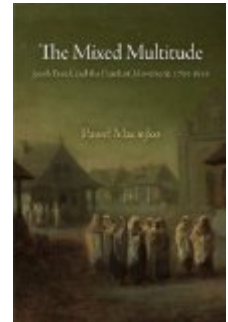


**Paweł Maciejko.** *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755-1816.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. xiii + 360 pp. \$65.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8122-4315-4.



**Reviewed by** Judith Kalik

**Published on** H-Judaic (March, 2012)

**Commissioned by** Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

The Frankist messianic Jewish movement that shattered the Polish-Lithuanian Jewish world in the eighteenth century originated in the aftermath of the self-proclaimed messiah Shabtai Tsvi (d. 1676). The mass conversion of Frankists to Catholicism left no impact on either Judaism or Christianity and was a passing episode in the history of Polish Jewry. Nevertheless, this affair fascinated many scholars and drew much attention not only because of its bizarre and spectacular character, but also for variety of reasons, which changed in different epochs: it was seen as "a vehicle of emancipation" (p. 263) in the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, but with the renewal of the Jewish-Christian dialogue based on mutual respect in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century "it demonstrated that there were not really two separate societies, Christian and Jewish, but rather two agglomerations of heterogeneous social groups" (p. 264). The classical study of Majer Balaban (*LeToldot HaTnu'ah HaFrankit*, 1935) is obviously long outdated, and many important developments have occurred in the pass-

ing years: the most important Frankist sources, the "Frankist Chronicle" and "The Book of the Words of the Lord," were published (Hillel Levine, 1984; Jan Doktór, 1996, 1997), and the autograph of the most important anti-Frankist document, *Divre Binah* (understanding words) by Dov Ber Birkenthal of Bolechów was rediscovered in the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem (p. xiii). Therefore, the new study of the Frankist movement by Paweł Maciejko is a welcome contribution to a fascinating subject.

The book consists of a preface, introduction, nine chapters, lists of place names and abbreviations, notes, bibliography, and index. Its title is derived from the biblical expression *erev rav* (mixed multitude), which denotes those Egyptians who joined the Israelites in their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 12:38). In the later rabbinical tradition they and their descendants are often blamed for various acts of misconduct committed by the Jews, and both Frankists and anti-Frankists frequently applied this term to each other.

After a brief survey of the Sabbatian background of Frankism in the introduction the author proceeds with an account of the movement itself in chronological order, from the so-called Lanckoronie affair in 1756 to the Eve Frank's "court" in Offenbach from 1791 to 1816. The author's main interest throughout the book is to investigate the development of Frankist doctrine as well as the responses to the challenge of Frankism from both the Jewish and the Christian sides. The crucial question asked by the author is why Polish Jews reacted with joy and jubilation to the conversion of Frankists to Catholicism in such sharp contrast to the traditional Jewish view of the mass voluntary apostasy of Jews as a major disaster. The answer to this question leads the author to a very significant conclusion in chapter 5 (entitled "How Rabbis and Priests Created the Frankist Movement"): in the author's opinion, the Frankist movement emerged from an unexpected alliance of Jewish and Christian authorities. This is, in fact, the most important contribution of this study to the scholarship on Frankism, as the author correctly remarks: "This alliance of rabbis and priests has escaped the attention of Jewish and Christian scholars" (p. 155). According to the author's analysis the Jewish leadership feared most that the Podolian Sabbatians might be eventually recognized by Polish authorities as a separate Jewish religious denomination following the existing Karaite model, and therefore they pushed (using behind-the-scenes machinations) Jacob Frank's followers to embrace Catholicism, thus separating themselves for good from any connection with Judaism. On the Christian side the main reason to condone the Frankists' conversion was the desire of Polish Catholic clergy to demonstrate the superiority of the Catholic faith in face of the missionary activity of the German Pietists among Polish Jews, which accelerated considerably in the mid eighteenth century. Frank's conversion effectively created the Frankist movement, since Frank's leadership before this act was by no means taken for granted inside the sect, and Yehu-

da Leyb Krysa, for instance, was often perceived as a leading figure. In internal Jewish politics the conversion of Frank and his followers played into the hands of such zealous anti-Sabbatians as Jacob Emden. However, the author shows less awareness of the use of Frankist conversion in internal Catholic conflicts. He attributes the opposition to the conversion mainly to the Apostolic See and to papal nuncio in Poland Nicolai Serra (p. 153), but the most outspoken opponent of Frank's support was Piarist Stanisław Konarski, who had informed the papal nuncio Eduardo Corsini about the harm caused by Frank's activity to the Polish Jews already in 1756. Since Konarski personally, and the Piarists in general, were very active in the promotion of the Enlightenment in Poland, his view can be contrasted with the behavior of one of the most reactionary Polish bishops, Kajetan Sołtyk, who continued to assist Frankists even after Frank's arrest. This contrast reveals that controversy about Frank's conversion followed the lines of the general split between enlightened and reactionary camps inside the Polish church.[1]

The author finds the main interest in Frankism in "the originality of Frank's thinking" (p. 264). He attributes to Frank, among other ideas, the concept of "Jacob's return," a reference to the biblical account of the encounter between Jacob and his twin brother Esau after Jacob's return from Haran. The latter promises to follow Esau (Gen. 33:14), but this promise remains unfulfilled. Since Frank's writings (*The Words of the Lord*, the petition of Frankists for permission to convert, the so-called red letters) frequently mention this episode, the author concludes that "Frank understood his mission as a fulfillment of the unfulfilled promise given by Jacob to Esau, called his conversion to Catholicism 'the path to Esau', and described his program in terms of a quest for reunion of the brothers" (p. 185). However, "Jacob's return" is a Christian idea, which originated with the French Jansenist movement and became very popular among both Protestants and mainstream Catholics in the eighteenth cen-

ture.[2] According to this view, the mass voluntary conversion of the Jews to Christianity termed "Jacob's return" is a necessary precondition for the second coming. Though the author quotes the Pastoral Epistle of Władysław Łubieński explicitly referring to this idea in the Frankists context (pp. 152-153), and even admits that "at the early stages of the development of the movement, Frank utilized Christian millenarian teachings about the ultimate conversion of the Jewish people" (p. 230), he does not reach the conclusion that conversion of Frankists simply fulfilled the demand for Jacob's return among the Polish clerics of messianic orientation, as I have argued elsewhere.[3] The few criticisms above and some disagreement with the author, however, do not at all diminish the great value of this excellent book.

#### Notes

[1]. As I have argued in "Attitudes towards the Jews and Catholic Identity in Eighteenth-Century Poland," in *Confessional Identity in East-Central Europe*, ed. M. Crăciun, O. Ghitta, and G. Murdok (Farnham: Ashgate, 2002), 190.

[2]. See D. Bankir, "Reayon 'Shivat HaYehudim' BeYansenism HaTsarfati" [The Idea of "The Return of the Jews" in French Jansenism], in *Bein Israel LeUmot: Kovets Ma'amarim, Shai LeShmuel Ettinger*, ed. Sh. Almog (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1987), 71-86; and B. Z. Kedar, "Hemshekhiyut VeKhidush BeHamara HaYehudit BeGermaniya shel HaMea Ha-18" [Continuity and innovation in the conversion of German Jewry in the eighteenth century], in *Perakim BeToldot HaKhevera HaYehudit BeYmei HaBeinaim UBaEt HaKhadasha*, ed. Etkis and Y. Shulman (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1980), 154-171.

[3]. "Christian Kabbala and Polish Jews: Attitudes of the Church to Jewish Conversion and the Idea of 'Jacob's Return' in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Eighteenth Century," *Jewish History Quarterly* 212 (2004): 499-501.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at  
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-judaic>

**Citation:** Judith Kalik. Review of Maciejko, Paweł. *The Mixed Multitude: Jacob Frank and the Frankist Movement, 1755-1816*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. March, 2012.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32939>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No  
Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.