

# “Muslim Converts or Crypto Jews? Sabbatean Communities in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic”



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Sabbatai Sevi, a seventeenth century Ottoman Jewish messianic claimant, led one of the largest religious movements in Jewish and Islamic history. When Ottoman authorities forced Sevi to convert to Islam in 1666, his followers formed a crypto-sect, later known as *Dönmes*, and maintained their overtly Muslim and covertly Jewish enigmatic identity over centuries. By using flexible and multiple identities to stymie external interference, the *Dönmes* were able to survive despite persecution from Ottoman authorities, internalizing the Kabbalistic principle of a "burden of silence." Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, cultural *Dönmes* continue to cope with external and internal challenges in a secularizing and modernizing framework.

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