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Early Eighteenth Century' Jewish Religiousness: A Case of Leibele Prossnitz as Depicted in *Bashraybung fun Shabbetai Zevi*¹

Abstract: *The study analyses parts of Bashraybung fun Shabbetai Zevi dedicated to Leibele Prossnitz, the best-known Moravian adherent of the Sabbatian movement. This early modern Jewish messianic movement is reflected as heretical in academic and non-academic discourse alike and Bashraybung is the only contemporary source describing Leibele Prossnitz' religious behaviour in more detail. Such described behaviour is put in general context of the early modern European Jewish society to derive those deeds and thoughts of Leibele Prossnitz which are in the text perceived as "normal" (orthodox) and those which are perceived as "extraordinary" (heterodox, heretical). Further, the study distinguishes the deeds and thoughts of Leibele Prossnitz which are specifically Sabbatian, that means those which are shared neither by other messianic enthusiasts of the time nor by other contemporary Jews, and those which are of his own invention. The study is intended to be a contribution to the present discussion on early modern Jewish orthodoxy and heterodoxy.*

Keywords: *Sabbatian movement – Leibele Prossnitz – messianic movements – Jewish heterodoxy – Jewish orthodoxy – heretical movements – early modern Jewish history – early modern Jewish society*

In the summer of 1665 Nathan of Gaza,² a well-known healer of the souls in the land of Israel, proclaimed Shabbetai Zevi³ as the "messiah". The news on for so long awaited Jewish "messiah" spread rapidly from Israel to all around the Jewish world.⁴

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2 Nathan ben Elisha Hayyim Ashkenazi (1643/4–1680) was one of the two most important persons of the Sabbatian movement (as the messianic movement of the second half of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century is in the Jewish historiography refer to, or less frequently also as Sabbatianism), considered as its main prophet and exaggerator.

3 Shabbetai Zevi (1626–1676) was the central person of the Sabbatian movement, a Jewish messianic movement in the second half of the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. He was considered as the long-awaited Jewish messiah.

4 The continent of America was an exception. There is no evidence that the movement influenced the Jewish community in America (the Southern and the Northern alike).

Already in the winter 1665 every Jew in Europe, Asia and North Africa was excited about the messiah, and only little reservation and opposition aroused. The huge excitement, however, extinguished very quickly, when the Jewish “messiah”⁵ converted to Islam in the September 1666. Though, the most of the former believers in the Shabbetai Zevi’s messianic role deserted, there were groups of Sabbatians (as the believers in messianic role of Shabbetai Zevi are labelled in the Jewish historiography) living long after Shabbetai Zevi’s apostasy, and even after his death in 1676, until the end of the eighteenth century.

After the apostasy there were several Sabbatian centres established in Europe. These centres were, however, moving in the course of the time. In the beginning the centres were situated predominantly in Italian communities, foremost Leghorn and Modena amongst them, where the eager Sabbatians from all around the Europe were aimed to. There was a Sabbatian school in Leghorn, which was surrounded around Abraham Rovigo (ca. 1650 in Modena – 1713 in Mantua), a leading Italian Sabbatian, who kept close ties with Meir Ben Hiyya Rofe (ca. 1610–ca. 1690), a Sabbatian emissary of the Jewish community in Hebron, and other Sabbatians linked to the land of Israel, who provided him with the news on the Sabbatian movement there.

After the death of Shabbetai Zevi and, foremost, of Nathan of Gaza, with the declining dominative position of the movement in Israel in the eighties of the seventeenth century, the importance of the Sabbatian centres in Italian Peninsula decayed. Contrary the importance of the Sabbatian centres in the north, in the German lands (in Hebrew: *’arẓot Ashkenaz*, were those lands, where German languages dominated, including Dutch Republic for example), and in the north-east, above all in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, grew. This situation had prevailed until 1725, when a great anti-Sabbatian campaign aroused in the Western and the Central Europe. Since then the core of the Sabbatian movement remained just in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (mainly in the provinces of Galicia, Volhynia, White-Russia, Podolia and Bessarabia until the mid of the eighteenth century).⁶

5 For elementary information on Jewish messianism, see entry *Messiah*, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 14, 2007, pp. 110–115; and entry *Messianic movements*, in: *ibidem*, pp. 115–122.

6 For elementary information on Sabbatian movement, see entry *Shabbetai Zevi (1626–1676)*, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 18, 2007, pp. 340–359. The most comprehensive study on the subject still remains Scholem’s classic study Gershom SCHOLEM, *Sabbatai Ševi. The mystical Messiah, 1626–1676*, Princeton 2016. For new perspectives on the movement in English, see Elisheva CARLEBACH, *The pursuit of heresy. Rabbi Moses Hagiz and the Sabbatian controversies*, New York 1990; Ada RAPOPORT-ALBERT, *Women and the messianic heresy of Sabbatai Zevi, 1666–1816*, Oxford 2011; Paweł MACIEJKO, *The mixed multitude. Jacob Frank and the Frankist movement, 1755–1816*, Philadelphia 2011.

Sabbatian activities in Moravia and Bohemia are also well documented.⁷ The upheaval of the years 1665 and 1666 is attested by collection of Sabbatian penitential prayers (in Hebrew: tiqqunim), which was printed in Prague in 1666.⁸ There is a known upheaval of Jews in Jungbunzlau (in Czech: Mladá Boleslav, Czech Republic today) in 1666, which Alexandr Putík correctly put into the context of the Sabbatian movement.⁹ The seventeenth century' German historian Martin Meyer informs, that the Moravia militia had to be called up, in order to extinguish the Jewish (messianic) unrest in 1666.¹⁰ The known sources do not throw much light upon subsequent thirsty years of the movement in Bohemia and Moravia.¹¹ It is known that Mordecai (Mokhi'ah) Ben Ḥayyim of Eisenstadt (1650–1683), a Sabbatian and an alleged brother of Meir Eisenstadt,¹² who spent some years in Abraham Rovigo's school, travelled through the Bohemia and the Moravia in early eighties of the seventeenth century. Another Abraham Rovigo's colleague in Modena in the late seventeenth century was Issachar Behr Ben Judah Moses Perlhefter (died after 1701), author of the famous Yiddish tractate Beer Sheva. His Sabbatian activities in Prague, however, remains unknown, it is possible that he was not a Sabbatian anymore after his return to Prague.

The evidence of Sabbatian activity grows with the rise of the Judah Ḥasid's exodus project to Israel.¹³ The activities of the group are attested in Moravia and also in Bohemia; a Sabbatian meeting considering the immigration plan was held in Nikolsburg (in Czech:

7 The Jews of Silesia were expelled from the land in the late fifteenth century and only privileged Jews with their families were allowed to be settled in Silesian towns up to 1781. The Sabbatian activities of these families' members are unknown. The only known Sabbatian activities in the land are connected to the person of Leibele Prossnitz (see below).

8 Natan of GAZA, *Tikun Kri'yah le-Khol Yom*, Praha 1666. These collections of tiqqunim were printed in many Jewish communities in Europe and Levant between the years 1665–1666.

9 Alexandr PUTÍK, *The tumult of Mladá Boleslav (jungbunzlau, bumsła) in the messianic year 5426/1666*, *Judaica Bohemiae* 34, 1998, pp. 4–106. Another event probably connected to the Jewish messianic expectation appeared in Kolin (in Czech: Kolín, Czech Republic today), see IDEM, *Fight for a Conversion in Kolín nad Labem, Bohemia, in the Year 5426/1666. A Contribution on the Subject of Reverberations in Bohemia of Shabbatai Zevi's Messianic Appearance*, *Judaica Bohemiae* 33, 1997, pp. 4–32.

10 Martin MEYER, *Philemeri Irenici Elisii Diarium Europaeum*, Bd. 16, [Frankfurt] 1668, p. 516.

11 The charter for the new synagogue in Prossnitz (preserved in the minute book of the Prossnitz Jewish community) indicates the year of the foundation as the year of our salvation and our redemption. The Sabbatian connotation, however, could not be proved unambiguously, since messianic expectations were symptomatic for the Jewish society in the early modern era (see below).

12 Meir Eisenstadt (ca. 1670–1744) was a famous rabbi serving in Prossnitz (in Czech: Prostějov, Czech Republic today) in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Initially, he should have been a Sabbatian and a follower of Leibele Prossnitz (see below), but also a rabbi who expelled Leibele Prossnitz from the community in the end (in 1706/1707).

13 Judah Ḥasid (Segal) ha-Levi (ca. 1650–1700 in Jerusalem) was a Sabbatian from the town of Dubno (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, today's Ukraine). He and Ḥayyim Ben Solomon Malakh

Mikulov, Czech Republic today) in early 1699. Judah Ḥasid and his emissary sojourned in Prague and met with David Oppenheim, a Bohemian and Prague chief rabbi at that time, to gain financial fund for the Ḥasid's exodus project in 1700. Nethanel ben Solomon, an emissary of the land of Israel, who engaged to the project, after Judah Ḥasid's arrival to Israel, visited Prague and David Oppenheim in 1700. Also the inception of the most famous Sabbatian of Moravian origins Leibele Prossnitz could be a consequence of Judah Ḥasid's emissaries (Leibele Prossnitz is said that he underwent inner conversion after a sermon of an itinerant preacher who came into his community sometime after the year 1702, and it is very likely that the itinerant preacher was afore mentioned Nethanel ben Solomon, who was known as a fiery preacher of the repentance).¹⁴

After the year 1706 a period of unknown Sabbatian activity, or perhaps non-activity, follows until 1725, when Sabbatian "heretical" pamphlets, circulating all around the Europe, were disclosed in German Lands and in Moravia.¹⁵ Jonathan Eybeschuetz, a prominent Prague' rabbi, was identified as the source of the pamphlets. Jonathan Eybeschuetz, himself being a Sabbatian, in order to protect his life and reputation, promptly issued a document condemning Sabbatian "heresy" (the document is in Jewish historiography known as Prague excommunication).¹⁶ Besides the Prague, other four excommunications were issued in the year 1725; the excommunications of Frankfurt, of the Triple community, and of Amsterdam generally condemn the Sabbatian "heresy", call for the persecution of the Sabbatians regardless their social standing, and urge the

(ca. 1650–1716/1717) established a group of Sabbatians, which emigrated from the Europe to Israel in 1700.

- 14 For the Judah Ḥasid, emissaries of his and Nethanel ben Solomon' activities in Prague, see S. KRAUSS, *Die Palästinasiedlung der polnischen Hasidim und die Wiener Kreise im Jahre 1700*, in: *Abhandlungen zur Erinnerung an Hirsch Perez Chajes*, Wien 1933, pp. 51–94; Alexandr PUTÍK, *Prague Jews and Judah Hasid. A Study on the Social, Political and Religious History of the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries*, *Judaica Bohemiae* 38, 2002, pp. 72–105; *ibidem* 39, 2003, pp. 53–92; *ibidem* 46, 2011, pp. 33–72.
- 15 In that year an itinerant book-seller Moses Meir Kamenker from Żółkiew (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time, in Yiddish: Zalkva, today's Zhovkva in Ukraine) was arrested in Frankfurt am Main and his satchel with goods was confiscated and searched. "Illegal" Sabbatian letters and pamphlets were found amongst other writings and books. An investigation had started and ended with bans excommunicating Sabbatians. Also in Moravia some "illegal" Kabbalistic pamphlets were discovered in 1725, but there is no clear continuity between the investigation in Frankfurt and in Moravia. It is ambiguous, whether the "heretical" treatises discovered in Frankfurt and in Moravia are the same.
- 16 Recently Paweł Maciejko analysed the wording of the document and revealed that the document is not merely feigned condemnation of Sabbatian "heresy", but a Sabbatian pamphlet in deed. See Paweł MACIEJKO, *Coitus Interruptus in And I Came this Day unto the Fountain*, in: Paweł Maciejko (ed.), *R. Jonathan Eibeschütz, And I Came this Day unto the Fountain*, Los Angeles 2014, pp. i–lii.

Sabbatians to repent. Contrary, the Kanitz's excommunication¹⁷ expelled the person of Leibele Prossnitz, his adherents and those, who believe in them from the land of Moravia.¹⁸

After the 1725' affair the information on Sabbatian activities in Moravia and Bohemia are scanty. The inhabitants of the Jewish community in Prossnitz used to be called Shebses (a Yiddish word derived from a Hebrew word denoting Sabbatians) by the end of the nineteenth century. Katarina Schöndel Dobruschka, according to Gershom Scholem a benefactress of Moravian Sabbatians, was born and, before her marriage and move to Brünn (in Czech: Brno, capital of Moravia in the eighteenth century), lived in Prossnitz. She should have carried on a salon in the second half of the eighteenth century, which the both Jews and Christians alike should have attended. Jacob Frank (ca. 1726–1791) – an eighteenth century' messianic person of Sabbatian origins who converted to Catholicism and who established a movement of his own (in the Jewish historiography known as Frankism) – was a cousin of hers. In the sixties of the eighteenth century he sojourned at her place in Brünn and, probably, under his influence ten out the twelve Schöndel Dobruschka's children converted to Catholicism.¹⁹

Information on Schöndel Dobruschka and on other Moravian Sabbatians, predominately those linked to Schöndel Dobruschka's fate, are scattered throughout the work of Jacob Emden (1697–1776), an arch-pursuer of Sabbatians in the second half of the eighteenth century. His information has to be taken with utmost circumspection, since he is mainly describing their scandalous misdemeanours, mostly of sexual nature.²⁰ With the course of the time to the end of the century the sources on Sabbatian activity in Moravia and Bohemia are very rare and frugal, speaking more on individuals rather than groups.²¹ The last well documented and known Sabbatian (or maybe Frankist, the distinction between the Sabbatian and Frankist movement in Moravia and Bohemia is blurred and it has still been waiting for its particular research) controversy aroused in early nineteenth century' Prague, when the members of well-fare Wehle's family were accused of this "heresy".

17 In the Jewish historiography the excommunication is known as of Nikolsburg, since Nikolsburg was the largest and the most important Jewish community in Moravia, and therefore the best place for issuing such an important document. However, a letter of Issachar Berush Eskeles (1692–1753), a Moravian chief rabbi in 1725, disproves the presumption. See Josef PRAGER, *Gahalei' esh*, manuscript, Bodleian Library, Department of Oriental Collections, Catalogue Neubauer #2189, vol. I, fols. 58v–59r.

18 For more information on the Sabbatian campaign in 1725–1726, see E. CARLEBACH, *The pursuit*, pp. 161–194.

19 For more information on Katarina Schöndel Dobruschka and Jacob Frank' sojourn in Brünn, see P. MACIEJKO, *The mixed multitude*, pp. 12, 192–196.

20 For example see Jacob EMDEN, *Sefer Hit'avkut*, Altona 1762, fols. 19v, 20v, 24r, 28r, 30r–v, 32v, 38v, 43r, 45v, 50r, 82r; Jacob EMDEN, *Beit Yehonatan ha-Sofer*, Altona 1763, fol. 20v.

21 For example see Eleazar FLECKELES, *Teschuva me- 'ahavah*, Prague 1809, p. 69.

The records on Sabbatian activities in Moravia are abundant, nevertheless there is not much information on a Sabbatian everyday life, inner spirituality, thoughts and religious practise in Moravia and Bohemia. Since the 1666' edition of Sabbatian tiqqunim, there is no other Sabbatian printing of Bohemian or Moravian province. Similarly, none extant manuscript mediates to us an account describing those details of a Moravian or a Bohemian Sabbatian. The exception is a career of Leibele Prossnitz, an early eighteenth century' Sabbatian, who is, after Shabbetai Zevi, the only Sabbatian ever excommunicated namely (Shabbetai Zevi was excommunicated by Jerusalem rabbis in 1665, but the excommunication had no effect. All other excommunication were generally condemning Sabbatians with no names given).

Leibele Prossnitz²² is the most famous Moravian Sabbatian. He was born around 1670 in Ungarisch Brod (in Czech: Uherský Brod, Czech Republic today) and he spent most of his life in the Moravian Jewish community of Prossnitz (since his predicate; in Hebrew and Yiddish sources spelled as Prostitz). Sometime in 1702, under the influence of an itinerant preacher, he passed through inner conversion. Since then, he was seeing two persons in his dreams. These two persons were Isaac Luria²³ and Shabbetai Zevi, who transferred the secret Kabbalistic explanations of the Torah to him.²⁴ Leibele Prossnitz started to preach the secret meanings not only in Prossnitz, but also in other Jewish communities in Moravia and even Silesia (he was reprehended not to do so and to go back to Prossnitz by rabbis in Wrocław and Głogów).

Leibele Prossnitz claimed that after the 40 years of hiding shall Shabbetai Zevi reveal himself again, and bring the redemption. To confirm his prophecy, Leibele Prossnitz had performed several "miracles" which were uncovered as fraudulent and Leibele was expelled from the Jewish community of Prossnitz. After few months in Coventry he did repent, return to the community, and since that time until the year of 1725 he should have been an obedient member of the Prossnitz community.

22 His full name is Judah Leib Ben Jacob Holleschau Prossnitz.

23 Isaac Ben Solomon Luria (1534–1572) was a late sixteenth century Safed's Kabbalist, ideas based on his teaching and legends on him dominated the Jewish spiritual milieu in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Isaac Luria was considered as a saint and holy person.

24 Divine persons appearing in someone's dreams or visions as spiritual instructors are well documented phenomenon in the Kabbalistic literature since the middle ages (in Hebrew: *maggid*, plural *maggidim*). It is very interesting that afore mentioned Nethanel ben Solomon is known for seeing *maggidim* as well. Another possible proof of Nethanel ben Solom being the preacher that inspired Leibele Prossnitz to his career. For elementary information on *maggidim*, see entry *Maggid*, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 13, 2007, pp. 339–341. For detailed explanation within the system of Lurianic Kabbalah, see Gershom SCHOLEM, *Major trends in Jewish mysticism*, New York 1946, pp. 244–286 and 287–324.

Prior to the year 1718 Leibele Prossnitz established in Prossnitz a Kabbalistic study group surrounded around him.²⁵ Soon after, study groups based on the Prossnitz's Kabbalistic explanations spread all over the land of Moravia. Well-attested are the Prossnitz's close ties with other known Sabbatians of the time, particularly with Jonathan Eybeschuetz and Judah Ḥasid. After the expulsion from Moravia in 1725, the last known evidence on him is from Mannheim, where the Jewish community prohibited his entrance into its walls in late 1725.²⁶

The most elaborate account on Leibele Prossnitz's life is of Leyb ben Ozer, a trustee of the Ashkenazic synagogue in Amsterdam. His in Yiddish written chronicle *Bashraybung fun Shabbetai Zevi* (further in the study just as *Bashraybung*) is the most voluminous chronicle of Sabbatian movement of Ashkenazic origins.²⁷ The chronicle re-counts the history of the movement since its beginnings up to the year 1718, when the manuscript was accomplished. The manuscript itself remained undiscovered for very long time and only the modified and translated text into Hebrew (both by Jacob Emden) was known.²⁸ Only Zalman Shazar in 1978 published an edited text from the original manuscript. Along the original Yiddish text, the Hebrew translation, explanation notes and introduction study are provided within the edition.²⁹ This study shall make use of this edition, since there have not been doubts risen on the edition's correctness.

The fact, that the text of the *Bashraybung* as it preserved in Jacob Emden's *Z'ot Torat ha-Kena'ot* (further in the study just as *Z'ot Torat*) is corrupted, is also evident from the story on Leibele Prossnitz. Leyb ben Ozer's story starts at folio 56r and ends at folio 69v (there are, nevertheless, few parenthesis inserted in the story), while the Jacob Emden's version is only two folios long. Moreover, in Jacob Emden's version there are many details on Leibe Prossnitz's fate, that Leyb ben Ozer could not know in 1718, as

25 According to Jacob Emden, Leibele Prossnitz became active again with the sojourn of Nehemiah Ḥiyya Ben Moses Ḥayon (ca. 1655–ca. 1730, a Bosnian Sabbatian of Sephardic descent, his 1713' controversy in Amsterdam is well known) in Moravia in 1713. See Jacob EMDEN, *Z'ot Torat ha-Kena'ot*, Amsterdam 1752, fols. 34v–35r.

26 For elementary information on Leibele Prossnitz, see entry *Prossnitz, Judah Leib ben Jacob Holleschau* (c. 1670–1730), in: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd ed., vol. 16, 2007, pp. 623–624. For more elaborate study, see Miroslav DYRČÍK, *Hnutí Šabtaje Cvi na Moravě v raném novověku*, diplomová práce, Olomouc 2012.

27 That means Jews of Western, Central and Eastern Europe. There were none Jews in early modern Spain and Portugal since 1492, respectively 1496. The Jews of Balkan Peninsula were predominately of Sephardic origins and the Jews in Italian Peninsula compose pedigree of their own. All the pedigrees differ foremost in ritual manners. In the eighteenth century's Amsterdam there were three independent communities: Ashkenazic, Sephardic and Portuguese.

28 J. EMDEN, *Z'ot Torat*.

29 Judah Leyb Ben 'OZER, *Sipur Ma'asei Shabbetai Zevi. Bashraybung fun Shabbetai Zevi*, Jerusalem 1978, pp. 168–212.

that Leibele Prossnitz was expelled from the land of Moravia in 1725 for example. Jacob Emden blurred *Bashraybung* as his main source on the Leibele Prossnitz's life and at the beginning of the story Jacob Emden informs his reader, that the Leibele Prossnitz's story is retold in accordance, what he heard from his father-in-law (Mordecai Ben Naftali Kohen, a rabbi of Ungarisch Brod in early eighteenth century) and the members of the Jewish community in Ungarisch Brod.³⁰

There is no doubt that Jacob Emden, besides *Bashraybung* and his father-in-law, used an additional source for his Leibele Prossnitz's story.³¹ The same today lost source was used by Joseph Prager, a supporter of Jacob Emden in Emden-Eybeschuetz controversy.³² In his *Gahalei 'esh*, a collection of testimonies on Sabbatian and anti-Sabbatian activities since the beginning of the movement until the fifties of the eighteenth century, Joseph Prager headed the testimony on Leibele Prossnitz *Deed of evil person Leibele Prostitz* (further in the study just as *Deed of evil person*) and in its preamble states that it was already printed long time ago.³³ No wonder that Jacob Emden utilized the same source that Joseph Prager, his fellow in the struggle with the "heresy", incorporated into *Gahalei 'esh* (moreover, the both testimonies were accomplished in more or less the same time).

The main topos of the all stories (in *Bashraybung*, in *Z'ot Torat* and in *Deed of evil person*) is the best known performance of Leibele Prossnitz which he was forced to do by the Jewish community in Prossnitz, in order to confirm his prophecy on immediate coming of the redemption; Leibele Prossnitz is making Shekhinah, a God's presence in the world,³⁴ visible to others in the form of burning letters of the Tetragrammaton, four Hebrew letters representing God's name in texts. The performance is, however, disclosed as a "fraud". Nevertheless, the story of Jacob Emden and the testimony *Deed of evil person* are lacking particular details on Leibele Prossnitz's everyday life included in *Bashraybung*, but contain a lot of additional information on Leibele Prossnitz's fate after the year 1718.

Along *Deed of evil person* Joseph Prager collected in *Gahalei 'esh* also other documents relating to Leibele Prossnitz; a letter of Yeshaya Ḥasid, a son-in-law of Judah Ḥasid the

30 J. EMDEN, *Z'ot Torat*, fol. 34v.

31 Jacob Emden mentions that the story was already printed (prior to 1752) in the language of the Ashkenaz (that means in Yiddish) and *Bashraybung* remained in manuscript until 1978.

32 In 1750 Jonathan Eybeschuetz won a post of rabbi in the Hamburg Jewish community over Jacob Emden. After finding Sabbatian amulets in Metz, previous Jonathan Eybeschuetz's place of work, Jacob Emden accused Jonathan Eybeschuetz being a Sabbatian, which accusation the latter refused. The controversy at some extent last up today. Some scholars, mostly of religious background, are reluctant to believe that such prominent rabbi as Jonathan Eybeschuetz could be a Sabbatian "charlatan".

33 J. PRAGER, *Gahalei 'esh*, fols. 38v–45v.

34 For elementary information on Shekhina, see entry *Shekhinah*, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 18, 2007, pp. 440–444.

leader, to Leibele Prossnitz³⁵ (both in Hebrew) and letters of Leibele Prossnitz to rabi Jonathan Eybeschuetz³⁶ and to Yeshaya Ḥasid³⁷ (in Yiddish). The first letter is condolences of Yeshaya Ḥasid to Leibele Prossnitz on his excommunication from the land of Moravia in 1725. The second letter is on Leibele Prossnitz' night visions and the last letter is a response to the first. The content of the letters is useful for analysing the (not only) Leibele Prossnitz's prolific inner world and thoughts around 1725. The last document within *Gaḥalei'esh* concerning Leibele Prossnitz is his excommunication from Moravia issued in Kanitz in July 1725.³⁸ The excommunication, surprisingly, do not give any specific transgression of Leibele Prossnitz, but very general condemnation of him, his companions and those whom believe in them.

This case study shall analyse the text of *Bashraybung* to derive Leibele Prossnitz's everyday life (including his inner world, thoughts and believes) and ritual practice prior the year 1706 (for explanation see below) as an example of the early eighteenth century' Sabbatian. Pursuant to Leibele Prossnitz's anomaly the study shall distinguish the deeds, behaviours and thoughts which are in the text perceived as "normal" and those which are perceived as "extraordinary".³⁹ The study shall also derive the deeds of Leibele Prossnitz which are specifically Sabbatian; that means those deeds, behaviours and thoughts of Leibele Prossnitz which are shared neither by other messianic enthusiasts of the time (see below) nor by other contemporary Jews (see below), and those which are of Leibele Prossnitz's own invention. To do so, the text of *Bashraybung* shall be put in general context of early modern European Jewish society.

After the apostasy of Shabbetai Zevi, the majority of the former "believers" (as Sabbatians are always referred to themselves in their writings) did not simply become foes of the Sabbatians and even did not leave the faith in the immediate coming of the

35 J. PRAGER, *Gaḥalei'esh*, fols. 57v–58v.

36 Ibidem, fols. 56v–57v.

37 Ibidem, fols. 74v–76r.

38 Ibidem, fols. 46r–47v.

39 To become famous already in own lifetime and to keep this popularity for centuries means to be an extraordinary and Leibele Prossnitz definitely was not an ordinary Jew of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. This is obvious from the fact that there were three eighteenth century Jews who thought his fate worthy of recording for the next generations (and there is also one eighteenth century' Christian account in German, see Johann Jakob SCHUDT, *Judische Merckwürdigkeiten*, chapter 31, book VI, Frankfurt and Leipzig 1714–1717, p. 334; and in Swedish, see Christian Petter LÖWE, *Speculum religionis judaicæ*, chapter 32, Stockholm 1732, pp. 79–82). If you were not a wealthy generous member of your community or a rabbi of an extraordinary reputation, there was little chance in early modern Jewish society made your fate to be written down, but to do extraordinary deeds. These deeds used to be of two contradictory kinds, those perceived positively and those perceived negatively, since breaking contemporary ethics and even law. As it shall be shown the Leibele Prossnitz' extraordinary deeds were of the both kinds.

messiah and the redemption at all. The messianic expectations had been already very vivid amongst the majority of the Jewish population since the early seventeenth century and remained vivid until the first half of the eighteenth century. The Sabbatian movement was not the cause of the Jewish messianic enthusiasm of the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century, but only a consequence of those expectations already aroused in the late sixteenth century' Safed (a town in the north of Israel today, in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century the town was a part of the Ottoman Empire).

Safed was a place, where some of the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 settled and established community based on studying and practicing Kabbalah, a mystical branch of Judaism. They emphasized ritual purity, repentance and ascetic way of life instigated by the idea of the immediate coming of the redemption. The expectations got its momentum with the teaching of Isaac Luria, or rather with the interpretations of the Isaac Luria's teaching in the writings of Ḥayyim Vital⁴⁰ and Israel Sarug,⁴¹ since Isaac Luria himself was not a prolific writer, and penetrated into the wide public's consciousness in the beginning of the seventeenth century. The Isaac Luria's teaching (the cosmogony and the cosmology), the derived believes from the teaching, and the ritual practise affiliated to the derived believes are in the Jewish historiography known as Lurianic Kabbalah (or less commonly as Lurianism).

These (non-Sabbatian) messianic enthusiasts (as Elisheva Carlebach titled them)⁴² have been at the margin of the scholarly attention. The recent stage of the research reveals, that the attitude of these messianic enthusiasts (former Sabbatian believers or not) to the person of Shabbetai Zevi, and his role in the redemption, varied greatly. Amongst the messianic enthusiasts were those completely indifferent to the movement, those being agnostic⁴³ about the movement, and also the opponents of the movement including the prominent pursuers of the Sabbatians and the Sabbatian "heresy" (anti-Sabbatians).

The indifferent messianic enthusiasts believed in the immediate coming of the redemption, and even if the person of Shabbetai Zevi had no role in their concept of the redemption, they did not take any (at least public) action against the Sabbatians and their belief. The agnostic messianic enthusiasts also believed that the redemption is at hand,

40 Ḥayyim Ben Joseph Vital (1542–1620), the main interpret of the Isaac Luria's work.

41 Israel Sarug (floruit 1590–1610), after Ḥayyim Vital the second main interpret of the Isaac Luria's work, his interpretation are dominative in the seventeenth and eighteenth century' Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

42 Elisheva CARLEBACH, *Two Amens That Delayed the Redemption. Jewish Messianism and Popular Spirituality in the Post-Sabbatian Century*, *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series 82, 1992, No 3/4, pp. 241–261.

43 In the meaning as used in religious studies: a person who is interested in the matter but not sure what to believe or think about.

but kept all the possible way open to the future, not excluding the Sabbatian. Also the anti-Sabbatian messianic enthusiasts believed the redemption being at hand, however simultaneously denouncing Sabbatian “heresy”.⁴⁴

The latest recognized attitude of a messianic enthusiast is of semi-Sabbatian nature. Leyb ben Ozer recounts in *Bashraybung* that he used to be a Sabbatian, and that it had been reasonable not to denounce the faith in Shabbetai Zevi completely until 1706, when the “messiah” would have been re-appeared after the forty years in hiding. For Leyb ben Ozer the believing in the messianic role of Shabbetai Zevi after the year of 1706 was only foolishness, and subsequent prophecies on him, and also predictions of his re-appearing, were the deeds of the evil side.⁴⁵

Besides these messianic enthusiasts, there was a minority of messianic indifferent Jews, who were interested in all other matters, but the messiah and the redemption. The scale of their attitude to Shabbetai Zevi and the movement was, at least, as wide as of the messianic enthusiasts; from the utmost indifference to the utmost hostility. They did believe in the coming of the messiah and the redemption, as one of the principal tents of the Jewish faith, nevertheless this tent had no immediate impact on their everyday life and religious practise. Contrary to the messianic enthusiasts, these indifferent Jews practised only one custom directly relating to the expectation of immediate coming of the messiah and the redemption. The custom of saying additional penitential prayers for the restoration of the souls and the world (in Hebrew: tiqqun, plural tiqqunim)⁴⁶ within the day begun to be practised also in the sixteenth century’ Safed, and some of these additional prayers became an inherent part of the daily Jewish liturgy in Ashkenaz already in the course of the seventeenth century. In this (probably unconscious) way became the messianic indifferent Jews “a part” of the messianic enthusiasm of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.

The majority of the messianic enthusiasts, however, stayed at the same level in expressing their faith in the immediate coming of the redemption as the indifferent Jews. They had been reciting more penitential prayers within the day, beyond those already fixed in the liturgy,⁴⁷ but their faith had almost no other effect on their everyday life.

44 Some of them believed that the Sabbatians removed, by means of their “heretical” thoughts and acts, the time of the redemption.

45 J. ‘OZER, *Sipur Ma’asei*, p. 209–212. See Miroslav DYRČÍK, *Šabatianismus: Sekta nebo hereze? Příkladová studie – Leibele Prossnitz a Jakob Emden*, in: Hana Ferencová et al. (eds.), *Proměny konfesijní kultury*, Olomouc 2015, pp. 197–209.

46 For the explanation on tiqqunim within the system of Lurianic Kabbalah, see G. SCHOLEM, *Major trends*, pp. 244–286 and 287–324.

47 Best-known penitential prayers for restoration were taking place at midday and at midnight. The collections of these additional penitential prayers were very often printed in the seventeenth and

Their expectation of the immediate redemption was rather a hope for, than an intrinsic faith. The everyday life of this majority was far more influenced by fallouts of the Isaac Luria's teaching. The folk (the majority) prefers tales to the high speculative thinking. The elaborated Lurianic cosmogony and cosmology was in folk's mind reduced to the legends on the person of Isaac Luria and other prominent Kabbalists of the time, to the task of the "other side" (in Hebrew: *sitra achra*, generally it means evil)⁴⁸ in the world, to believes related to popular version of Lurianic cosmogony and cosmology, and to the rituals (in Jewish historiography known as practical Kabbalah, contrary to theoretical Kabbalah) which were to diminish the influence of the "other side", as the amulets for example (the most famous are those which gave to rise the Emden-Eybeschuetz controversy).

The ritual practice of the messianic enthusiasts' minority was, however, considerably different. Their faith in the immediate redemption did affect their everyday life to a great extent. This minority of the messianic enthusiasts used to imitate the ritual practise of the sixteenth century' Kabbalists in Safed. They used to fast all the week long, but the Shabbat (the seventh day of the week, when God finished his creation and rested. It is an every week Jewish holiday on which the thirsty-six kinds of work are forbidden to do. Since the Jewish week starts with Sunday and the Jewish day starts with sunset, the Shabbat day lasts from the Friday evening to Saturday evening). Their extreme sense for ritual purity is best-known. In the time, when the significance of the ritual bath (in Hebrew: *mikveh*) had been declining (men used to immerse in the *mikveh* just before the Shabbat, and women before the Shabbat and after the menstruation), the minority messianic enthusiasts did immerse daily (some of them did it even several times a day). Along with the immersions went the sexual abstinence (contrary to the common practise to "consume the marriage" on the Shabbat evening, some of them refused their wives for years). The mortifications of many kinds and many other ascetic practises are also well documented. These messianic ascetics were very often solitary persons living within a Jewish community, or, where possible, they formed small study groups. Some of them even preferred total solitude.

In the beginning of the movement, in the years 1665 and 1666, Shabbetai Zevi was keen to invent new rituals, to introduce new fasts, and to abolish established ones. In the maniac periods of his bi-polar disorder he intentionally transgressed the contemporary Jewish religious law (in Hebrew: *Halakhah*) and sometimes he forced his followers to do

early eighteenth century all around the Europe. The Sabbatian printed in the years of 1665 and 1666 bearing the name of the prophet Nathan of Gaza are of particular interest.

48 For elementary information on *sitra achra*, see entry *Kabbalah*, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 11, 2007, pp. 638–641. For detailed explanation within the system of Lurianic Kabbalah, see G. SCHOLEM, *Major trends*, pp. 244–286 and 287–324.

so as well (these transgressions of the contemporary Halakhah are in sources referred to as Shabbetai Zevi's strange deeds). Few Sabbatian calendars were fixed during those and the consecutive years and were obeyed by the Sabbatians even long after the Shabbetai Zevi's conversion. Nonetheless, Gershom Scholem claims that already in the beginning of the eighteenth century none of the Sabbatian calendars was observed.

According to the eighteenth century' sources, foremost of Jacob Emden, some Sabbatian individuals, and in some places even groups of Sabbatians, imitated their "messiah" and violated the contemporary Halakhah. The reason for violating the Halakhah was that the messianic time already had begun, and therefore the contemporary Halakhah (connected with this world and being of physical nature) is no more valid and have to be replaced by new Halakhah of messianic time (connected with upper worlds and thus being of spiritual nature). For some of the Sabbatians, the new messianic Halakhah was the so far valid Halakhah, just reversed upside down; so far forbidden was permitted, and vice versa. Gershom Scholem called the attitude "antinomian" (from Latin words anti – against, and nomos – law). These "antinomian" Sabbatians transgressed the Halakhah publicly or, hidden in the veil of "orthodoxy", in private. The scale of violation is blurred and Jacob Emden reports mainly on sexual transgressions of Sabbatians, which make this "antinomian" theory very doubtful (in parallel, many sixteenth and seventeenth century' Catholics accused Protestants of sexual libertinage and vice versa).⁴⁹

Besides them, there were many Sabbatians obeying the Halakhah and not transgressing normative behaviour of the time in any way. The everyday life of majority of these Sabbatians was the same as of majority of non-Sabbatian messianic enthusiasts; affected by popular Lurianic ideas of cosmogony and cosmology, associated believes and rituals. Neither the ascetic minority of these Sabbatians differs from the ascetic minority of non-Sabbatians. The scale of practise varied from a community to a community (Local geographical conditions mattered for example; ascetics living by sea were using the sea for ritual immersions; ascetics living in places with good snow conditions were using the snow for mortification.), and even from a person to a person, but no specific Sabbatian innovations in ascetic way of life are recorded.

The known part of Leibele Prossnitz's life begins with coming of an itinerant preacher to Prossnitz. It is not said that the preacher is a Sabbatian, but it is very likely that the

49 Recent research abandons the nomenclature *antinomian* for its pro anti-Sabbatian inclination. In his research, Maoz Kahana proves that the Halakhic transgressions of Sabbatians are in the perfect match with the Halakhah of the time, if the Sabbatians thought that the messianic era already had begun. In this way, the behaviour of the Sabbatians did not contradict the Halakhah, and it is not antinomian at all. See Maoz KAHANA, *Shabbetai Zevi ha-^cish ha-Halakhah*, Zion 81, 2016, No 3–4, pp. 391–433.

preacher could have been one of the Judah Ḥasid's emissaries who had wandered the Central Europe up to 1720 when the project failed (contrary, there also were plenty of non-Sabbatian itinerant preachers who wandered across the Europe, from a place to a place, in the early eighteenth century). Leibele Prossnitz took preacher's rebuke to his heart and underwent catharsis. Since then he turned his life upside down, he left his previous career whatever had been and became an ascetic Kabbalist, a preacher and a "prophet". Leyb ben Ozer and Jacob Emden agreed that before his inner conversion, Leibele Prossnitz was a very poor and ignorant peddler. This information, however, could not be taken for granted, since the both stories are educative and make of Leibele Prossnitz a "charlatan" and thus stress his ulterior intentions of social nature. More likely he was a teacher of children than an itinerant peddler. Leyb ben Ozer in *Bashraybung* depicts that Leibele Prossnitz started to teach children the Mishna,⁵⁰ and that after his career of a "prophet" he returned to this profession.⁵¹ Teaching children was in early modern Jewish society appreciated much higher than the profession of an itinerant peddler, but the social impact of poverty was almost the same.⁵²

Leyb ben Ozer and Jacob Emden suggest that before his career of an ascetic Leibele Prossnitz was not much a man of devotion (contrary to Leyb ben Ozer that the Leibele Prossnitz's career started with the itinerant preacher, Jacob Emden claim that the prophecies of Leibele Prossnitz started with his move into an abandoned house full of demons.). Both authors indicate that Leibele Prossnitz's dilatoriness in ritual manners derives from his busyness in gaining living for him and his poor family (and thus not

50 Mishna is a part of "classical" Jewish religious system. Very simplified it is a collection of "commentaries" on Torah made by rabbis during the first and the second century. The "classical" Jewish religious education system is Torah (five books of Moses) – Mishna – Talmud (later "commentaries" on Torah and Mishna). In the early modern period the teaching of Mishna was at margins. This is the reason for that Leyb ben Ozer claims that Leibele Prossnitz taught Mishna; to an ignorant could not be permitted to teach anything else, but Mishna.

51 Leibele Prossnitz did not belong to the most prominent strata of early modern Jewish society (the learned rabbinic, nor the wealthy), but he definitely was not an ignorant, since there are writings of his preserved up today. Besides above mentioned letters to Jonathan Eybeschuetz and to Yeshaya Ḥasid, he is the author of the mystical Kabbalistic commentary on the book of Rut (Leybl PROSNIZ, *Sefer Ṣadiq Yesod 'olam*, Jerusalem 1993). The authorship of this treatise, however, had remained unknown until Judah Liebs revealed only recently Leibele Prossnitz as its author (see Judah LIEBS, *Mehaber Sefer Ṣadiq Yesod 'olam, ha-Navi' ha-Shabta'i rabi Leybelei Prosniz*, in: idem, *Sod ha-'emunah ha-Shabta'it*. Qoveṣ Ma'amarim, Jerusalem 1995, pp.70–76.

52 There is not much known about the other social aspects of Leibele Prossnitz's life. It is known that already in 1702, the year of his catharsis, he had a wife and children. Nonetheless, nothing more is said about them in later period. Only the testimony Deeds of evil person Leibele Prossnitz states that Leibele Prossnitz divorced his first wife and married a daughter of a wealthy member of Prossnitz Jewish community Gerschon Ben rabbi Shimon Yechiel. Thanks to the marriage Leibele Prossnitz should have become rich (J. PRAGER, *Gahalei 'esh*, fol. 45r).

having time to keep religious duties). The more neglect of ritual practise before the more striking is the turning point, and the history, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, is full of similar sudden and striking catharsis. It is a topos and for that the information has to be taken with utmost precaution. Whether Leibele Prossnitz was negligent regarding the religious duties of an early modern Jew or not, since the certain point, according to Leyb ben Ozer between the year 1702 and 1706, he became a person of extraordinary devotion.⁵³ Leibele Prossnitz was more likely an ordinary pious Jew of non-extraordinary devotion before the turning point.

Leibele Prossnitz's devotion was on one hand "extraordinary", but also very ordinary on the other. As an extraordinary was Leibele Prossnitz's devotion perceived at least by the authors of *Bashraybung* and *Deed of evil person*, also by the narrators of the stories and probably by the other contemporary members of the Jewish community in Prossnitz. *Bashraybung* several times emphasize the ascetic practice of Leibele Prossnitz; "... and he was pious very much, he fasted all the time..."⁵⁴, "... and everyday he fasted, he was temperate in his living and several times a day he immersed into ritual bath. And sometimes he immersed even three hundred and ten times into the bath..."⁵⁵, "[he and chosen ten people] shall live in solitude and in self-denial (mortification)"⁵⁶...⁵⁷. Unfortunately, Leyb ben Ozer does not describe the self-denial (mortification) modus operandi in more details. With utmost probability the reason is that his informants (the narrators of the story) were not aware what was going on behind the closed door.

The Leibele Prossnitz's ritual practise is extraordinary in the eyes of the early eighteenth century' Jewish folk, but the anomaly is diminishing in the perspective of an early modern ascetic. Everyday fasts and ritual immersions are not something extraordinary amongst the ascetics. Since the sixteenth century Safed Kabbalists pious Jews used to fast every day except the Shabbat, since the Shabbat is the foremost amongst the week days and even God stopped his work on this day. The Shabbat day is dedicated for celebration of God and his work and the celebration (expressed also in consummation of festive meal) is a commandment and therefore the fast is strictly forbidden (the commandment could be broken in life saving purposes only). The everyday fast does not mean that an individual did eat and drink nothing all the week long, but on Shabbat. These minor (in contrast to

53 As such is depicted just in the *Bashraybung*, but not in *Deed of evil person* and in the Jacob Emden's *Z'ot Torat*. Jacob Emden diminishes the extraordinary devotion of Leibele Prossnitz to highlight his deceitfulness. The author of *Deed of evil person* doubts the Leibele Prossnitz's intrinsic devotion through the mouth of Leibele Prossnitz's father-in-law. Ibidem.

54 J. 'OZER, *Sipur Ma'asei*, p. 171.

55 Ibidem, p. 173.

56 The Yiddish word *sigufim* used here means the both the *self-denial* and also the *mortification*.

57 J. 'OZER, *Sipur Ma'asei*, p. 173.

major fasts, the days established in Jewish calendar for complete renunciation) everyday fasts were about avoiding the certain kinds of meals (meat for example, generally it was a custom to avoid the meat on Mondays and Thursdays, but the ascetics used to eat the meat only on Shabbat) and drinks (foremost those including alcohol. Contrary on Sabbath it was worthwhile to consume a drink of alcohol.).

As well the everyday ritual immersions of Leibele Prossnitz are not nothing extraordinary in the perspective of an early modern ascetic. This custom of everyday ritual immersions begun to be more spread with the Safed Kabbalists again. Even the notion on three hundred and ten immersions in a day is not a Leibele Prossnitz invention.⁵⁸ It is known that already Safed Kabbalists did so. The reasoning for the number is a bit obscure, but it is a third of the number nine hundred and thirty, which allegedly were years of Adam the first (man).⁵⁹ Adam the first (in Hebrew: 'adam ha-Rish'on) is a well-established Kabbalistic symbol of purity intact by sins, the utmost aim of whole ascetic effort. The meaning of the symbol became widespread amongst masses with the dissemination of Lurianic Kabbalah in the first half of the seventeenth century. Leyb ben Ozer (or his informants) used this symbol in the story, when Leibele Prossnitz would have sacrificed a black cock to the "other side" (the evil).⁶⁰ Leibele Prossnitz immersed ritually nine hundred and thirty times the day before the night he sacrificed the cock. By immersing into the bath as many times as were the years of Adam the first, Leibele Prossnitz vanished all his sins and became the sinless person, Adam the first, because only the completely sinless person could have deal with the evil side.

No details on Leibele Prossnitz's fasting and other mortification indicate two possibilities. The less likely is that the informants of Leyb ben Ozer were not aware of any extraordinary ascetic practise specifically of Leibele Prossnitz invention or of Sabbatian origin, because it all taken place behind the closed doors. Notwithstanding, Leibele Prossnitz was not alone behind the doors, but accompanied by other ten men "*who shall live with him in solitude and in self-denial*"⁶¹. The more likely is that Leibele Prossnitz and his attendance did not practise any "extraordinary" ritual practice additional to the "classical" frame of ascetic practise, or any "scandalous" (Sabbatian) ritual practise which would have surprised an "orthodox" mind of the eighteenth century Jew. In the peak of the Sabbatian movement in the years 1665–1666, which is considered as the most penitential movement ever taken place in Jewish history (by both sources Sabbatian and non-Sabbatian alike), many details of ascetic practise performed by all strata of the Jewish

58 Ibidem.

59 *Genesis* 5,5.

60 J. 'OZER, *Sipur Ma'asei*, pp. 177–178.

61 Ibidem, p. 173.

society (Sabbatians and non-Sabbatians alike) are recorded for example; amongst them were ritual immersions at midnight and before the sunrise, flagellations, or mortification by nettles worn on the naked body under heavy clothes.⁶²

Shabbetai Zevi is famous for his transgressions of Halakhah of the time, for innovation of new ceremonies, and for giving the established rituals new meanings. The most famous are abolition the ninth of Av's fast (the ninth of Av's fast is commemorating the destruction of the Temple in the first century by the Romans. Shabbetai Zevi turned it to the celebration of his alleged birthday on this day in 1626), eating of the forbidden fat (according to the Halakhah there are certain sort of fats of several animals which are forbidden to eat, the fat above kidneys for example) and uttering the name of God aloud (uttering God's name was restricted to the priests, only once a year at the Rosh ha-Shana (the Jewish new year) and only in the Temple. Since the destruction of the Temple, the God's name is forbidden to utter for everybody). In his manic phases Shabbetai Zevi used to like pomp and ostensibility, and he did like to break the contemporary Halakhah publicly.

Contrary, Leibele Prossnitz seems that he did like to do his ascetic practise in private, behind the close doors. Similarly, he would have preferred to transgress contemporary norms this way. There is, however, one ritual of his own impulse⁶³ (this is, however, debatable, since the impulse came from two men he was seeing in his dreams, for more on the men in Leibele Prossnitz's dreams see below), which was performed semi-publicly. That is the "scandalous" episode with sacrificing the black cock to the other side, which, metaphorically said, broke his neck, because since the episode Leibele Prossnitz was in displeasure of the majority of the Jews in Prossnitz. Leibele Prossnitz announced his intentions publicly, but everybody in Prossnitz was so scared of the other side that chose rather not to be a part of the ritual. The ritual would have taken place in the Leibele Prossnitz's room, where Leibele Prossnitz would have been let alone, but the room was observed very carefully from the house across.

Believing in the existence of the evil (other side) was wide spread and throughout accepted in the early modern Jewish society. Since the Safed Kabbalistic movement, defeating the evil as the main purpose of the Jewish nation became dominant cosmogonic myth of the early modern Jewish society. The general (non-Sabbatian) Lurianic folk concept was that the evil side will be defeated after all sins of the Israel will be atoned and then the redemption shall come. Every Jew is therefore responsible for his part in

62 For more detailed explanation on ritual purity and mortification practise within the system of Lurianic Kabbalah, see G. SCHOLEM, *Major trends*, pp. 244–286 and 287–324.

63 Contrary to the famous ritual showing up the Shekhinah, which Leibele Prossnitz was forced to perform, as a proof of his prophecy by other members of the Jewish community in Prossnitz.

the process of the redemption and the only way to accomplish the individual task is the penitence and accompanied devotions. Contrary, the Sabbatian folk conception was that the messiah in the person of Shabbetai Zevi shall alone defeat the evil and the rest of the Jews could only be helpful to him in sincere repentance of their sins.

Leibele Prossnitz invented his own way which broke the both conceptions non-Sabbatian and Sabbatian alike. He caused scandal amongst the Jews in Prossnitz claiming that the other side desires for its part. There is a wide known and accepted legend about thirty six righteous men who keep the world running in the early modern Jewish society. These men are so righteous that even in the case that all the Israel was cursed, these men are able to combat the evil to the extent that the world would not collapse (there are indeed records on individual righteous men, who are said that fought their inner spiritual mystical fight with evil side) and these men are the only person considered worthy to interact the other side “directly” (indirect way were amulets and other superstitions for example). None of these righteous men ever sacrificed anything to the other side. This type of interaction with the evil was restricted to the wicked persons only. In the Sabbatian concept these men are no more essential, since the redemption time had occurred and the final battle with the other side shall be won by Shabbetai Zevi, the messiah, alone. Shabbetai Zevi did many transgressions against the contemporary Halakhah (and also many of his adherents), but he never made a sacrifice to the evil and none of his transgression was ever interpreted in this way.

The Leibele Prossnitz’s reason for the blasphemy of sacrificing the cock could be found in his inner very vivid world formed foremost by his dreams. Initially there were two rabbis (maggidim) appearing in his dreams, Isaac Luria and Shabbetai Zevi.⁶⁴ They taught Leibele Prossnitz the secret explanations of the Torah and other mysteries, which Leibele Prossnitz afterwards lectured at public. Soon after, another person entered into his dreams, a rabbi Josi ben Joezer, who told to Leibele Prossnitz that “*he [Leibele Prossnitz] is able to chained Samoel (spelling in Yiddish, in Hebrew: Samael), the first amongst the demons, and thus defeat the evil completely*”.⁶⁵ The only he and his attendant have to do, is to do study Torah and fast for forty days.⁶⁶ Samael did not let Leibele Prossnitz alone and soon Leibele Prossnitz, and thanks to Leibele Prossnitz’s very vivid dreams also other

64 J. ‘OZER, *Sipur Ma’asei*, pp. 169–172.

65 *Ibidem*, p. 175.

66 *Ibidem*, p. 176.

men visiting his synagogue, became scarred a lot of Samael.⁶⁷ To hush Samael and the very vivid dreams on him Leibele Prossnitz “invent”⁶⁸ the sacrificing of the black cock to him.

While the sacrificing to the other side by pious and devoted Jew was an innovation, the instruments used in the depiction of the event are very traditional. Samael as the first of the demons is well established in Jewish literature (foremost the Kabbalistic) since the eighth century. Samael is appearing in the Leibele Prossnitz's dreams in the form of a black dog. Dog was in the early modern Jewish mind seemed ambivalently. It was appreciated for his watching quality, but at same time it was seen as an impure animal rolling in and eating the carcasses. The collocation *black dog* did mean nothing but a creature related to the evil, something that an early modern Jew should have been avoided. Amongst the Ashkenazic Jews there was, and still is, a ritual on the day before the day of the atonement, when Jews symbolically transmits all their sins which they committed within the last year to poultry (men to a cock, women to a hen), and the poultry is afterwards given to the poor (the ritual is in Hebrew known as *kapparot*).

Leibele Prossnitz chose a black cock, because black is always connected to the other side and in this particular case also the cock, since the cock represents sins, which always come from the other side. Leibele Prossnitz is just returning to the other side what used to be its. Leibele Prossnitz justifies this “strange” ritual by referring to an old ritual of sacrificing to Azazel, a filthy ghost. The ritual was, however, abolished after the Temple's destruction, since it has to be performed by sons of Aaron (priests, in Hebrew *kohanim*, the Jewish surnames *Kohen*, *ha-Kohen*, *Katz* for example are referring to the pedigree. It is not known that Leibele Prossnitz was descendant of the pedigree) in the sanctuary and since the sanctuary (the Temple) is destroyed the ritual is forbidden to performed.

An important part, and not only in the story with the black cock, takes numbers. Figures of nine hundred and thirty and three hundred and ten have been already explained. According to *Bashraybung* the black cock had to be tied to Leibele Prossnitz's bed by a twenty one ells long rope and the rope had to encircle the one leg of the bed three times. The cock had to be tied to the bed for nine nights and the ninth night the cock was grinded.⁶⁹ The figure *three* is not need to be explained in more details, since in the variable cultures means foremost the perfection, because figure *three* has its beginning, the middle and the end. The figure *twenty one* is only a multiple of two very symbolic

67 Ibidem, pp. 176–177.

68 Sacrificing to the other side is not an innovation within the early modern Jewish society, as an example could be taken the story on Leibele Prossnitz as depicted by Jacob Emden in *Z'ot Torat*; Leibele Prossnitz should have lived in the house full of demons and to sacrifice them the incense. It is a topos that only the wicked men make sacrifices to the “other side”. The invention of Leibele Prossnitz is that a so far very pious and devoted Jew made a sacrifice to the “other side”.

69 J. 'OZER, *Sipur Ma'asei*, pp. 177–178.

figures, three and seven (in seven days God created the world, the Shabbat is the seventh day of the week). The symbolic meaning of the figure nine is not so well established in the Jewish tradition. In the Lurianic Kabbalism the figure *nine* was connected to Adam the first (sinless) man (the gematria of the word Adam is connected to the number *nine*, and also the years of Adam were *nine* hundred and thirty), but also to the other side as an imperfect number (missing one to the figure *ten*, another symbol of the perfection).

So far nothing specific Sabbatian, or of Leibele Prossnitz own invention. Nevertheless, the ritual with black cock is preceded by instructions given to Leibele Prossnitz by the persons he is seeing in his dreams (maggidim). Afore mentioned magid Josi ben Joezer instructed Leibele Prossnitz and his ten fellows to fast for *forty* days in order the evil side to be completely defeated and the first *four* (the number four has its symbolic meaning within the Jewish tradition, but in this context is just a tenth, a perfect fraction, of the number forty) days they had to fast completely (no food and drink all the days long). The figure forty has no symbolic meaning in the Jewish tradition, but just in the Sabbatian context. *Bashraybung* explains at another place, that after forty years of his disappearing (in the year 1666) Shabbetai Zevi is about to appear again (in 1706).⁷⁰ An explanation why just the forty years is not given in *Bashraybung*, but is found in the Nathan of Gaza's teaching (the main Sabbatian prophet and interpreter). It is a parable to the forty years that the Israel spent (get lost, disappear) at the desert of Sinai after the exodus from Egypt and before its reach of the Land of Israel.

The same idea of Shabbetai Zevi's disappearing is reflected in the depiction of rabbis appearing in the Leibele Prossnitz's dreams. The rabbis are initial two, Isaac Luria and Shabbetai Zevi. The first is not alive and it is a ghost, but the latter is of corporeal nature, that means that he do exist,⁷¹ and he is just hiding him away from the world. Contrary to many hints on that Leibele Prossnitz received the secret meanings of the Torah, on that he is teaching these secrets and on that he is preaching the folk, the teaching on Shabbetai Zevi's reappearing after forty years is one of only two Leibele Prossnitz's teaching given in *Bashraybung* (needless to say that this teaching is not mentioned in *Z'ot Torat* nor in *Deed of evil person*).

The second teaching of Leibele Prossnitz contradicts the Nathan of Gaza's teaching. It is not obvious whether this Leibele Prossnitz's transgression of the Sabbatian teaching is an invention of his own conscious free mind or of his unconscious ignorance of the Nathan of Gaza's teaching (or the most likely is the ignorance of Leyb ben Ozer and his informants). Nevertheless, the famous ritual of showing up the Shekhinah is breaking

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 174.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 171.

the Sabbatian teaching in two manners. First, according to Nathan of Gaza only *sola fide* shall assure the living in the next world for an individual. The signs and miracles are not necessary for believing in Shabbetai Zevi's messianic role and for confirmation of the prophecy. No one should have required signs and miracles and no one should have performed any. Leibele Prossnitz performed the ritual of showing up the Shekhinah in order to confirm his "prophecy".⁷²

Second, the Nathan of Gaza's teaching explains that while the Israel has been in exile (in Hebrew: *galut*), also the Shekhinah has dwelled in exile, however, since the time of the redemption is at hand and all sins of the Israel has been atoned the Shekhinah is no more present in this world, but has dwelled already in upper worlds for some time. Leibele Prossnitz in *Bashraybung* claims, that he shall make the Shekhinah to descend from the heaven (in Yiddish and Hebrew *Shamayim*). That means from an upper place, but still of this world. In this claim the concept of the existence of the upper worlds is not reflected. The reason is not that Leibele Prossnitz (nor Leyb ben Ozer, nor his storytellers) did not be aware of the concept (and in this case the expression *from the heaven* could mean an different upper world), because in another sentence is explained that the participants of the ritual have not look at the Shekhinah directly, since it could make the worlds be collapsed.⁷³

The signs and miraculous events are the very important aspect of the Leibele Prossnitz's story in *Bashraybung*. They accompanied almost all the deeds of Leibele Prossnitz. This all-pervasive aspect of the story is a proof of that believing in God and of that the all deeds were only a manifestation of God's grace or disgrace, is not a fabrication of modern historiography, but a vivid part of the everyday life of the vast majority of the pre-modern men. Initially, the signs and miracles were in the grace of Leibele Prossnitz; to an ignorant (and simultaneously non-Kabbalist), who even cannot read (according to *Bashraybung*), are transgressed mysterious explanations of the secret meaning of the Torah by *maggidim*;⁷⁴ the veracity of the *maggidim* is confirmed by signs (Leibele Prossnitz is instructed by two rabbis in Prossnitz to look at the *maggidim*'s feet. According to a legend the demons have only four fingers on each foot);⁷⁵ Certain Elchanan Magid in Nikolsburg died wright after his reproach of Leibele Prossnitz.⁷⁶

72 He was not alone. In fact, there are many signs and miracles performed by Shabbetai Zevi or by other Sabbatians recorded in the sources (and also plenty of prophesying Sabbatians).

73 J. 'OZER, *Sipur Ma'asei*, p. 183.

74 *Ibidem*, p. 171.

75 *Ibidem*, p. 170.

76 *Ibidem*, p. 172.

Nonetheless, with the ritual of sacrificing the cock these signs and miracles turned into the Leibele Prossnitz's disgrace. Leibele Prossnitz was called to the reading of the Torah and an error in the passage he was reading occurred (the reading a weekly portion from the Torah scroll in the synagogue on Tuesday, Thursday and Shabbat is a custom held since antiquity up to today). A legend on Isaac Luria is reminiscing in this event, because Isaac Luria is said that he had not uttered a blessing over the Torah scroll in which an error in the text was found later (and he even had known the exact passage where the error is).⁷⁷ The ritual of showing up the Shekhinah was disclosed as a fraud and the disclosure was interpreted as a miracle performed by God.⁷⁸ Interesting at this aspect is that no specific Sabbatian signs, miracles or an explanation of this kind was not done.

More interesting is, however, the lack of "classical" topoi of the time, non-Sabbatian and Sabbatian alike. The story on Leibele Prossnitz is void of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth century obsession over penitential devotions. Concerning Leibele Prossnitz's obsession over the ritual purity and the ascetic practise, the lack of penitential devotions, which are mostly performed in public (in contrast to the ascetic practise), is very obscure. The peak of the Sabbatian enthusiasm in the years of 1665–1666 is symptomatic for the stress on penance, which was proclaimed by the Sabbatian leading persons. Almost all the folk (Sabbatian and non-Sabbatian) did perform the penitential devotions in those years. It is very startling, that in the year of the so long awaited appearing of Shabbetai Zevi after forty years, a leading person did not perform any penitential devotion and did not require the others do so. One possible explanation could be that Leibele Prossnitz thought the penitential effort as had been already accomplished (in the years 1665–1666) and that the reappearing of Shabbetai Zevi is enough for the completion of the redemption.

Other general topoi connected with the Sabbatians is probably also lacking in the story of Leibele Prossnitz. In the whole story on Leibele Prossnitz in *Bashraybung* is not a hint on Leibele Prossnitz violating the contemporary Halakhah, nor even an intention of his to violate the Halakhah, nor an intention of his to force others to do so. Every "strange" deed that Leibele Prossnitz ever performed was in the borders of the "orthodoxy" of the time. Leibele Prossnitz did cross contemporary morals (he sacrificed to the other side, he cheated with Shekhinah), but he did not make a deed which was considered as heretical. Nevertheless, Leyb ben Ozer indicates in one sentence that Leibele Prossnitz violated the contemporary Halakhah "... he [Leibele Prossnitz] *did many things that I heard about which cannot be depicted*".⁷⁹ Even though the way of violation is not disclosed, the blurred phrases as "that something cannot be depicted" indicate in sources on Sabbatians the

⁷⁷ Ibidem, pp. 179–180.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 184.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 188.

misdemeanors of sexual nature. It is hard to decide the veracity of such phrases, since there are topoi as it has been already explained above.

Conclusion

The story of Leibele Prossnitz as depicted in *Bashraybung* comprises more general contemporary non-Sabbatian topoi than Sabbatian or Leibele Prossnitz's "innovations". The Leibele Prossnitz's asceticism is extraordinary in the early eighteenth century' Jewish society on the one hand, but very ordinary in the perspective of other ascetics of the time; no ascetic practise of his own is described in *Bashraybung*. All the religious practise of Leibele Prossnitz are described within the framework of the contemporary religious culture, normative and folk alike, except the ritual of sacrificing the black cock to the other side. The penitential devotions, another practise very significant for the time, are, however, missing in *Bashraybung*. The story of Leibele Prossnitz contains, nonetheless, other significant aspects of the eighteenth century' folk culture; a *maggidim* in dreams; signs and miracles explained as God's interferences; sins and frauds seen as temptation of the evil; a legend on Isaac Luria.

The idea of re-appearing of Shabbetai Zevi after forty years of his concealment is the only specific Sabbatian aspect of the story in *Bashraybung*. Nothing else ties Leibele Prossnitz to the Sabbatian "heresy". According to *Bashraybung* Leibele Prossnitz was a Sabbatian ascetic obeying strictly contemporary Halakhah; no violations of the Halakhah, no innovations of religious practise of regular nature (the ritual of sacrificing the black cock was one time event), and no new explanation of already established ritual practise are recorded. Leibele Prossnitz, at least according to *Bashraybung* and around the year 1706, was an ordinary ascetic "orthodoxy" Jew with a charisma, who believed in the re-appearing of the Shabbetai Zevi and who managed to convince others to believe so for a moment, and who was disposed to cheat in order to confirm his believe to the others.