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*Islam and Sabbateanism in  
the Chronicle Sefer Divrei Yosef*

SHIMON SHTOBER

The seventeenth-century historian, Joseph Sambari, was a witness to the great messianic eruption of his day, i.e., the Sabbatean movement, which emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century. Sambari was on the scene, having met Shabbatai Şevi in Cairo more than once. Unfortunately, the pages that contained his report on Sabbatianism were ripped out of his chronicle, a mystery that we shall explore below.

*Sambari: A Biographical Sketch*

Joseph Sambari was born in Cairo, probably in the 1630s, where he spent his entire life as a member of the Musta'ribi congregation of the Jewish community (autochthonous Eastern Jews, assimilated into the Arabic culture). Aside from his name, that of his father, Isaac, and his toponymic nickname, Qatāya, there is almost nothing we know about Sambari. He studied in Cairo at the *yeshiva* headed by Rabbi Abraham Scandari, whose extensive library not only aroused in the young student an intense curiosity in history, but also provided him with a considerable number of sources he later used in his works. Sambari seems to have been one of the few Cairene scholars of his time whose research went beyond history proper and included the history of biblical texts as well, especially in the field of *Masora*. He also had a keen interest in the topography of Egypt, especially that of its capital, Cairo.<sup>1</sup>

The only available information about the later years of Sambari pertains to his professional life. In the 1670s, he functioned as a clerk in the service of Raphael Yosef,<sup>2</sup> the *şarraf-bashi* (the treasurer) of Qaraqash 'Ali, then the Ottoman governor of Egypt. The generous support of his patron, the above-mentioned treasurer, enabled Sambari to indulge in historical research and writing. Although he complained bitterly about the hard times

<sup>1</sup> On Sambari, see Shimon Shtober, *Sefer Divrei Yosef: Eleven Hundred Years of Jewish History under Muslim Rule* (Jerusalem, 1994) [henceforth: Shtober, SDY], 13-16, 18, 54-55. He himself supplied most of the autobiographical data. Cf. *Sefer Divrei Yosef*, 79, l. 47-81, l. 83.

<sup>2</sup> For the role that Rafael Yosef played in the history of Sabbateanism, see below near notes 22, 25.

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