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## JUDAIZING<sup>1</sup> AND IDENTITY IN THE EARLIEST TRANSYLVANIAN SABBATARIAN WRITINGS (1588?–1621)<sup>2</sup>

One cannot deny the challenges of discussing concepts like religious and national identity with reference to the early modern period, as these did not exist in the way the 21<sup>st</sup> century people tend to impose them on earlier periods, neither is it likely that such concepts were clearly delineated in the head of early modern writers. The outset of the conference, however, is the proposal: “Jews through Christian eyes.” Adapting such a title to Transylvanian Sabbatarians naturally calls for the discussion of the problem of identity, and for asking the question which side did the Sabbatarians occupy in this contrast between Christians and Jews, or more precisely, on which side did they place themselves?

As far as it is possible, I will try to examine the identity of Sabbatarians not from an external viewpoint according to which they are sometimes Jews, sometimes Christians, at other times they are ‘colourful dogs,’ ‘bats’ (neither bird, nor mouse – neither Jew, nor Christian), depending on the different national and denominational biases at play in the respective cases. My purpose is not to put them into this or that group. My paper will focus on the key terms relating their identity appearing in their own texts, and I also hope to identify the roots of the identity problems of the Sabbatarians and tell something about

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<sup>1</sup> The most famous expert of the Transylvanian Sabbatarianism, Róbert Dán wrote a thorough comprehensive essay on the “career” of the term ‘judaizing,’ however, a more detailed discussion of the term with relevance to the Sabbatarians is missing from this work. See Dán, *Judaizare’ – The Career of a Term*, 25–34.

<sup>2</sup> The present paper has a basically similar version written in Hungarian language, published in Keresztény Magvető, (2017) with the title: *Zsidózás és identitás a korai szombatos szövegekben...*

their own perception of Christianity and Jewishness in this very first period (from the beginnings until roughly 1621, before the literary contribution of the Transylvanian ex-chancellor Simon Péchi).

## Signs of an Identity Crisis

16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century Hungarian Protestants often voiced their concerns for their homeland and their nation, mostly in their Psalms and Jeremiads. One way to do this was to draw a parallel between the fate of the Jews and the Hungarians. Concern with the homeland and the nation significantly contributed to the shaping of an identity, it became an integral part of the writers' and singers' perception of themselves and their communities. The social and political events and the natural disasters began to make sense through the lens of the divine promises and punishments received by the elect nation.

However, this was completely different among 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century Sabbatar-ians. Although their songs are not translations but their own compositions, in which the history of the Jews, and the graces and curses they encountered play a considerable role, the parallel between Jews and Hungarians, but even the parallel between Jews and Sabbatarians is conspicuously missing. Neither is this the only absence: the songs are virtually devoid of references to either the homeland or to ethnicity (be it Hungarian, Szekler, or anything else). Beginning with the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the first wave of research carried out in the field of Sabbatarianism, the problem of Sabbatarian religious and national identity also emerged. The first scholars already noted the absence of a concern for the motherland, and that there are no allusions to national sentiment. After a comparison of Sabbatarian songs and the liturgical heritage of other Hungarian Protestant churches, researchers regarded the difference concerning national attitude expressed in them as something unusual and striking. One out of the numerous examples where Sabbatarians face accusations in this regards:

We are searching in vain amidst the harmony of religious feelings for the sounds of the noble and great emotion... of the love of the motherland. The songwriters of other denominations, following the traditional approach, melted a strong patriotic feeling in their church lyric and connected religious and patriotic motifs with one another; but the Sabbatarian poet, as if refusing his social obligations, keeps silent about his nation and homeland. In other denominations, the degree of patriotism corresponds with the degree of their Protestantism... These people are, however, merely devout believers without the smallest connection to home, as if the very earth on which they live would not be their motherland.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Nagy, *Szombatos codexek*, 29.

A number of researchers tried to find excuses for the Sabbatarians (for example, hinting at the fragmentary nature of the sources) until several new songbooks were discovered, and it became clear that the group of their didactic songs and their festivity songs can be regarded as almost complete. Among the excuses, one finds references to their millenarism, to the persecutions against them, or their Turkophil attitude – everyone according to his or her concept and above all, according to his or her biases – but in all cases, without completely satisfactory answers.<sup>4</sup>

## Keywords of Identity in Early Sabbatarian Texts

The most important Sabbatarian texts concerning a community identity must have been the congregational songs. These texts did not simply give voice to the thoughts of a handful of songwriters, but during the frequent sessions of collective singing, the sung ideas were internalized, and provided a communal experience for the participants of the church service. Therefore, I think it is quite remarkable that the mention of the *Jews* is the most frequent in these songs, and particularly in those composed for feast days. Compared to other Hungarian Protestant songs, it is clear that Jews and Judaism as subjects are much more prevalent, and also that this subject fulfils a different role in Sabbatarian songs.

In Protestant, and above all, in Calvinist songs, the spiritual identification with the Jews is a result of the Biblical language and paraphrases. This is not the case among the Sabbatarians. Although the songs – similarly to the Protestant tradition – offer a great opportunity to confess the identification with the Jews, this opportunity is not utilized, or rather it is utilized differently than among other Protestant denominations. On several occasions, the songs contain a prayer to God asking him to admit them into the tribe of Israel, and to treat them exactly like he treats the Jews. However, this prayer is not sung on behalf of the Hungarian nation or of certain people from a clearly defined geographical area, but it is the wish only of the ‘little troop’ of Sabbatarians. By phrasing this wish, the songs at the same time make it clear that participation in the tribe of Israel is not a given, but something that you

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<sup>4</sup> The first scholar, József Lugossy, who discovered one of the oldest songbooks, explained the mentioned shortcoming with the eschatological anticipations of the Sabbatarians. According to him, the anticipation of the Messiah’s kingdom resulted in indifference towards their earthly motherland, focusing instead on an imaginary world. This focus was largely the result of their persecution and the pressure that society exerted on them, eventually suppressing the national sentiment in them. See Lugossy, „Egy szombatos énekes könyvről,” C–CXXXVIII. Other opinions on this subject: Kardos, „A XVI. század magyar lyrai költészete,” 196–197; Császár, „A protestáns kor költészete,” 2–20, 76–88, 142–152; Thúry, „Adalék a szombatosok történetéhez,” 60–61.

have to wish for, pray for, act for and wait for.<sup>5</sup> These songs are not informed by an already existing parallel, similarity, and they do not compare the events from the relatively short history of the Sabbatarians and the history of the Jews, and – which is probably the most important – they do not think of the Jews as a rejected people, to be supplanted by a new elect nation.

In my opinion the frequency of the word “Jew” (Hungarian “zsidó”) in opposition to the mention of other nations, or even religions and denominations, is significant. For example, the word appears 161 times (on approximately 146 pages) in a modern edition<sup>6</sup> which contains, with a few exceptions, the whole body of the currently extant early Sabbatarian prose literature. Besides this, phrases like “sacred nation,” “your Nation,” “sons of Israel,” or simply, Israel are also highly frequent. At the same time, none of the texts contain the word “székely/Szekler,” and in the few cases when “Hungarian” is mentioned, it is not relevant from our current perspective.<sup>7</sup>

According to the conviction transmitted by Sabbatarian texts, the Jewish nation is the only sacred nation. Other nations are “Pagans” who live among shameful conditions.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, it seems likely that Sabbatarians had an uneasy attitude to their own nation, which they would have preferred to change. “Pagan” means a heritage from which you must purify and sanctify yourself, but in my opinion, they themselves were not convinced that such a complete break is possible.<sup>9</sup> The fact that they regarded themselves as ‘spiritual Jews’ (this is not a frequent phrase, though), and the spiritual sons

<sup>5</sup> For example see in *Szombatos énekek*, 61–62. Henceforth, RMKT V. Where I quote several verses, I provide the song’s number, too, while in the case of shorter quotations, I only provide the page numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Újlaki-Nagy, ed., *Korai szombatos*.

<sup>7</sup> See an example for a neutral mention of the Transylvanian Hungarian and Saxon nations, and the ‘Vlachs’ in the apology *Az Szentírás panaszolkodása*, edition: Máté, ed., *A Szentírás Apológiája*, 189–207, 201.

<sup>8</sup> The condemning perception of Pagans is suggested by the following passage from the mentioned apology. The author is arguing for the authenticity of the Scriptures and its revelation among the Jews, and explains the absence of historical narratives akin to the Old Testament with the indifference of other nations, but also with the varying characteristics of the different nations: “Is it a wonder that the lion-natured Turk, the bear-statured Moscow, Tartar and other such wicked Pagans did not examine the heavenly histories [*res gestae*] and did not write histories [chronicles] about them? Because they could have done that only if they had been concerned about them. But the Ethiopians and the Persians were principal historians, as you are wise when you deny God. One hardly finds a nation except the Chaldeans more ready to preserve the holy histories from the creation on through *aetas* to *aetas*... Every nation transmitted the glory of his own nation in the histories and not that of the strangers.” *Az Szentírás panaszolkodása*, 203.

<sup>9</sup> It is a maxim of earthly life that “in all times the seeds of the saint will be saint, but the seeds of the wicked will be wicked” RMKT V., 491.

of Abraham, also suggests that they felt a distance between themselves and ‘real’ Jews.<sup>10</sup>

Let me cite one example from a song written for their Day of Atonement, in which the desire to participate in the company of ‘saints’ is expressed. They pray to God in the following manner:

Extend your grace on the converting Pagan / Your grace is infinite, let us receive it ... Did the Pagan have to lose your favour / If they returned to you through your great grace? / Even if you did not make the covenant with them from love, / You promised them a share in the goods of your house. // Show, my Lord, thy goodness in these, / Whoever converts to you, do not look at their fathers / Do not look at the deformity of their nations in your greatness, / Because you are their creator, and they will become good if you drag them.<sup>11</sup>

As a control material, I also examined the frequency of the words ‘keresztény’ (Hungarian for ‘Christian’) and the Latin ‘christianus.’ The results are once again undisputable. There are a combined total of 12 occurrences of the two terms, and this number covers not only the mentioned edition but the complete body of prose works. Out of these, there are two instances when the word ‘christianus’ is used, always with a positive connotation, and the songs also fea-

<sup>10</sup> “We bless our Lord... / Who took spiritual Jews for Himself from among the Pagans... If we regard ourselves Abraham’s sons,/ Let us preserve the memory of the miracles made with his seeds” RMKT V, 141. “When the many promises, the Saint Lord to Israel/ delivers to the tribes of Jews,/ Let him see that we too abide his Law.” RMKT V, 153, see also p. 280. Jesus’ role in the call of Pagans to conversion is not entirely clear. Although belonging to the old law was open for everybody from the beginning, and this was often emphasised in Sabbatarian texts, yet they claim that „[Christ], in whom not only Jews, who learned from Moses, but believers from all the Pagans and nations became sons of Abraham, and they become their son now, too, and they became blessed, and they become blessed now, too...” The text refers to Gen 22:17 and Heb 2:16. See *Korai szombatos*, 151.

<sup>11</sup> RMKT V, song 68, verses 14–15, p. 160. Other examples: “We are praising You,/ For taking such Pagans to You,/ As though they were good,/ Showing thus your own goodness.// You admitted us into your Israel,/ Counted us among your saints,/ Admitted us from your own will.// Though in our Pagan nature/ We were far from sainthood,/ Born from sinful ancestors.// Yet with our lapses/ And our many shortages,/ ... / With ungraceful condition,// Please, dear God,/ Carry on teaching us in your grace, like You did before...” RMKT V, song 57, verses 26–29, pp. 134–135.

“holding these same days together with them...,” “...with whom we too... [should celebrate and give praise], that He gave his law to the Jewish believers, from them to us, poor people, too...” RMKT V, p. 151.

“So that we be together with the saints,/ and participate in bliss,/ we should keep God’s orders for this.” RMKT V, p. 120.

“That in your mercy, my Lord, you admitted us,/ Counted us among your saint people...” RMKT V, p. 112; see also pp. 109, 129.

ture positive uses of this adjective.<sup>12</sup> In all of these cases the respective passages deal with the following questions: who are really entitled to be described with this word, and what were the beliefs of those people in the Apostolic times who were described with this name. Though only in an explicit fashion, the author seems to suggest that while the name ‘Christian’ might be denied from them, true ‘christianus’ people still held the same beliefs about God and pursued the same faith as the Sabbatarians. Instead of refraining from the use of this term, the authors in fact demand it for themselves in these cases. However, the word ‘Christian,’ which occurs 10 times in the whole body of their prose works, receives a negative connotation in 6 cases,<sup>13</sup> neutral in 3 cases and positive in one case only.<sup>14</sup> In most cases, the word ‘Christian’ is used as a synonym of ‘Pagan,’ and the two phrases appear side by side together in the texts (‘kereszténység vagy pogánság’ – ‘Christianity or Pagandom’). Although both phrases appear with negative connotations, the word *pogány* (‘Pagan’) is not always used in a strongly negative, condemnatory tone. A good example of this is that in many cases they describe themselves with this word (in the footnotes, several examples are included), obviously not to boast, but rather to describe an inherent state which they would happily leave behind – if it were only possible.

Therefore, this question seems to be a bit ambivalent. In most cases, Sabbatarians talk about Christianity in a condemning tone, as a group foreign to them, to which they do not belong. But because of the few positive examples in which the author seems to regard themselves as the true Christians, one cannot talk about a complete turn from Christianity. It is probably fair to say that Sabbatarians turned away from the Christianity contemporaneous with them,

<sup>12</sup> “Thus you claim falsely about us that we profess that Christ spent his time in vain, and it is also false that we would deny the Christ, since we do not profess along with you that he is God. But from the beginnings, the true *christianus* was not the one who professed that Jesus is not God, but the one who, like us, professed that he is Christ, the Son of God, and the King of Jews.” *Korai szombatos*, 46.

“Understand reader, whom are truly called the disciples of Christ in this present time too, who profess the name *christianus*, whom respect his teachings, and try to live and act according to the teachings of the apostles as much as they can.” *Korai szombatos*, 175.

‘Old true Christians’ RMKT V., p. 204.

<sup>13</sup> Examples: “Satan possesses and controls Christianity and Pagandom since then etc.” *Korai szombatos*, 74. “...if no sooner does Christianity believe that only God is the God of Jews, then it will learn it through his own vicissitudes, as it was prophesied by Isaiah,... when the fullness of the Pagans come, as it was told by Jesus, and apostle Paul, too, that is, when Pagans fulfill their measures, just like the Jews did... these are claimed about Pagans by God. Thus he talks about Pagans inclined to the happiness of his people, so that he saves his people... Do you, Christianity, see that God does not deliver Pagans to the land of Canaan then..., since it is already possessed by Pagans.” *Korai szombatos*, 92. In negative sense, see also pages 82, 91, 92, 134.

<sup>14</sup> In neutral sense, see *Korai szombatos*, 80, 172. In the cases mentioned in the last two footnotes, it appears 4–5 times along with the word ‘Pagan.’ Another neutral example: *Az Szentírás panaszolkodása*, 196, and one positive: *Az Szentírás panaszolkodása*, 204.

but thought that true Christianity should be just the same as the true, fully enlightened Judaism.

## Context of the Use of the Term ‘Jew’

According to Sabbatarian texts, the most regularly mentioned and debated error of the Jews is what these texts refer to as their ‘spiritual blindness.’<sup>15</sup> This was one of the most widely voiced anti-Jewish accusation in the Christian world, whose solid foundation laid in the New Testament. Contrary to this, the Sabbatarian stance on this generally debated accusation is partly affirmative, partly defensive.<sup>16</sup> This means that while Sabbatarian writers do acknowledge the blindness of the Jews, they also emphasise its ‘partial’ nature. They try to refine the question, clarifying in what sense are Jews blind, and what the things are that they see in a better way than everyone else.<sup>17</sup> The texts do not simply mitigate their error, and stress its partial character, but often contrast it with the blindness of Christians, which is represented as something even more blatant and condemnable.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Rom. ch. 11. is the referred biblical locus.

<sup>16</sup> Opposed to the present, the blindness of the Jews was not remissible in the time of Jesus. The Jews rejecting the Messiah remained in darkness, because God saw their sinful motifs, their selfish mercenary nature, and did not let Jesus reveal himself the way they expected, that is, a king. See for example *Korai szombatos*, 52, 73–74.

<sup>17</sup> “It is the case, that elsewhere apostle Paul says that the Jews are blind, but in the same place explains, in what lies their blindness, that is, it is a partial, and not a complete blindness, but similar to how Christ cries for them that they did not recognise the day of his visitation, and that they have a desire to see that day, but they will not be able to see it until they do not reach a state where they can joyfully tell if they see it: Blessed is he who came in the name of the Lord. This was brought on them by their blindness, because they did not believe Christ, because if they would have believed him, they could have lived the way Zacharia sing it, till the end of times. But since they missed this opportunity, now they are in exile according to the curse of Moses, and when the time of Pagans fulfills, as it is claimed by Paul, then whole Israel will be set free, because Moses’ veil will be removed from their heart... the blindness of Jews is not that they do not know God, neither that they do not explicate the Scriptures truthfully...” *Korai szombatos*, 33–34. See also RMKT V., song 80, pp. 43–46, 202.

<sup>18</sup> “What’s your response to this? Those Jews are blinds! Hypocrite! Cast away the plank from your own eyes, because you are completely blind, you are without God, because you worship a human instead of God, you are without Christ, because you confess that Christ is God, you are without law, because after Martin Luther, you don’t say anything to God’s law, so that you could live with that. You are without covenant when you are without God, yet you still judge others.” *Korai szombatos*, 66.

Another example: “Apostle Paul claims that Jews suffered a partial blindness, because they did not recognise *Christ* [meaning the anointed Messiah] in Jesus, from which it is clear that if it was blindness in the Jews that they did not recognise Christ, it is a much greater blindness in the Christians that they brag with the name of Christ, although they do not know Jesus as the real Christ.” *Korai szombatos*, 134.

In their view, the Jews are blind only in that they fail to acknowledge the person of Jesus as the Messiah. The reason for this is comprehensible, though, and is a result of Christian idolatry, that is, the precept of the Trinity, and other human traditions. During the course of their history, Jews often suffered as a consequence of idolatry, and thus they cannot be blamed if they do not want to repeat the same mistakes again, and refuse to worship Jesus. It took centuries to build the strong ‘rails’ which defend their monotheism, and these rails guard them from accepting the Messiah. This blindness, which was called in Pauline terms the ‘veil of Moses,’ will disappear with the second coming of Jesus. On that day, the Jews will recognize their Messiah, and will cry aloud with the words of King David: “Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.”<sup>19</sup> Since the faith in Jesus is not among the terms of the covenant made with God, it thus cannot serve as a reason to break up the covenant, and is thus not an essential requirement for salvation for them.<sup>20</sup> So nothing changes, the covenant made with the Jews is still valid, and just like before, people converting from Paganism are welcome to join it.<sup>21</sup>

As it was mentioned before, the Sabbatarian’s idea was that the Jews were only blind as to the person of the Messiah, while in other respects, their eyesight surpasses that of Christians. Only they possess the right knowledge of God,<sup>22</sup> and they are blessed with exceptional light and wisdom regarding the

<sup>19</sup> In connection with this, see the original textual context in the previous footnotes. In all cases, translations of the quoted biblical passages are from the New King James Version.

<sup>20</sup> “... and if any [of the converted Pagans] would deny Christ, he will be again without God, but the Jew, because he did not become the people of God through the belief in Christ, thus, his failure to believe in Christ did not mean a break with his God, only that bliss wandered away from them...” *Korai szombatos*, 34.

<sup>21</sup> “Those laws from the commandments were equally given and written to the Pagans according to the saying: Jews and newcomers should face equal laws... in the Jewish language, newcomer often means converted, meaning, converted from Paganism... and it is clear from the prophet’s writing that this does not only cover the Jews who live among Pagans... If say a Pagan or someone from a foreign nation adopts my covenant, understands my law, sanctifies my feast, that man will be like the Jew... It is not here that this is true only of Pagans amongst you, but could relate to any place and any person.” The rest of the text lists further arguments and references to support the claim of the author. *Az zsidó hűtön valók közül kirekesztett ember ellen*, RMKT V, pp. 485, 498.

Other examples: “God favors the converted Pagan,/ Who takes up his covenant,/ And who respects his saint feast.” RMKT V, p. 111.

“Never did he do this to any nation,/ Neither did he lead anyone like this/ One elect nation... The company of the saint nation,/ Its everlasting bliss,/ He also promised this good to us,/ Together with other blessings,/ If we keep His tradition.” RMKT V, song 48, verses 4, 7, p. 116. See also RMKT V, song 80, verse 102, p. 153 and *Korai szombatos*, 63.

<sup>22</sup> “From the beginning, Jews knew God the same way as they know Him now. What relates to God’s being, reality, and the true explanation of Jewish writing was with them from the beginning.” *Korai szombatos*, 62.



interpretation of the Scriptures. This wisdom cannot be despised or dismissed, since a correct interpretation of the Scriptures is impossible without it. In accordance with Paul, and with a reference to Jesus, the Sabbatarian texts claim that God entrusted the Jews with his Word, and only they have the key to its correct interpretation.<sup>23</sup> The law and the prophets were given to the Jews, but if we only adopt their translation without the Jewish wisdom, then we will not be able to get to the Scriptures' correct interpretation. The Jews are the 'leaders of the blind' in the exegesis and interpretation of the Bible. In this sense, 'salvation comes from the Jews.'<sup>24</sup> Another passage claims that "... the philosophers... look for wisdom until the end of their life, but they never find it, because they don't seek it where it is to be found, that is, God has only granted this wisdom to one nation out of all the nations under the Sun."<sup>25</sup> After this short overview, everyone should be able to guess which that one nation was.

An important element of Jewish wisdom is an expertise in the *Hebrew tongue*. This language is "the foremost language above the rest, or a fountain."<sup>26</sup> In Matthias Vehe-Glirius' view, who was an authority and a spiritual 'leader' for the Sabbatarians, a theologian without a knowledge of the Hebrew language cannot access the accurate true meaning of the biblical text. Interpretation by such a theologian is like a blind man's opinion about colours.<sup>27</sup> The biggest error of the Christians was the 'discovery' or rather 'invention' of the

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"See in the same writing of that János Sommerus about justification, *quinti* books before, from which you will clearly learn that the blindness of the Jews was not that they did not know God, neither that they did not explicate the Word truly... but as King David says, 'In Judah is God known' [Psalm 76, 2], which referred to: it was always known by Jews like this, like now." *Korai szombatos*, 34; see also 91. The reference probably points to a tract in the volume *Tractatus aliquot* written by Johann Sommer, whose title was *De iustificatione hominis coram Deo* (25a–81a). This collection was published in 1583 in Cracow.

<sup>23</sup> "... they are trusted with the divine revelations." *Korai szombatos*, 33. Biblical locus is Rom 3, 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> "Lord Jesus looks at this, when he talks about salvation in the following manner: salvation comes from the Jews, which Jews are usually called the leaders of the blind as in Rom 2." *Korai szombatos*, 132; see also 33. See also RMKT V, 129.

<sup>25</sup> In more details: "Lactantius touches upon this when he writes the following: Rightly we call the wise people of the world philosophers, because they search for wisdom until the end of their life, but they never find it, because they don't seek it where it is to be found, that is, God has only granted this wisdom to one nation out of all the nations under the Sun." *Divinarum institutio libri VII*, 3, probably referring to the first chapter. Marginal note: "Psal. 113, *hebraeis data est sapientia et ab illis nos habemus.*" *Korai szombatos*, 33. An excerpt summarising Glirius' commentary to the Prolegomena of John's Gospel transmits the precept originating from the Jewish *agada* according to which the wise Jews were with God before the creation, together with the Messiah, the law, the manna and God's royal throne. See *Korai szombatos*, 48–49.

<sup>26</sup> *Korai szombatos*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> See Vehe-Glirius, *Declamatiuncula contra*, 240.

Trinity, which is based on mistranslations of the Scriptural text, resulting from the lack of expertise in the unique Hebrew language and thought.<sup>28</sup>

If my interpretation is correct, then another constituent of Jewish wisdom for the Sabbatarians is the rabbinic literature. Sabbatarian writings explicitly claim that everything that is related to the Jewish interpretation of the Bible is correct, except for the assessment of Jesus' person. Let me quote one example for this relationship, which argues for the continuity of the Pharisaic interpretative tradition (in their use and interpretation, Pharisaic means – and this is not groundless – the rabbinic literature. The speaker is the personified Scripture):

... as my *textus* was preserved by one nation fully, so was my sense, too. What does the man know from his own thinking, like Luther, Calvinus, the Popes and the others? They thought and explained my sense from their brains. Inspired by God, Moses explained me for forty years, and several prophets followed this lead, this was the *Pharisaica secta*. The exegesis of Christ and the apostles relied on this. This was preserved in memory, transmitted from son to son, kin to kin, and through the prophets to the people in each *aetas* ... my people was not lost...<sup>29</sup>

Jewish wisdom is a necessary and inescapable tool not only for the interpretation of the Old Testament, but also for the texts of the New Testament. In the footsteps of their spiritual leader, Glorius, Sabbatarians stress the Jewish character present in the New Testament, they try to identify and explain unique Jewish terms and perspectives even behind the Greek phrases<sup>30</sup> and

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<sup>28</sup> “But those professing the Trinity, and those professing one God but still worshipping Christ, are lost in error because of an untruthful interpretation of the true current of the Word. Sometimes because of being unfamiliar with the Jewish phrase, which differs from all other languages. One reason is the false translation of Jewish laws into the Latin tongue, because the Pagan philosophers did almost the same as when a truly shining, pure piece of gold is given to the treacherous goldsmith, but the treacherous craftsman takes away from the pure gold, and replaces it with ore... and as it was translated falsely, it was also explained falsely, and this was handed down from the idoltrous fathers to their ancestors.” *Korai szombatos*, 35–36.

<sup>29</sup> *Az Szentírás panaszolkodása*, 202. Although the life of the Pharisees was wicked, their teachings are still right, since Christ instructed his disciples to avoid following their acts and example, but to adhere to everything that they say. Another example: “...but those for whom especially and specifically God had me written and explained, those people equally and truthfully understand me, to wit, the Jews, in everything, except for that one point that they deny the Christness of Jesus, the reason for which is the audacity whose *poena* they too have to bear with.” *Az Szentírás panaszolkodása*, 201, see also 204.

<sup>30</sup> A few examples where the Sabbatarians try to call attention to what is written above: “Blind world, hear this, and keep it in your mind,/ What enormous error is this in you,// That you so much hate the name of the Jew,/ And that you scold the Jewish faith so much,// Remember saint Jesus Christ,/ Who was Jewish by both his birth, and his religion,// And preached the Jewish law,/ Moses and the other prophets he let us hear... The

to emphasise that the writers themselves were Jews.<sup>31</sup> Sabbatarian polemical literature warns the readers about this also as a means of defending the Jews and Judaism.

Quotation: “Jewish writing can be best explicated with the help of a Jewish method, because the apostles themselves were Jewish. Thus we cannot think that the river is richer than the spring, that is, we cannot put Pagan ignorance above Jewish wisdom etc.”<sup>32</sup>

The wisdom given to Jews is not only profitable in the spiritual domain, but in the physical, *material domain*, too, it can be utilized in everyday life as well. In Sabbatarian terms, the reward for keeping the law is the ‘reward of two lives,’ referring to rewards in the afterlife and in the earthly life, in which others can also participate similarly to the Jews.<sup>33</sup> A Sabbatarian writer

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apostles were all Jews,/ Preached the Jewish faith, professed that faith themselves,/ Jews who at that time believed in Christ,/ They kept that very same law then// Afterwards like before, too// Yet followed that more completely and more saintly// Then also the Pagans who converted,/ were purified from Paganism, and converted to Judaism// They both believed and acted-/ And in all means and way of salvation//Both Jews and Pagans agreed,/ They did not differ from each other in their Jewish faith.” The quotation comes from didactic song no 71, which is the paraphrase of another song, see RMKT V, verses 3–12, pp. 174 and 156. See also p. 230.

Another example: “...many people are in the darkness and in error, so much so that they don’t even know that the saint fathers, saint prophets, and the saint kings, and the saint apostles were all Jews, and the Lord Jesus Christ was also of Jewish origins, it is proved by the Scripture that he was from the seed of Abraham and the kin of King David.” *Korai szombatos*, 130.

<sup>31</sup> This idea comes directly from Matthias Vehe-Glirius, who published his observations and critique concerning the Apostolic writings in his book *Mattanjab*. See for examples the pages 392–393 in Dán, ed., *Matthias Vehe-Glirius*.

<sup>32</sup> *Korai szombatos*, 59.

<sup>33</sup> Quotation from one of their songs, written for the Sabbath: “In his sacred book of Laws, God often wishes and commands/ That his people should keep the law as a monument of His great deeds,/ And invites Jews and Pagans with the same love to keep that law,/ The rewards in both lives he promises from his law to both Jews and Pagans// Those rewards are such that people cannot receive them from their own power,/ Like the grease of the Earth, richness of grass, corn,/ Abundance of oil and wine, beautiful plenty of all fruits,/ Good rain and dear dew for the growth of these,/ Seeds and their growth like stars in the sky,/ Dear peace, health, great plenty, possessing all goods,/ Fear and terror from the heart banished, fortitude against everything,/ No harm by enemies, or the wronging of enemies if they come// Possessing riches of earth, growing the country to distant borders,/ Defended by borders of the seas, would collect tax from others,/ Would be feared by islands, Would receive presents from all corners of the world,/ Nice fat sheep, different beasts that could not be counted// The pleasures of the body are these and more, with which God visits the faithful,/ According to his promise, blesses the Pagan with his goods just like the Jews,/ For the keeping of the sacred law, says this to both these people, besides these,/ Would give them a life which no human mind can think of.” This is followed by the list of the rewards of the second life, that is the life after resurrection. RMKT V, song 2, verses 1–5, p. 20; see also p. 41.

talks about this in a tone of approval nearing admiration, building on the stereotype of the rich Jew:

You claim that the Jews are mad. Cheat him, if he is mad. If he is mad, why do you borrow money from him? Why does he have more money than other nations, when it has no heritage at all? For he does not want to press clay for noble people, that is why he does not ask for his inheritance. In his madness, he does not even want to resurrect, seeing that not one, not two nations, but probably all the nations under the Sun hate him for his *Religio*, and he does not want your lies turned into truth, because then they would go mad. They see how mad Pagans waste each other because of the huge confusion. And from experience, they have learned the profit of peaceful sufferance...<sup>34</sup>

However, we must refrain from attributing too much importance to the promise of material promises. In my opinion, the reason for the conversion to Sabbatarianism was not the outlawed Szekler's hope for material riches. Although the promise of blessings frequently appears in their texts, the realities of earthly life, the hardships, contempt and mockery they have to face is more prominent, and they stress that they follow their faith despite all the hardships. The principal reward for their faith is, besides the blessings of earthly life, the approaching realm of the Messiah.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Az Szentírás panaszkodása*, 205–206.

<sup>35</sup> According to a song written for Sabbath: “I don't know why lazy Pagans wonder about the corruption of the lost Jews,/ Whom, taking into account the great covenant of holy fathers,/ He [God] keeps in such a state that not one of them spies on others' doors.” RMKT V., 57. Contrary to this, Pagans are engaged in debates and struggles with each other, and unlike the Jews, after a “terrible corruption” they are not able to get back to their feet. This quotation was the primary ground for Róbert Dán's presumption that the outlawed Szeklers were attracted by the company of Jews whom – in the absence of physical contact – they imagined as people living in plenty. According to his theory, they could only encounter wealthy and influential Jews in the Turkish Porte, and this produced a naive image about the conditions of Jews. Cf. Dán, *Az erdélyi szombatosok és Péchi Simon*, 34–35, 89, 110–112. I agree with the renowned researcher of Sabbatarianism to the extent that because of the lack of direct contact with the Jews, Szeklers indeed maintained a distorted view on the conditions and the rituals of them. In my view, however, it is not probable that Szeklers would have been unfamiliar with all the contempt and hardships Jews had to face. Although the text mentioned here, for example, paints a rather positive portrait about them, in other places, they discuss the Mosaic curses which they had to endure, and the contempt with which the world regarded them. Thus, in my opinion, it is highly questionable that without true religious conviction, driven solely by mercenary considerations, a contemporary Szekler Sabbatarian writer would have wished the condition of the Jews for himself. Dán tries to resolve the contradictions between texts, and the discrepancy between the idealised image about the Jews and the troublesome reality by locating the belief in the “rewards of two lives” in the early period of Sabbatarianism, which was later replaced by an emphasis on afterlife rewards. Since the dating of Sab-

Sabbatarian texts do not always talk about the situation of the Jews in a positive light. They are aware of their unpopularity in Europe, and clearly think that their problems are a result of the numerous repeated breaches of the law.<sup>36</sup> Their condition precisely reflects the curses promised in the book of Moses, which described the consequences of breaking the covenant. Rejecting and murdering Jesus was the final step in this process, a result of their previous obstinacy, which were carried on from generation to generation. The present Jews are suffering for the evil accumulated during the centuries, as God is a vengeful God who punishes the fathers' sin in their sons.<sup>37</sup> In such a context, Jews were clearly discussed with a voice of condemnation in the Sabbatarian texts, which called them evil in several cases.<sup>38</sup>

Notwithstanding the depth of their sins and the extent of the punishment, these had no bearings on the covenant with God, or on the promises made to them. At the arrival of the Messiah, God will forgive them, collect them from the four corners of the world, and lead them back to Canaan.<sup>39</sup> This is warranted mainly not by the Jews but by God, because in Him there is no change.<sup>40</sup>

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batarian songs is even today characterised by questionable results, I do not think that this presumption of Dán can be supplied with satisfactory arguments.

<sup>36</sup> *Korai szombatos*, 57, 196.

<sup>37</sup> "Furthermore, this God entered into the covenant with His people in such a way that His help will be constantly present if they keep his commandments, ... but if they do not observe them, then the dreadful curse of God will be on them, as it is written in Levit 28, Deut 28. Foreseeing that they will break His covenant, God made this testimony to be written against them, for the reason that when the curse will come over them, this testimony would answer to them, and make them understand why they were banished by God. And about such words like: it is hard for them, for the Jews, that they killed Christ, yet they did not kill him unexpectedly, but they have previously detached themselves from God repeatedly... The murder of Christ was not the only reason for their captivity, but also their idolatry from the beginning on, and the shedding of the blood of the prophets, too. Besides those, they also committed this [the killing of Christ] afterwards. Christ speaks about this too, saying: fill up the measure of your fathers [Mat 23:32], from which it is clear that it was the forefathers in former times who started the countless sins, and how the sons did fill the measure up. But God is a strong revengful God who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the grandchildren. This is happening to the Jews now." *Korai szombatos*, 90.

<sup>38</sup> For example "But the Jewry got fat in good luck kicked to the backside,/ Even though it had a share in every earthly goods,/ from where God threw him out/ for the transgression of His law, turning all His blessings to curses over them." RMKT V, 21. See also *Korai szombatos*, 43, 155.

<sup>39</sup> *Korai szombatos*, 92. *Az Szentírás panaszolkodása*, 201, 205.

<sup>40</sup> "Apostle Paul also comments on this, when he says: In what are the Jews better than the Pagans? In a lot of things, for sure. First, that they were entrusted with the divine revelations. Even if some of them, say, were faithless among them, would their faithlessness undo the covenant of God? Not at all! You should understand what kind of covenant Paul is talking about here, about which God says the following with the prophets: My covenant with my people ends when the Sun and the Moon expire." *Korai szombatos*, 33.

## Sabbatarian's Self-perception

Contrary to the blindness of Jews and Christians, the only group walking in the light, on the one true path is the 'little troop' of Sabbatarians – as they were called in the songs.<sup>41</sup> This declaration, however, was less confident than one would assume.<sup>42</sup>

Quote: "... our faith is more intact and purer in this: that in what the Jews are blind, we are all the more sightful. But we should only brag with this if we also own those other goods that the Jews possess, because without them, this one will also be fruitless."<sup>43</sup>

Besides familiarity with rabbinic literature, which is only indirectly accessible for them, the other means to reach the state of full light – or to even surpass the Jews – was the appropriate handling of the apostles' writings, in which the 'true leaders' were of immense guidance. For these writings are a means to understand the mission of Jesus, but they also give us a hand in interpreting the books of the Old Testament – in fact, they serve as a Pagan Talmud.<sup>44</sup>

A didactic song attributed to András Eóssi places the Sabbatarians and their knowledge in relation to Jewish wisdom.<sup>45</sup> The author describes them-

<sup>41</sup> See for example RMKT V., 83, 107, 'your little troop, small flock' 155, 'little troop,' 'small troop,' 'handful of people' 279.

<sup>42</sup> When András Eóssi writes that "we find true religion in hiding" (RMKT V., 40.) in my interpretation he does not refer to Sabbatarian faith, but to the appropriately "complimented" Jewish faith. The reason for this is that the Jews are part of the divine covenant, and even despite their partial blindness, possess deeper knowledge of God than the otherwise immaculate Sabbatarians who are on the right path. Although Sabbatarians head in the right direction, they still need the "company" of the Jews, and they need to share in their wisdom, because they own the true faith, although a small side of it has remained in the dark for the Jews.

Further examples: "Whoever wants to find salvation and live,/ Has to keep to the Jewish faith, and not else.// We have to differ from present-day Jews/ In the article that we recognise Jesus as Christ./ But in the way of salvation,/ Apart from this one article, I say, you need concord.// Just like the Jews the good Pagan/ must believe, live, and understand salvation." RMKT V., song 71, verses 18–21, p. 175. *Az Szentírás panaszkodása*, 201.

<sup>43</sup> *Korai szombatos*, 173–174.

<sup>44</sup> "... because we possess the whole core of the Law, and its explanation in the apostles instead of the Talmud, which if you follow, you will become the son of God and a saint. Those who truly understand the writings of the apostles with all their limits, as I said, can become better and wiser through them than without them, as they can completely discover order and truth regarding religion, life and morality in them, which not only make them devout, but as I said, they turn them into saints, so that they might surpass many Jews now, like it was in the apostles' times." *Korai szombatos*, 173.

<sup>45</sup> Let me quote a longer passage from one of their didactic songs, which sheds light on the main features of the Sabbatarians' attitude to the Jews:

"You hid it [true wisdom] from the wise men of this world,/ But revealed it to the smallest,/ To the humblest people of this world,/ To us, the poor, despicable vermins.// They wonder about it, they don't understand/ Where we could have understood and

selves as “little”, with a diminutive, and he also claims that they are “the humblest people of the world,” and “poor, despicable vermins.” These depreciative adjectives obviously follow a biblical example,<sup>46</sup> but at the same time also signal the distance dividing the knowledge esteemed by the world and the true divine knowledge, which becomes manifest among the low-ranking, untrained social group, the little troop of the Sabbatarians.

In extant Sabbatarian writings, there are two references where the term “Sabbatarian” is used, and both mentions appear in an apologetical context. One of these passages is a defense against the accusation that Sabbatarians do not accept the generally held beliefs about the Apostolic writings and decrees, and claim the one and only right interpretation for themselves.<sup>47</sup> The second example comes from a song written for the Sabbath. Probably this song is the most revealing as to how the Sabbatarians perceived themselves, and how they positioned themselves in the surrounding world:

Let me quote from this text:

Do not let your youthful plant be plucked,/ Whom you started to grow amidst  
the Pagans,/ Get it to his feet,/ To tie him to yourself with your everlasting  
covenant.

Your so nicely commenced little heritage/ Do not allow the collapse of this edi-  
fice,/ Your work so beautiful,/ From wild trees to suffocate your heritage.// We  
have never seen truth but in the Jew,/ Never known salvation but through your  
law,/ The truth of which,/ The everlasting reward of which is only found in  
them.// Thus we chose your law to obey,/ Israel’s tribe to favour and to approve  
[jovaltuk],/ Ourselves to them joined,/ Notwithstanding their distressed fate.//  
In this freedom you let us remain,/ Anyone voluntarily adopting thy covenant,/  
Thy truest bond,/ With the Jew might share in everlasting life.// Although  
Christianity holds high his own feathers, persecutes us and the Jews etc.

This is followed in the text by the mentioned reflection over the name Sab-  
batarian [‘szombatos’], in the form of a response to external mockery and the  
pejorative use of the term by others. The songwriter does not offer a rebuttal

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acquired/ The true path to salvation,/ If we haven’t lived in Padua, nor in Paris.// As if  
salvation would consist/ In knowing a lot of Pagan writings,/ In explaining a lot of Pagan  
languages,/ Rhetoric, and strumming music.// We learned it where you placed it,/ Injected  
it into the sons of Jerusalem,/ Left your revelations to them,/ Dedicated your covenant  
to them.// From the teachings of your holy son/ We learned it and memorised it,/ As He says  
that salvation is from the Jews,/ and they are the leaders of the blind.// As for the partial  
blindness/ Regarding knowledge of your holy son,/ In that we won’t follow them till the  
grave,/ But everything else we learn from them.// If in one peasant language we might  
know/ The meaning and true use of the sacred language,/ The true path to our salvation/  
Through a true leader and expositor... Though they know all the false wisdoms,/ For us  
your wisdom is just enough...” RMKT V, song 80, verses 73–80, p. 205.

<sup>46</sup> See for example Job 25:6; Ps. 22:6; Esa 41:14.

<sup>47</sup> See *Az zsidó hitön való közül kirekesztett ember ellen*, RMKT V, 485.

of this accusation, but accepts the name, and in contrary to the negative connotation joined to it, interprets it in a positive way, and praises it as something honourable that others associate him and his fellows with the ‘sign’ of God’s people, the Sabbath. Quote<sup>48</sup>:

Although they do not know, we are happy about the fact that they scold us by the name of thy law that you gave as a sign to your sons and servants. We do not shake the name of thy holy Sabbath off from ourselves; we will be Sabbatarians [‘szombatosok’], because we resist Satan’s power, we resist his great poison, we overcome his cruelty with bearing. It makes us glad that we can wear the seal of thy holy law and thy mighty word, the Sabbath feast, so that we are people of thy noble majesty.<sup>49</sup>

The end of the song contains a few words about their desires and their present state, namely that they hoped to become a complete part of Israel’s tribe with the coming of the Kingdom of the Messiah.<sup>50</sup> If the use of the term “judaizare” is justified in their case, then, in my opinion, this desire to belong to the people of Israel is one of the main reasons.<sup>51</sup>

## Further Perspectives

Later Sabbatarian literature is characterized by an ever-growing advancement towards the Jews – both in their religious and their national identity. As a consequence of Simon Péchi’s role as an organizer and translator, the Sabbatarian’s rituals became more and more similar to those of Jews. Their own songs and prayers were gradually replaced by pieces translated from Hebrew, sung on

<sup>48</sup> According to Jürgen Kaiser: “Das Halten des Sabbats schmiedet eine abgesonderte Gemeinschaft zusammen indem es ihr kontinuierliche rituelle Strukturen verleiht. Je ungewöhnlicher sich diese Riten ausnehmen, desto stärker ist das Erwählungsbewußtsein der Gemeinschaft. Der Sabbatismus ist also auch die Vergewisserung einer besonderen Erwählung.” Kaiser, *Ruhe der Seele*, 253–254.

<sup>49</sup> In the song’s translation the original verses are turned into prose. RMKT V, song 19, verses 11–13, pp. 61–62.

<sup>50</sup> “You bless us together with the hosts of Jacob./ Let us share in the lot of Israel./ Admit us into the Kingdom of the holy Messiah ...”, RMKT V, 62.

<sup>51</sup> Surviving Sabbatarian texts shed no light on the term “judaizer.” Probably they did not see as much offense in it as in the adjective “heretic,” to which they responded on several occasions. Maybe they even accepted the “judaizer” label. In the course of the huge Sabbatarian court case of 1638, Simon Péchi expressed his objection in a letter to the Prince, writing that “whereas we were not judaizing” („holott mi nem judaizáltunk”). Keresztény Magvető, 1880, no 6, p. 390. However, the background for this statement might have been a lot of different things besides the direct danger of death, but I cannot go into details here.



behalf of Israel. But neither in that age, nor in later ages could the bond with the Hungarian nation completely disappear.

The Sabbatarian identity problem is an intriguing process which culminated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the conversion of Sabbatarians to Judaism. By then, at least according to people writing about the subject, many of them claimed an obviously unfounded Jewish ancestry. With the conversion to Judaism, this confusion did not dissolve, though. Even after this, in fact, up to the end of their history, they were mocked by both Hungarians and Jews, and their affiliation was constantly challenged, meaning that a shame felt because of their unstable identity was an integral part of their daily life. The extent, or so to say, the percentage of their Jewishness (as it was qualified during the Second World War), had been a matter of debate throughout their history. However, for them this was not merely a theological debate, but often a question of life and death.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

No matter how hard we try to refrain from using concepts like religious and national identity in connection with the early modern period, the ever recurring question concerning Sabbatarians has not changed: where did they belong, were they Christians or Jews? The situation was exacerbated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the recognition of the alleged unpatriotism of Sabbatarian songs, since compared to contemporary Protestant poetry the absence of a patriotic voice was striking. This absence gave further impetus to questions regarding identity. However, not only the critical literature on Sabbatarianism, but the Sabbatarian texts themselves beg for an inquiry into the subject of identity.

At the same time, reading about the essence and affiliations of Sabbatarianism, one cannot escape the impression that opinions are almost always biased and mythicising, while even critical literature tends to stick to an external point of view. Driven by the desire to alleviate this situation, the current paper set out to explore the communal identity of the Sabbatarians based on an internal investigation focusing on the group's self-concept. The results will hopefully dissolve some of the general fallacies regarding Sabbatarians and their judaizing, and contribute to a more balanced view of them. In order to achieve this, I studied the relevant keywords of surviving early Sabbatarian texts. I observed the frequency and the context of words like "Jewish," "Christian," "Pagan," and "Sabbatarian." The proportion of these words, as well as the positive and negative connotations clearly tell us a lot about the affiliation of Sabbatarians, and the problems with and changes in their communal identity.

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<sup>52</sup> About the accusations emerging during World War II, and the apology of Sabbatarians, see Kovács, *Útfélen fejfa*, 70–72; Kovács, "Akik egy székely falut elraboltak," *Székely Nép* 62 (1944); Pál, *A magyar jövő vallása* 1.

The extant texts do not reveal an effort by Sabbatarians to define themselves as a separate denomination. Although they accepted the derogatory ‘Sabbatarian’ (and perhaps ‘Judaizer’) name coming from the outside, they preferred to call themselves the ‘little troop’ in their songs, which referred more to the numbers than to a unique theology or separation. Based on the examination of the keywords, they saw themselves as true Christians originating in Pagandom, who would like to belong to the covenant between God and the Jews. They did not overemphasize their Christianity at all. The reason for this was their generally negative view of the condition of contemporaneous Christianity, which they held too closely intertwined with Pagandom. Although true Christianity in their view was devoid of any Pagan additions, but in itself, without Jewish wisdom it was deficient, and represented no stakes in terms of salvation. Therefore they tried to assimilate with the Jews in every theological and ritual point except for one (until even that final theoretical point, accepting Jesus, did not fade away slowly). They followed this path, while probably even they held the actual assimilation with the Jews improbable. We might see this in the constant, inflated apologies for their Pagan origins in the Sabbatarian songs, and the even more frequent articulations of the desire to belong to the Jews.

### Summary

The denominational and national identity of Transylvanian Sabbatarians (‘Judaizers’) has been constantly debated since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century discovery of Sabbatarian literature. The question has always been haunted by mythologizing tendencies. The absence of something that was a given in the case of other denominations – that is, reflection on their native land and their nationality – was explained in terms of denominationally and nationally biased standpoints. Although most scholars had their own opinion about this question, no one has tried to perform a detailed inquiry into the problem, based on the texts themselves, and within a context of the Sabbatarians’ attitude to Jews. The present essay tries to address this problem. Utilizing a relevant set of keywords, I try to identify the signs of identity-creation in the earliest extant texts, and I also try to explore the Sabbatarian perception of Jews. My investigation reinforces the hypothesis that the absence of a patriotic voice is rooted in the theological advance towards Jews. Although the perception of the Jews is not entirely positive in Sabbatarian texts, their role is unique, making them essential for salvation. This indicates the later direction of the formation of Sabbatarian national and denominational identity, which is a gradual movement towards Jewishness, leading to ‘assimilation’ later.

**Keywords:** Judaizing, Communal Identity, Religious Identity, Sabbatarian, Pagan

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