and messianic hopes combine in an explosive mixture. Now available in paperback, this book allows English readers to experience these events through the words of those who lived through them, in lucid and compelling translations by a leading authority in the field. Of the contemporary 'testimonies' translated by David J. Halperin, three are accounts by Sabbatai Zevi's followers of the life and deeds of their messiah. These are the *Najara Chronicle*, an eyewitness narrative which Gershom Scholem called 'one of the most extraordinary documents shedding light on Sabbatai's personality'; *Baruch of Arezzo's Memorial to the Children of Israel*, a sober yet devout biography of Sabbatai written shortly after his death; and the bizarrely fanciful hagiography composed in 1692 by Abraham Cuenque of Hebron. These narratives by Sabbatean 'believers' are supplemented by two seventeenth century letters, pungent in their style and colorful in their details, in which Sabbatai and his followers are described by a contemporary rabbi who detested them and everything they stood for. Finally, a reminiscence of Sabbatai's last days, preserved by one of the most independent-minded of his followers, conveys the enigma of the man who was to haunt the generations.



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