When a Rabbi Is Accused of Heresy

The Stance of Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk in the Emden-Eibeschuetz Controversy

SID Z. LEIMAN

Introduction

Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk was born in Cracow in 1681. A distinguished talmudist of noble lineage, he succeeded Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Ashkenazi (d. 1718) as Chief Rabbi of Lwow in 1718. Large numbers of students were attracted to his yeshivah in Lvov, and later to his yeshivot in Berlin, Metz, and Frankfurt. In 1739 at Amsterdam, the first volume of his magnum opus, Penet Yehoshu’’a, appeared in print. A running commentary on the Talmud—largely defending Rashi against the strictures of Tosafot—it is studied to this day in all yeshivot. Falk served as Chief Rabbi of Frankfurt from 1742 until 1753. He was seventy years old—and serving in Frankfurt—when the Emden-Eibeschuetz controversy erupted in 1751. At the time, he was generally recognized as the zeqan ha-dor, the senior and most authoritative rabbi in an age of rabbinic titans.¹

Strangely, Falk’s stance in the Emden-Eibeschuetz controversy has been largely neglected by modern scholarship. Except for the brief comments by Graetz,² Kahana,³ and others ⁴ in their general accounts of the controversy, no book, monograph, or scholarly study has focused specifically on Falk’s role. Some key issues that need to be addressed include the following: What were Falk’s objectives in his struggle against Eibeschuetz? What means did he employ in order to obtain those objectives? Specifically, what strategies did Falk employ in waging the war
against Eibeschuetz? Did Falk succeed? These issues—at least in the published literature—have never been raised, much less resolved. Indeed, the very framing of the questions is intended to set an agenda for scholars to pursue. Precisely because this is a pioneering investigation, whatever is said here is provisional at best. Moreover, due to constraints of time and space, the scope of this investigation is necessarily narrow and limited. Should others be stimulated to broaden and deepen the investigation, ve-hayah zeh sekhari (let that be my reward).

The Controversy

The Emden-Eibeschuetz controversy erupted on Thursday, February 4, 1751, when Rabbi Jacob Emden (d. 1776) announced at a private synagogue service held in his home that an amulet ascribed to the Chief Rabbi could only have been written by a secret believer in the false messiah, Shabbatai Zvi. The Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz (d. 1764), was a renowned talmudist who had served with distinction as rabbi, teacher, and preacher in Prague and Metz, prior to his assuming the post of Chief Rabbi of the triple community of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck in September 1750. Emden’s announcement initiated what was perhaps the most explosive rabbinic controversy in the last three hundred years. The controversy would involve not only the leading rabbis of the eighteenth century, such as Ezekiel Landau (d. 1793) of Prague, Elijah b. Solomon (d. 1797) of Vilna, but also Christian scholars and foreign governments. The controversy was widely reported in the newspaper and periodical literature of the time, and continues to be a rich topic of investigation for modern scholarship.

Eibeschuetz, a distinguished kabbalist, wrote amulets to help ward off evil spirits, to protect those in danger—especially pregnant women—and to heal the sick. Indeed, as early as 1743, while serving as Chief Rabbi of Metz, he was widely known as a ba’al shem, a master of the secrets of the Kabbalah who wrote amulets. In Metz itself, and throughout the surrounding Jewish communities of Alsace-Lorraine, Eibeschuetz wrote amulets. When he left Metz in 1750 and made his way northward through the Rhineland, he wrote and sold amulets in the various Jewish communities on the Rhine, including several in Frankfurt. Upon his arrival in Altona (which then belonged to the Kingdom of Denmark) and Hamburg (a free city in Germany) in September 1750, he had barely unpacked his bags when rumors were rife about the new Chief Rabbi’s Sabbatean leanings. Appar-
ently, some of the amulets written in Frankfurt were shown to leading rabbinic scholars in that city, who immediately designated them as Sabbatean in character. Letters from Frankfurt were sent to private individuals in Altona and Hamburg, warning them about the heretical leanings of their new Chief Rabbi. When these rumors came to Eibeschuetz’s attention, he dismissed the charges as a recycling by his enemies of similar charges leveled against him in the 1720s. Eibeschuetz claimed they were false charges then, as they were now. Nonetheless, several members of the triple community were now alerted to a potential problem, and they decided to monitor Eibeschuetz’s amulets to the extent possible. It did not take long before an amulet written by Eibeschuetz in Hamburg fell into their hands. It appeared to them to be Sabbatean in character, and they eventually consulted with Emden, who concurred. The Chief Rabbi denied that he wrote the amulet in question. The triple community was once again rife with rumors. Matters came to a head when Emden was summoned to a meeting with representatives of the Jewish council of the triple community in Altona on Tuesday, February 2, 1751. A second meeting was scheduled for the following Thursday; it never convened. Emden realized at the first meeting that he was going up against a stacked deck of cards; the triple community was intent on vindicating its Chief Rabbi. And so Emden decided to go public on that fateful Thursday morning. The scheduled meeting, of course, was canceled. The next day, Friday, the Jewish council officially disbanded the private synagogue service that had convened in Emden’s home for almost twenty years. Shortly thereafter, Emden was placed under house arrest; all social contact with Emden was banned. He was notified that within six months he would have to leave Altona permanently. That very Friday, Emden’s last day as a free citizen in Altona, he managed to send out letters to several of the leading rabbinic authorities of the time. Each received a synopsis of the events that had occurred—similar to the summary presented here—and an urgent plea for aid. One of the letters was addressed to Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk of Frankfurt.  

Options in the Controversy

What to do about Eibeschuetz was the prime issue for most of European Jewry in 1751. For many, the issue was one of establishing Eibeschuetz’s innocence or guilt. Evidence needed to be gathered, examined, and
weighed by a rabbinic court, after which a decision would be rendered and the matter laid to rest once and for all. This was not the case for Emden, Landau, Falk, and others. Their minds were made up early in the fray: Eibeschuetz was guilty. The key issue for them was establishing a strategy. How do you bring Eibeschuetz down without destroying rabbinic Judaism in the process? How do you depose, arguably, the leading talmudist (certainly so in number of students) of the eighteenth century—who will surely turn to his disciples in a moment of need—without risking a civil war whose devastating effects may in fact lead to victory for the forces of Sabbateanism? A variety of options needed to be considered, none of them particularly pleasant.

Option A: The Emden Approach
Emden opted for confrontation with Eibeschuetz from the beginning to the end of the controversy. His single-minded goal was to “defrock” and depose Eibeschuetz. For Emden, Eibeschuetz—even if he repented—could never again serve as rabbi, darshan (preacher), or rosh yeshivah (head of a talmudic academy). A rabbi who is simultaneously a confirmed Sabbatean can never again be trusted to hold public office. The means toward attaining the goal was sustained and unrelenting frontal attack. The scandal was to be kept in the headlines at all times. Any means could be used to bring Eibeschuetz down: yellow journalism, slander, protests, informing the governmental authorities, and, of course, the wielding of rabbinic power. Emden placed Eibeschuetz under the ban, as well as Eibeschuetz’s family and his disciples. Emden accused any rabbi who wrote a letter in defense of Eibeschuetz of either being a Sabbatean or an acceptor of bribes. Emden, however, was his own worst enemy. He kept tripping over himself. Among his more egregious claims: Eibeschuetz was an am ha-areś (ignoramus), and he, Emden, was a better public preacher than Eibeschuetz. These and other ridiculous claims led to total loss of credibility on Emden’s part. They did more to shore up Eibeschuetz’s innocence than anything Eibeschuetz could have claimed on his own behalf. Emden was a loose cannon, to say the least. Sober-minded rabbis distanced themselves from him.

Option B: The Landau Approach
Two rabbis, Ezekiel Landau and Mordecai of Duesseldorf (d. 1770), foresaw much that would transpire. Early on, they warned the anti-Eibeschuetz forces that any frontal attack on Eibeschuetz was doomed
to failure. They stressed that Eibeschuetz was articulate, bold, and influential in governmental circles. He could not be defeated. He could, however, be neutralized. The only strategy worth pursuing was a strategy of neutralization. All rabbis in Europe would be asked to sign a general ban against any and all forms of Sabbatean belief. Eibeschuetz, as one of the leading gedolei ha-dor (rabbinic authorities of the era), would be among the first rabbis asked to sign the ban. Given the present set of circumstances, this would be an offer he could not refuse. Indeed, given the accusations that had been leveled against him, even more could be demanded of him. He must publicly denounce belief in Shabbatai Zvi, and in any and all Sabbatean writings, especially those Sabbatean writings ascribed to Eibeschuetz himself. He must agree to withdraw all his amulets from circulation, and to never write amulets again. The rationale here was simple: once Eibeschuetz was cleansed of Sabbatean connections, he would be identified publicly only by his Torah teaching, which was great indeed. What he really believed in the deep recesses of his heart was a matter between Eibeschuetz and God. This was a brilliant approach; it also provided Eibeschuetz with a graceful exit from the controversy. It failed only because Emden and, more importantly, Falk were relentless in their pursuit of Eibeschuetz.

**Option C: The Falk Approach**

The most distinguished member of the anti-Eibeschuetz forces was neither Emden, nor Rabbi Samuel Hilman Heilprin (d. 1765) of Metz, nor Rabbi Aryeh Leib (d. 1755) of Amsterdam. While they led the battle against Eibeschuetz in its opening stages, they eventually gave way to Rabbi Jacob Joshua Falk of Frankfurt. From April 1751 until his death on January 16, 1756, Falk directed the campaign against Eibeschuetz. A clever strategist, he began by forging a coalition of German rabbis. The goal was to isolate Eibeschuetz, and then force him to appear before a Jewish court of law. There, he would either be vindicated or found guilty. If found guilty, he could be rehabilitated—meaning that Eibeschuetz would be given the opportunity to repent, to express genuine regret for the sins of his past, and to accept upon himself the penance prescribed by the court. If rehabilitated, he could serve once more as Chief Rabbi, *darshan*, and *rosh yeshivah*. If defrocked, he could never again serve as rabbi, preacher, or teacher anywhere in the world.

Falk’s approach was a principled one. It was predicated on the principle that there can be no duplicity in a *gadol be-yisrael* (rabbinic authority). A *gadol be-yisrael* who is also a secret Sabbatean must either
be rehabilitated or defrocked. Falk, in effect, distanced himself from the Emden approach, which offered no possibility of rehabilitation on the part of Eibeschuetz, even as he distanced himself from the Landau approach, which—by focusing on outer form rather than inner conviction—did not require genuine repentance on the part of Eibeschuetz.

Eibeschuetz, for his part, rejected the Emden approach out of hand. He welcomed the Landau approach and implemented all its stipulations with alacrity.\textsuperscript{17} With regard to the Falk approach, he apparently was in no hurry to make a court appearance. Instead, he chose to engage in a battle of wits against Falk and his rabbinic coalition.

The rationale for Falk’s position was poignantly argued in a broadside published by Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Amsterdam in 1752.\textsuperscript{18} It was a public response to a group of rabbis who defended Eibeschuetz by explaining away the amulets, and who expressed concern for the kevod ha-torah (honor accorded to the Torah learning) of rabbinic scholars and the hillul ha-Shem (profaning of the name of God) if the controversy would be allowed to continue. Every word of the broadside against Eibeschuetz’s defenders was approved by Falk, who as commander-in-chief of the anti-Eibeschuetz forces made a point of editing every broadside before it could be published.\textsuperscript{19}

The text reads in part:

I know well that great scholars such as yourselves know the truth of the matter. You even want to rehabilitate him. But you have rehabilitated his body and outer appearance, not his spirit and soul. Not so for us. We want to rehabilitate his spirit and soul. Let him retain his seat of glory and greatness, but only if he turns from his wickedness, admits the truth, and resolves never to return to his folly. Then the end of the matter will be better for him than its beginning. This is our only concern: to reestablish our Faith on its mound, so that we all share one language and the same words, in order to unify and
sanctify the Great Name of the One held in awe due to His sanctity. ... The bottom line: scholars such as yourselves know full well the essence of the matter. But you wish to take pity on him, and you cover up the matter by claiming that what you do is for the sake of Heaven, in order to contain divisiveness in Israel and prevent the desecration of [God's] Name.

Falk's Role in the Controversy

Long before the outbreak of the controversy, Falk was known for his ability to battle and contain Sabbateanism. In 1722, while serving as rabbi of Lvov, he excommunicated all Sabbateans in a public ceremony.20 In 1725, he presided over judicial proceedings that allowed penitent Sabbateans to return to normative Judaism. One of the penitents, a distinguished rabbi, informed Falk as follows:

יוכל抑え אתה, אתה שטת מעניון זה בידיעה ברוחה ד שמין אתכם ראה לך

Please provide advice: What shall we do? I know with certainty that Reb Yonasan [Eibeschuetz] is the head of all of them [the Sabbateans].21

Falk, then, had reason to suspect Eibeschuetz as early as 1725. In that same year, the leading rabbis (including David Oppenheim22 [d. 1736] of Prague, Ezekiel Katzenellenbogen23 [d. 1749] of Altona, and Jacob Cohen Poppers24 [d. 1740] of Frankfurt) established a policy that all Sabbateans had to be either rehabilitated or excommunicated. With regard to those Sabbateans who opted for rehabilitation, the policy was that they could be rehabilitated only in the presence of three geonei eres rabbanim mefursumim (master talmudists who are also prominent rabbis).25 Falk applied this policy to Eibeschuetz. Not only would Eibeschuetz have to appear in a Jewish court of law; it would have to be in a court consisting of three distinguished geonim—and presided over by none other than Falk himself.26

It is one matter to have a policy; it is quite another matter to implement it. Initially, Falk refused to enter the fray. He refused to respond to Emden’s urgent plea at the start of the controversy (see above).27 Doubtless, he understood it was a no-win situation. After several months of disarray, which saw virtually all the rabbis in Europe under excommunication (for supporting either Emden or Eibeschuetz), calls came from all quarters that Falk, as zeqan ha-dor
and a tried and tested Sabbatean-buster, end the stalemate and restore order. His strategy was one of diplomacy, resolve, and gradual escalation of rabbinic power, as necessary. In brief, he did the following over a five-year period:

1. He sent private messages (via third parties) to Eibeschuetz, asking that Eibeschuetz contact him. Eibeschuetz did not respond.

2. He published a massive, calling for the accused party to appear before a rabbinic court. He deliberately made no mention of Eibeschuetz’s name in this public missive. Eibeschuetz did not respond.

3. He addressed a private message directly to Eibeschuetz, asking that Eibeschuetz contact him. Eibeschuetz did not respond.

4. In the summer of 1751, Falk printed as a broadside his private message addressed directly to Eibeschuetz. The letter indicated for all to see that if Eibeschuetz were to refuse to appear before a rabbinic court, Falk would rally rabbis the world over and appropriate action would follow.

With this public threat, Falk finally caught Eibeschuetz’s attention. What followed was a battle of titans—Falk and Eibeschuetz—which ended only with Falk’s death in 1756.

At the height of the controversy, on Second Adar 6, 5513 (March 12, 1753), with Eibeschuetz still refusing to appear in a court of Jewish law, Falk called for Eibeschuetz to be defrocked. He did so in a letter addressed to the kešinim, parnasim, u-manhigim (lay leadership) of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck. The letter, published here for the first time, reads:

[Translation of the letter text]

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ובישת תפקיה החזיקה על ידינו שלושה מסダイエット אירא בדמינוואסף, הייה לה יזמנה
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אודר לא מתארה שDataURLים לא לגベースו ליב פורטסוים ימי, שביססו את אצחי השדרган ולבחור שלוש שפות בקוצר לב אומלט. לא מgetManager כintéוגר של שייר, ואד התחב מוקטת וזריך ברי שקייצי.

נעצרו בהקשרים שונים, שביססו את אצחי השדרגן, הציידי מצוירת תרבות עם התיישבויות שונות.

ההתאום המנוגד המורסן מופיע בבראשית י"א שיק"ג ונסגר בבראשית י"א שיק"ג.

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When a Rabbi Is Accused of Heresy

When a Rabbi is Accused of Heresy, he is often forced to confront his own beliefs and the implications of his actions. This can be a difficult and painful process, both for the rabbi and for those around him. It is a time of intense scrutiny, with every word and action under the microscope.

The rabbi must navigate a complex web of religious and legal considerations. He must consider the implications of his actions on his community, his family, and himself. He must also consider the implications of his actions on his own soul.

The rabbi's accusers may be motivated by a variety of factors, from personal vendettas to genuine concerns about religious purity. Whatever their motivations, the rabbi must be prepared to defend himself against these accusations.

Defending oneself against accusations of heresy can be a daunting task. It requires a deep understanding of the religious texts and principles involved, as well as a strong sense of ethical principles.

Ultimately, the outcome of a rabbi's trial for heresy will depend on a variety of factors, including the strength of the evidence against him, the quality of his defense, and the attitudes of the community. It is a time of great stress and uncertainty, but it is also a time of opportunities for growth and learning.

In the end, a rabbi who is found guilty of heresy may be forced to leave his community or even his country. He may be required to undergo further training or study to prove his fitness to continue in his role. But he may also find new opportunities to serve his community and Shape the future of Judaism.

The experiences of rabbis accused of heresy are varied, but they all share a common theme: the struggle to maintain their integrity in the face of external pressures. It is a challenging task, but it is also one that can lead to profound personal growth and spiritual development.
To the wise lay leaders of the triple community, Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck, may God protect it, and may he grant you increased well-being, and to the distinguished judges and all the Torah scholars, and to those exceptional individuals who fear the word of God, words of peace and truth.

I have previously warned you on many occasions regarding your Chief Rabbi, who is called Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz, and who has enticed and led astray many Jews from the true faith to the false and abominable belief, the religion of Shabbatai Zvi, may his name and apparition be blotted out. His name has already receded and his memory has been blotted out from the world.

More than thirty years have passed since we placed [all Sabbateans] under the ban in Zolkiew, Poland, in the year 1722, in the presence of seven rabbis with seven ram’s horns, and by means of extinguishing candles, as is prescribed for the great ban in Sefer Kol Bo. At the end of each paragraph of the text used in the ceremony, and at the mention of each month and sign of the zodiac, they sounded the ram’s horn. All the Jews gathered in large numbers, and the school children responded “Amen.” They cried out to God in a loud voice, even unto the heavens. Many of the sinners from the accursed sect stood with us on the platform. They too confessed their sins, crying out loudly and bitterly, saying, “Such and such have we done,” according to the fixed text that we formulated. When we left the synagogue on the seventeenth day of Tammuz in that year, we required the penitents to practice the law of mourning and of being placed under the ban, whether for seven or thirty days, aside from the other punishments meted out by us, the seven rabbis. I presided [over the ceremonies], serving at the time as Chief Rabbi of Lwow and environs. Similar action was taken in various communities throughout Poland by the late Gaon, renowned for his Torah and piety, Rabbi Eleazar, who [later] served as Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam. From there he traveled to the Holy Land, where he rests in peace. So too the distinguished Gaon, Rabbi Aryeh Leib, [the present] Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam, took similar action in the communities under his control.

In 1725, three “pillars of the earth” in Germany took similar action. They were the late renowned Gaon, Rabbi Jacob Kohen, Chief Rabbi of Frankfurt; the late renowned Gaon, Rabbi Ezekiel, who served as your Chief Rabbi; and the late Gaon, Rabbi Abraham,
When your Chief Rabbi saw that no protest came forth from the leading rabbis of the generation, he became firm in his impurity, saying, "Who can lord it over me?" Moreover, he believed that the predictions of Leib Prostitz, may his name be blotted out, came true. Leib assured Rabbi Jonathan that their Messiah, Shabbatai Zvi, had appeared to him in a vision at night. The Messiah informed him that when Rabbi Jonathan’s name would become great on high, the Messiah’s name would also become great, at which point his name will be reversed, and he will be called Zvi Shabbatai. So according to the above mentioned writings, as attested by trustworthy witnesses whose testimony was recorded in the Jewish courts of Moravia, under the aegis of the late renowned Gaon, Rabbi Issachar Berish, Chief Rabbi of Nikolsburg, and the renowned Gaon, Rabbi Hilman, who at the time was Chief Rabbi of Kremser. That is why some [of his] amulets open with Shabbatai Zvi and close with Zvi Shabbatai. [Due to the lack of rabbinic protest,] Rabbi Jonathan began to go more public [with Sabbatean practices], treating lightly the four fasts and writing countless amulets, all invoking the name of Shabbatai Zvi, may his name be blotted out. In them he wrote explicitly, "May the name of BBTY HBV become great and sanctified in the world," and other such heresies. But none of this became open knowledge because the amulets were sewn into their cover and hidden away [from the naked eye]. Some three years ago the matter of the amulets became open knowledge when one of the amulets was opened, which led to all the amulets being opened. Abomination, filth, and heresy were found in all of them. So I addressed a "letter of peace" to him, beginning with the words, "He who resides in the heavens on high." It has recently been published separately [as a broadside]. So too many of the amulets have been published in a small pamphlet—even though I had nothing to do with its publication—and it is clear as the sun that he wrote them. This is especially true regarding the five amulets notarized by the two official notaries of the Jewish community of Metz. Aside from this, he wrote numerous amulets as he passed through the Jewish community of Frankfurt. All of them contain impure texts and invoke the abominable Shabbatai Zvi, may his name be blotted out. Regarding all this, I chastised him in the above mentioned "letter of peace." He replied with neither a word nor half a word.

It is evident, then, that the amulets merely make public what was always known. His sins have been revealed, [and] so too the time
When your Chief Rabbi saw that no protest came forth from the leading rabbis of the generation, he became firm in his impurity, saying, “Who can lord it over me?” Moreover, [he believed that] the predictions of Leib Prosstitz, may his name be blotted out, came true. Leib assured Rabbi Jonathan that their Messiah, Shabbatai Zvi, had appeared to him in a vision at night. The Messiah informed him that when Rabbi Jonathan’s name would become great on high, the Messiah’s name would also become great, at which point his name will be reversed, and he will be called Zvi Shabbatai. So according to the above mentioned writings, as attested by trustworthy witnesses whose testimony was recorded in the Jewish courts of Moravia, under the aegis of the late renowned Gaon, Rabbi Issachar Berish, Chief Rabbi of Nikolsburg, and the renowned Gaon, Rabbi Hilman, who at the time was Chief Rabbi of Kremsier. That is why some [of his] amulets open with Shabbatai Zvi and close with Zvi Shabbatai. [Due to the lack of rabbinic protest,] Rabbi Jonathan began to go more public [with Sabbatean practices], treating lightly the four fasts and writing countless amulets, all invoking the name of Shabbatai Zvi, may his name be blotted out. In them he wrote explicitly, “May the name of BBTY HBY become great and sanctified in the world,” and other such heresies. But none of this became open knowledge because the amulets were sewn into their cover and hidden away [from the naked eye]. Some three years ago the matter of the amulets became open knowledge when one of the amulets was opened, which led to all the amulets being opened. Abomination, filth, and heresy were found in all of them. So I addressed a “letter of peace” to him, beginning with the words, “He who resides in the heavens on high.” It has recently been published separately [as a broadside]. So too many of the amulets have been published in a small pamphlet—even though I had nothing to do with its publication—and it is clear as the sun that he wrote them. This is especially true regarding the five amulets notarized by the two official notaries of the Jewish community of Metz. Aside from this, he wrote numerous amulets as he passed through the Jewish community of Frankfurt. All of them contain impure texts and invoke the abominable Shabbatai Zvi, may his name be blotted out. Regarding all this, I chastised him in the above mentioned “letter of peace.” He replied with neither a word nor half a word.

It is evident, then, that the amulets merely make public what was always known. His sins have been revealed, [and] so too the time
has come to extirpate the wicked and to cut off the thorns and thistles, i.e., the heretics who believe in Shabbatai Zvi and his teaching. Truthfully, due to the amulets, the existence of the treatises titled Va-Avo ha-Yom el ha-Iyyun, Ayelet Ahavim on Song of Songs, Kavanot Teqi'ot Shofar, and Kavanot Megillat Ester became public knowledge. They combine to form a single book of impurity. All these treatises are replete with blasphemy, a denial of the Torah in its entirety. All this was already revealed to me some ten years ago by the Gaon, Rabbi Hayyim Kohen, Chief Rabbi of Lwow. Now it has become even clearer on the basis of the discussion of numerous distinguished rabbis in Poland, who convened on market day, last Heshvan, in Brody. Therefore, we confronted him with our earlier missives sent out last year, and now again more recently, making sure to inform you that whatever we have done in this matter was done with the full consent of all the rabbis in Germany and Poland. We have already informed you that your Chief Rabbi misled the King and his officers when he claimed that the majority of Jewish communities and Jewish scholars support him. In fact, not even two or three distinguished rabbis support him. His supporters come from the masses who are members of the accursed sect, many being associates of his and members of his family. I have written about this at length. The time has come to run him out of the community. We are restrained only by the honor due the Crown, the mighty and pious King, may his glory increase. His only concern has been to contain the controversy and to restore peace in your community. That is why I wrote that our opening position [to Rabbi Jonathan] was one of peace, issuing him a final warning via his associates or the communal authorities.

He has now seen our summons and warning, and the deed is done, for two notaries delivered it to him. From his response, it is evident that he is still a rebel, and is not concerned at all about the words of the wise Geonim of our generation. We therefore stand by our decision and words, as already recorded. The rule is: all follows the closing section, and one learns from the last line. So long as your Chief Rabbi refuses to follow the legal decision that was rendered regarding him, and so long as he does not genuinely repent, he is considered a heretic for all purposes, as spelled out in our writings. This includes: he is placed under the ban, and separated from all that is holy in Israel. There is no need to mention that the holy headdress will be removed from his head. He is banned from deciding
any issue of Jewish law pertaining to what is prohibited or permitted. He may not preach in public or participate in any matter pertaining to Jewish law and practice. He may not, however, be banned in a public ceremony, until proper authorization from the royal authorities is obtained. He surely may not be forcibly removed from office. Would that this works! Perhaps he will bend his stiff neck for his own eternal benefit, and will leave your community, moving away together with his entire family. For one who fares poorly in one place should move away to another; the change of place will lead him to genuine repentance, as Maimonides has written in "Hilkhot Teshuvah." Wherever he settles, he must vow and agree not to serve as a rabbi or decisor of Jewish law for as many years as the rabbis of our generation determine. Once he agrees to the above, he may not be abused in any manner, and certainly not harmed physically. Would that he leaves of his own accord, within a time frame acceptable to you! It is essential that he leave your community. If it is necessary to provide him with provisions for his journey, this should be done. Certainly, he should receive whatever monies are owed him for the remainder of his rabbinic contract. Regarding all these matters, we have ruled leniently, and not applied the letter of the law, for he is a rabbinic scholar and of noble lineage.

Regarding those hot-headed members of the community who are prone to using strong-arm tactics either to assure victory or for monetary gain—who would not repent even when faced by the gates of hell—and thereby incite controversy in your community and in other communities as well, there is no atonement whatsoever for them. It is incumbent upon the communal officials and the judges of your community to warn them once again that if they refuse to abandon their wicked ways, they will be placed under the ban. The communal officials can punish them severely as they see fit. They can be fined a huge sum of money, half of which will be turned over to the King, and half of which will be designated for some useful purpose. When you act according to these guidelines, all previous bans issued against you will become null and void. This applies even more so to all supporters of Rabbi Jonathan during the controversy who, due to the instructions we have issued, repent and recognize their Creator. All previous bans issued against them in past years by the great rabbis of our generation are null and void. All the curses shall be transformed into blessings, but only if they remain faithful and do not revert to their sinful ways, and if
When a Rabbi Is Accused of Heresy

they repent fully before God, each according to his situation and according to the instructions he receives from the judges and scholars of your community. Repentance, of course, cannot be forced upon anyone. It can only be done in order to fulfill the will of Heaven.

I beseech you to practice the ways of peace, love, and friendship. The earlier sins will no longer be recalled. May your increased merit enable you to annul and extirpate the impurity of Shabbatai Zvi. How great is the reward stored away for the righteous! How much more so will be the reward for those who genuinely repent! Your reward from Heaven will be doubled. May God fill your storehouses—and whatever you undertake—with blessing and success. May He continue to do so until the righteous redeemer appears, soon, in our time, Amen.

These are the words of the one who signs in honor of God, and in honor of the holy Torah, and for the benefit of our brethren the children of Israel, and with the support of the wise Geonim of our generation, the young one, Jacob Joshua of Cracow, here in Worms, awaiting God’s salvation, who is in the process of implementing his goal of settling in the land of Israel.

Conclusion

Did Falk succeed? Much, of course, depends on how one defines success. Personally, Falk paid dearly for his efforts to bring down Eibeschuetz. He was deposed from the rabbinate of Frankfurt and spent his last years as a layman, wandering between Mannheim, Worms, and Offenbach, where he died in 1756. On the communal front, it would also appear that Falk failed. The goal was either to rehabilitate or defrock Eibeschuetz. Neither event occurred. Eibeschuetz never appeared before a Jewish court of law, so no rehabilitation took place. In 1753, he took his case (without making a personal appearance) before the Council of the Four Lands in Jaroslaw and was vindicated by a large plurality. In 1756, he was reelected as Chief Rabbi of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck by an even greater plurality than in his first candidacy. He died in 1764 as Chief Rabbi of the triple community, and was buried with full honors in the rabbinic section of Altona’s Koenigstrasse cemetery. Eulogies were delivered in his honor in Altona and Prague, if not the world over.

Falk failed largely because he was following a script designed in 1725 by master talmudists who were also prominent rabbis, so that they could lord it over lesser rabbis and laymen who were tainted by
Sabbateanism. But Eibeschuetz was not a lesser rabbi; indeed, he was perhaps the most prominent of the master talmudists. No one could lord it over him. Eibeschuetz was clever: precisely because Falk was following a script, Eibeschuetz anticipated every move he made, and was always one step ahead, outmaneuvering and outflanking him—at least for a while.

In this battle of heavyweights, neither could knock out his opponent. Eibeschuetz perhaps won on points, but he won only the battle. Hounded by Falk, Eibeschuetz was discredited and isolated from almost all the rabbis in Germany and from most Sabbateans. Students no longer flocked to his lectures. No new offers came his way, and Eibeschuetz died lonely and defeated. Sabbateanism would never again pose a real threat to rabbinic Judaism. Falk had won the war.

Notes


3. D. Kahana, מנהיגת המתקבליים (Tel Aviv, 1926), 2:23–54 and appendices.


11. That Emden considered Eibenschutz guilty from the start requires no documentation (beyond the references listed in the previous note). For Landau, see Leiman, “When a Rabbi . . . R. Ezekiel Landau.” For Falk, see below.


13. For Eibenschutz as am ha-arez (ignoramus), see J. Emden, קטעות ענבר (Altona, 1756), 16b, 38b. For Emden as preacher, see his ענבר, ed. Kahana (Warsaw, 1897), 101, 112; cf. vi, עינש עדות בָּעָבִיק, 13b.


17. For Emden’s testimony that Eibenschutz refused to write amulets after the controversy began, see קטעות ענבר, 5a.

18. The original broadside is preserved in various public and private collections. It was also printed in שבת אמסטרדם (the first edition is without pagination), end pages. It was inadvertently omitted from the Jerusalem reprint of 1971 (which was based on a faulty original).

19. See Falk’s letter to Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Amsterdam, dated 8 Second Adar, 5513 (March 14, 1753), in J. Emden, קטעות ענבר (Altona, 1756), 13b–14b.


23. Rabbi Ezekiel Katznellenbogen served as Chief Rabbi of Altona, Hamburg, and Wandsbeck from 1713 until his death. See E. Dukesh, אז לפנינו (Cracow, 1903), 21–29.


25. Since the Sabbatean heresy was characterized by duplicity, one could never be certain that a Sabbatean’s repentance was genuine. Hence the need for safeguards,
such as a Jewish court consisting of distinguished geonim. See Y. D. Wilhelm and
G. Scholem, vara 30 (1955): 99–104. See esp. 104:

Lost their repentance be an act of deceit, in the manner of Nehemiah Hayon,
no one’s act of repentance will be accepted as genuine until he appears before
three talmudic masters who are also prominent rabbis. They—by means of in-
terrogation—will determine whether what he says is what he believes and,
hence, whether his repentance is genuine.

26. Early in the fray, Falk demanded that Eibeschuetz appear before a rabbinic court
consisting of three distinguished ge’onei eres. Only when Eibeschuetz’s delaying
tactics became evident did Falk insist that he must sit on, and preside over, the
court. Doubtless, Falk felt that only he would be in a position to grill Eibeschuetz
and determine the genuineness of his repentance. Certainly, Falk’s colleagues
were persuaded that only he had the requisite fortitude, expertise, and wisdom
that it would take to contain Eibeschuetz.

27. So Emden, הח,textbook, 23a.
28. See, e.g., Landau’s letter of 1752, in J. Praeger, ז”, 2, fol. 129a. Cf. Rabbi Morde-
ccai of Dusseldorfer’s letter referred to above, note 14.
29. Ibid., 30, 34–35.
30. Ibid., 30, 34–35.
31. Ibid., 57–58.
32. The broadside is available in public and private collections. For the text, see ibid.
34. מס,’ (New York, 1946), 98b, 139.
35. The reference is to Rabbi Eleazar b. Samuel (d. 1742), who served as rabbi of Brody
from 1714 to 1734, and as Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam from 1735 to
36. On his pilgrimage to the land of Israel, see Y. Bartal, מ’, מטרא, 116:7–25, ed. Y.
Michman.
37. See above, note 16.
38. See above, note 24.
39. See above, note 23.
40. Rabbi Abraham b. Judah Berliner served as Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Amster-
dam from 1716 to 1730. Cf. M. H. Gans, Memorbook, trans. A. P. Pomerans (Baarn,
1977), 165.
41. The broadside was first issued in 1725, then reissued (in part) in Altona in 1752.
For the text of the original broadside, see Wilhelm and Scholem, דברי תונוא
ברטט צבי. The 1752 reissue appeared in a broadside titled
לאל ה.”

43. The anonymous theosophical Sabbatean treatise often ascribed to Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz is more accurately titled Va-Avo ha-Yom el ha-Ayin, apud Genesis 24:42. On the treatise and its author, see Liebes, דרש אֱישָׁנָה חַשְׁרָת אָטָא, esp. 344n85.

44. Rabbi David Strauss (d. 1762) served as Chief Rabbi of Fürth from 1748 until his death. See L. Loewenstein, "Zur Geschichte der Juden in Fürth," Jahrbuch der jüdisch-literarischen Gesellschaft 6 (1908): 187–90.


47. Rabbi Naftali Hirsch Katzenellenbogen (d. 1800) served as Chief Rabbi of Mergenthheim (1741–63). See Loewenstein, Geschichte der Juden in der Kurpfalz, 240–43.

48. See Zinz, צפתי תּוֹת, דבעית יָדָיו, 134 and 283.

49. BT Shabbat 32a.

50. See Praeger, יא, 30a, 1: fol. 58a.

51. Rabbi Issachar Baer Eskeles (d. 1753) served as Chief Rabbi of Moravia and Hungary, administering both offices from Nikolsburg and Vienna. On Eskeles, see Loewenstein, "Zur Geschichte der Rabbiner in Mainz," 226–27.

52. See above, note 15. Doubtless, Falk is referring to a document signed by Rabbi Issachar Baer and Rabbi Samuel Hilman Heilprin, whose text is preserved in Praeger, יא, ו, 1: fols. 59b–60a.

53. In atbash code—in which ת becomes tav, ב becomes shin, and so forth—BBTY HBY = SBTY ZBY, i.e., Shabbatai Zvi.

54. The letter, dated 11 Sivan, 5511 (June 4, 1751), appears in קְשָׁט אֵלֶּגֶּת לְוָשָׁנָה וּרְחֵית הָעוֹלָם, 56–58.

55. The letter first appeared in print as a broadside in Amsterdam, 1751. Its appearance in print was a matter of contention between Eibeschuetz and Falk. Eibeschuetz claimed that it appeared in print even before he received it. See his 네ומ אֲפִל (Jerusalem, 1966), 4. Falk explained that it was printed without his permission. See קְשָׁט אֵלֶּגֶּת לְוָשָׁנָה וּרְחֵית הָעוֹלָם (Amsterdam, 1752).


57. All the treatises listed were ascribed to Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschuetz. Their titles became public knowledge due to various broadsides published during the controversy. See, e.g., the addendum to the letter of Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, circulated in August 1752 and published in the broadside קְשָׁט אֵלֶּגֶּת לְוָשָׁנָה וּרְחֵית הָעוֹלָם (Altona, 1753).
59. Rabbi Hayyim ha-Kohen Rapoport (d. 1771) served as Chief Rabbi of Lwow from 1740 until his death. See S. Buber, שֵׁהוֹדֶה (Cracow, 1895), 69–72.

60. Landau alludes to a rabbinic conference that convened in 1752 on market day in Brody. See Emden, חֵפָצֶה עָנֵים, 7b. Falk may be referring to the proclamation issued by a rabbinical group that convened in Brody in 1752. The proclamation, printed in אספנ瑢 רוחמה והוראה, lists by title the various heretical works ascribed to Eibeschuetz. The proclamation, however, is dated Ellul (August) 1752, whereas Falk dates the meeting to Heshvan (October) 1752.

61. Altona in 1753 belonged to the kingdom of Denmark, whose ruler, Frederick V, reigned as king of Denmark and Norway from 1746 to 1766.


63. See Zinz, עֵרֶץ תְעוּשָׁת, 15–25.


65. For the eulogy in Altona (by Rabbi Isaiah Breslau), see Emden, וְהַטְבָּאָתּוֹ, 111a. For the eulogies in Prague (by Rabbi Ezekiel Landau, Rabbi Zeraḥ Eidlitz, and others), see E. Landau, דרֶועָה תְשָׁפָע (Warsaw, 1884), 92–93, and Z. Eidlitz, רֵאַה לְצִיוֹרִים (Budapest, 1942), 27–41. Emden’s claim, loc. cit., that no eulogies were delivered outside of Altona and Prague, cannot be taken seriously. See, e.g., Rabbi Mordecai b. Samuel, שְׁרוֹת תָּפְלָה (Amsterdam, 1774), vol. 2, gate 5, chap. 7.

66. I.e., after Eibeschuetz’s death in 1764. Due to its affirmation of the blood libel, followed by mass conversion to Christianity in 1759, much of the Frankist branch of the Sabbatean heresy lost whatever credibility it may once have had in rabbinic circles.