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Review Essay
Ḥasidei de'ar'a and *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*: Two Trends in Modern Jewish Historiography

by

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Rachel Elior. *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism*. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006. 258 pp.

Mor Altshuler. *The Messianic Secret of Hasidism*. Leiden: Brill, 2006. xii, 440 pp.

Jan Doktór. *Pozcątki Chasydyzmu Polskiego*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Universytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004. 311 pp.

Zeev Gries. *The Book in the Jewish World, 1700–1900*. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007. 251 pp.

Igor Turov. *Rannii hasidizm: istoriia, verouchenie, kontakty so slavianskim okruzheniem*. Kiev: Dukh i Litera, 2003. 264 pp.

Glenn Dynner. *Men of Silk: The Hasidic Conquest of Polish Jewish Society.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 384 pp.

Marcin Wodziński. *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A History of Conflict*. Trans. Sarah Cozens. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005. 335 pp.

Ilia Lurie. *'Edah u-medinah: ḥasidut ḥabad ba-'imperya ha-rusit 588–643*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2006. 145 pp.

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Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern

David Assaf. *Ne'eḥaz ba-sevakh: pirkei mashber u-mevukhah be-toldot ha-ḥasidut.* Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-Toldot Yisrael, 2006. 378 pp.

Gershon Hundert, one of the leading scholars of Eastern European Jewry, has portrayed Hasidism as "one of many movements of religious enthusiasm that arose in the eighteenth century."[1] Though most scholars today agree with this description, they diverge regarding the goals of the movement, the causes of its emergence and spread, and its impact on Eastern European Jewry. Simon Dubnow, the father-founder of modern Eastern European Jewish historiography, considered Hasidism to be a response to the seventeenth-century communal crisis. He portrayed Hasidism as a spiritual movement of ordinary Jews who rebelled against the stringencies of rabbinic Judaism and sought spiritual accommodation from charismatic yet uneducated leaders.[2] Benzion Dinur saw Hasidism as a popular revolution against the corrupt power of the *kahal*, the umbrella self-governing organization of Polish Jewry.[3] Gershom Scholem maintained that it was the popularization of Kabbalah that was responsible for the phenomenal success of Hasidism, its rapid spread, and the mass following of the zaddikim, the hasidic masters.[4] By the end of the late twentieth century, most scholars agreed that Hasidism was a popular movement triggered by the economic breakdown of Polish Jewry, directed against the legal authorities, and led by mystically oriented leaders with no significant rabbinic pedigree or deep knowledge of traditional Jewish sources.

However, in the 1990s, the situation radically changed as Moshe Rosman discovered a number of key primary sources in the archive of the Czartoryski family in Kraków and proved that the legendary founder of Hasidism known as the Ba'al Shem Tov (Israel ben Eliezer, ca. 1699–1760) was not a semiliterate itinerant preacher but a practicing kabbalist hired by the *kahal* in Międzybóż, one of the wealthiest and most prosperous communities in southeastern Poland. The local *kahal* supported him on a permanent basis, made itself responsible for his taxes, paid his rent, and sponsored his two disciples.[5] One of the main implications of Rosman's analysis is that in order to analyze the character and history of the

1. Gershon David Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania in the Eighteenth Century: A Genealogy of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 160.

2. Simon Dubnow, *Toldot ha-ḥasidut* (Tel-Aviv, 1930–32); see also idem, "The Beginnings: The Baal Shem Tov (Besht) and the Center in Podolia" and "The Maggid of Miedzyrzecz, His Associates, and the Center in Volhynia (1760–1772)," in Gershon David Hundert, *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to Present* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 58–85.

3. Benzion Dinur, *Be-mifneh ha-dorot: meḥkarim ve-'iyunim be-reshitam shel ha-ẓmanim ha-ḥadashim be-toldot yisra'el* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1955), 83–227; see the English version, "The Origins of Hasidism and its Social and Messianic Foundations," in Hundert, *Essential Papers on Hasidism*, 86–208.

4. Gershom Scholem, *Devarim be-go: pirkei morashah u-teḥiyah* (Tel-Aviv: Am over, 1975), 287–324.

5. Moshe Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism: A Quest for the Historical Ba'al Shem Tov* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1996), esp. 63–82, 173–86. On Rosman's methodological innovations, see his *How Jewish Is Jewish History* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007).

hasidic movement, one has to go grassroots. Before investigating "what Hasidism thought," one has to look at "what Hasidism was," employing the methods of cultural and social history rather than the history of ideas. Rosman's analysis also demonstrated that the discovery of new sources, above all in Polish and Ukrainian archives and in languages other than Hebrew and Yiddish, is an essential element in rewriting the history of the hasidic movement.

But even before the mid-1990s, scholars of Hasidism started to drift from the history of ideas to social history as they saw that ideologically based grand historical narratives were insufficient to explain the entirety of the movement. Previous scholarship failed to answer how the old-style pietists, dubbed "lowercase" *hasidim*, managed to transform themselves into anti-ascetic "uppercase" *Hasidim* and move from the kabbalistic elitist *kloyz* into a communal and largely accessible *bet midrash.* Nor could they explain the rapid conquest by hasidim of what today is Moldova, Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, and Poland within a twenty-five-year span. These and similar questions generated opposing trends among historians of Hasidism. The representatives of one trend claim that the answers can be found in internal Hebrew and Yiddish sources and that the teachings of hasidic masters are more significant than anything else. The representatives of the other trend resort, among other things, to external sources in Slavic languages and emphasize the key role of new social networks and institutions created by hasidim. These two trends can conveniently be classified as *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* (star-struck Hasidim) and *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* (earth-bound Hasidim), albeit there are no hasidic groups with such names and the Aramaic quasi-Zoharic wordings are my invention.

As in any dichotomy, the division of scholars of Hasidism into two trends, groups, or camps is artificial, and the borders between them are informal and blurred. Sometimes the disputes within each of the groups have more significant ramifications than those between the opposite groups. And some scholars who study Hasidim through the lens of anthropology or folklore do not fit into the historiographic framework with its characteristic trends discussed here. Furthermore, as this essay is a review essay, the limitations of the genre do not allow me to identify and discuss each and every representative of what I call *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* and *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'.* Nor am I trying to portray the most typical or the most representative figures of the two trends, as the choice of books to review depended first and foremost on the time of publication. My task is more modest: to point to certain tendencies that have shaped the field in Jewish historiography dealing with Hasidism. I seek to prove that my classification helps systematize key trends in the study of Hasidism and suggest a path for future productive research.

"Contextual" and "Ghettoized" Historiography

By the metaphor *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*, "earth-bound Hasidim," I mean an informal grouping of Jewish scholars who seek to integrate the history of the hasidic movement into a larger sociocultural and socioeconomic Eastern European context. As Hundert has demonstrated, *context* is the key word in the research

methodology of those whom I consider *Ḥasidei de'ar'a.*[6] Most of them agree with Moshe Rosman's statement that "[o]nly by bringing the Besht down to earth will it be possible to evaluate his way in the service of heaven."[7] Like Rosman, *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* claim that the "earthly" context underlies much of what hasidic masters saw as their new way in the service of heaven.

Ḥasidei de'ar'a understand by "earthly" context a socioeconomic, cultural, demographic, comparative religious, and psychological environment enveloping eighteenth-century Jewish pietistic revivalism. They seem to follow Zeev Gries, who once observed that "[t]he student of religious beliefs or doctrines cannot divorce himself from investigation of the social context where they found expression, nor can he ignore the general and local historical circumstances under which they were created."[8] For *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*, as I will demonstrate in due course, contextualization is a search into the horizontal and synchronic; they establish direct and complex links between the rise of Hasidism and parallel processes taking place among Polish Jews, as well as among their non-Jewish neighbors, Poles or Russians. *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* are confident that it is not feasible to reconstruct this context without the knowledge of languages, in this case, Polish and Russian, if not the Ukrainian or Lithuanian language. *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* consider the representatives of early modern Jewish pietism as human beings of flesh and blood who either paid or did not pay taxes, enjoyed the support of the *kahal* or the upper-class Jewish bourgeoisie or were persecuted and despised by them, interacted with Polish or Russian authorities, established organized groups of followers or kept a low profile, and brought to press or avoided publicizing their homiletic works. *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*, the earth-bound scholars of the movement, place hasidic masters—zaddikim—in an immediate Polish Jewish urban context, be it Międzybóż, Warsaw, Lubavich, or Berdiczów, in which, they claim, Hasidism as a movement makes sense. *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* practice caution when dealing with primary sources. They are particularly skeptical about hagiographies, which they think strain much of the life of the hasidic master portrayed in books through the filter of editors, publishers, and printers.

By yet another metaphor, *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, "star-struck Hasidim," I refer to a very different informal grouping of scholars who study Hasidism as a new stage in the development of Jewish mysticism and as a groundbreaking social phenomenon. Whereas *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* underscore the context and the dynamics of the movement within this context, *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* emphasize its place within the Jewish tradition. At certain stages of research—for example, when Gershom Scholem argued against the scornful treatment of Kabbalah in Jewish *Wissenschaft*—this angle has proved its advantages.[9] *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*

6. See the chapter "Contexts of Hasidism," in Hundert, *Jews in Poland-Lithuania*, 160–85.

7. Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, 94.

8. Zeev Gries, "Hasidism: The Present State of Research and Some Desirable Priorities," *Numen* 34, no. 1 (1987): 97–108; 34, no. 2 (1987): 179–213.

9. For Scholem's critique of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* school, see his "Mi-tokh hirhurim 'al ḥokhmat yisra'el," in *Ḥokhmat yisra'el: hebetim historiyim u-filosofiyim*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1979), 153–68.

view the object of their research diachronically; they seek to integrate it into grand historical narratives such as Jewish messianism. *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* claim that in order to study Hasidism, one needs to engage an entire corpus of Jewish mystical texts written over the span of five or seven centuries. *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* maintain that this corpus of mystical texts is indispensable for making sense of Beshtian Hasidism. Concerned about the diachrony, they emphasize the continuity among the twelfth-century German pietists (*Ḥasidei Ashkenaz*), the Abulafian ecstatic Kabbalah, the late thirteenth-century Zohar, the sixteenth-century Lurianic liturgy, and the homiletic writings of the eighteenth-century Polish religious revivalists. They analyze in great depth the ways in which Beshtian Hasidism developed such notions as *devekut* (cleaving to God), *ẓadik* (righteous one), *hafshatat ha-gashmiyut* (liberating oneself from corporeality), *niẓoẓot* (divine sparks), *tikkun* (fixing or improvement), *yiḥudim* (unifications), and other key kabbalistic notions. For them, Hasidism is first and foremost a new system of ideas stemming from Kabbalah.

Placing Hasidism within Judaic mystical tradition allows *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, star-struck Hasidim, to trace parallels between what they term the theology of the Besht and the mysticism of Abraham Abulafia, Isaac Luria, or Yosef Karo. To critically reconstruct a historical picture of the Besht, *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* remove him from his immediate sociohistorical context and place him firmly within the context of an abstraction named "Jewish mysticism," wherein he takes his place among the other great "Jewish mystics" of the previous centuries. The Besht becomes paradigmatic as a reincarnation of the Jewish mystical paradigm. Yet his leadership makes him different. *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, most prominently Immanuel Etkes, use the self-assessment of the Besht from his "Holy Epistle" (*'Iggeret ha-kodesh*) as proof that he was a leader of the Jewish people.[10] Quite remarkably, *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* prefer to prove Beshtian leadership through the celestial ascent of his soul and his cleaving to God, *yiḥudim* and *devekut*, rather than through his earthly social skills. Because some scholars ultimately divest the Besht and other hasidic masters of their earthly materialism, make them into celestial beings, and enable them to talk over the barriers of centuries, I address these scholars as *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*.

The following is an attempt to look through recent books on Hasidism using the proposed classification and to find out what modern scholars of Hasidism can teach us.

The Lure and Peril of the Star-Struck Hasidim

In her volume *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism*, Rachel Elior presents Hasidism as a theological phenomenon stemming from "individual mystical experience to a comprehensive doctrine" (10). Lurianic Kabbalah serves as an overarching theme for Elior's story. Early eighteenth-century hasidim studied the ideas and imitated the behavior of the Safed circle of Isaac Luria. They

10. See the chapter "A Leader of the Jewish People" in Immanuel Etkes, *The Besht: Magician, Mystic, and Leader* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005), 77–112.

revived the kabbalistic myth, in particular the concept of the divine origins of the Holy Tongue and Hebrew letters. Elior maintains that the Ba'al Shem Tov inherited the kabbalistic tradition and revolutionized it by blurring the distinction between the light of the letters and human language, the sacred and the profane, sanity and madness, the higher world and this world, and life and death (67). Hasidim of the Besht developed his ideas, based on Lurianic concepts, and created a set of doctrines that had important social ramifications, above all the doctrine of the zaddik, a charismatic authority endowed with divine grace. Elior considers Hasidism in an ideational context reduced to sabbateans, Frankists, and, in the late eighteenth century, mitnagdic resistance to Hasidism. Elior concludes her study with a lengthy comparison of Jacob Frank and the Besht, who were both charismatic mystics, kabbalists, and paradoxical thinkers and leaders of two opposing movements "revolutionary on their socio-religious character." The last chapter lays out various trends in the study of Hasidism and emphasizes the diversity of trends and approaches among modern scholars of the movement.

Written by a scholar who has achieved recognition as an expert in Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism and whom I consider one of the most important among *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, Elior's book leaves a puzzling impression. It is an erudite volume that says nothing new. The conceptualization of Hasidism as a stage in the development of Lurianic Kabbalah dates back to Gershom Scholem; its mystical aspect to Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer, Joseph Weiss, and Abraham Joshua Heschel; the mitnagdic opposition to Mordecai Wilensky; and the revolutionary character of the hasidic movement to Benzion Dinur and Raphael Mahler. Elior uses a rather outdated concept of the movement to cement her narrative. She leaves aside theories, ideas, insights, and data amassed by scholars who have long departed from the thinking patterns of Dinur or Scholem. Although Elior makes an attempt to create a context for Hasidism, her context is mainly ideological: A highly complex, murky, and underresearched interaction between, for example, sabbateans and Hasidim is presented merely as a dispute between theologians, who think and speak philosophical concepts and debate over doctrines. Following the approach of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, Elior presents to us what Hasidim could have thought rather than who Hasidim were or could have been. This focus on the intellectual content of hasidic ideology prevents the author from testing new and risky but rewarding approaches to Hasidism. This is even more regrettable because the depiction of Hasidim as systematic thinkers with their own clear-cut doctrine, as a Jewish Polish version of the Heidelberg or Jena Romantics, is highly problematic. In order to discuss the intellectual structure of hasidic ideology or theology based on the model of contemporary European thought, it is necessary to prove first that hasidic thinkers aspired to think within the canons of European theology.

Elior obliquely refers to research into the social aspects of the hasidic movement, yet she could have more seriously engaged the social context. Elior keeps repeating that the movement originated in Podolia and later moved to Volhynia. But what was the Podolian specificity of the movement?

Could Hasidism have emerged in Moravia, Altona, or in the midst of pietistic groups in northern Italy? Were Elior to reconstruct the sociocultural circumstances of the Besht—including the spread of Jewish shamans and popular Kabbalah—perhaps she would be able to explain why Hasidism sprang up in eastern Poland instead of in any of the dozens of contemporary mystical groups throughout Central and Southern Europe. Indeed, some Polish realities are mentioned in the book. Elior presents to the reader close associates of the Besht who were in Brody, Rowno, Szarogród, Bracław, Horodenka, Kuty, and Kosów. Elior mentions that it was a fragmented group, but she does not elucidate how and when its members came together—if they ever did so as a coherent group.

After reading Elior's book, one may begin to think that the Beshtian Hasidim agreed to request from their communities a sabbatical year to rescind their communal and family obligations and get together with the Besht in Międzybóż to talk Kabbalah, practice mystical unifications, and pray from the Lurianic prayer book. Indeed, we learn nothing about how, when, and for how long they stayed together. One should take into consideration some basics of the Eastern European environment of that time: for example, that the road conditions in Eastern Europe were awful, that any travel was a dangerous and painstaking enterprise, and that the distance between the towns where the Beshtian Hasidim resided was hundreds and hundreds of miles. Should *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* such as Elior engage this commonsensical Polish context, they would realize that hasidic ideas did not travel from place to place without hindrance and that the Besht lived in a very different informational milieu. Anybody who engages the history of ideas in eighteenth-century Eastern Europe should keep in mind that the Besht was not on the Internet 24/6 discussing his mystical insights into Torah by instant message with his hasidim. Not could the Besht regularly visit his alleged disciples scattered over a territory as big as France.

Elior's book advances a number of formidable ideas that are left unproven. For example, a chapter dedicated to groundbreaking late eighteenth-century social upheavals is titled "Hasidic Revolution" without providing criteria for determining Hasidism's revolutionary character. Elior portrays the Besht as an ecstatic mystic, *ba'al shem*, a powerful communicator, a spiritual innovator, and an inspiring leader, citing Rosman to support her last claim (73). But Rosman does not present the Besht as a leader. Though one can easily imagine the Besht as a spiritual innovator, there is no evidence that he was or even attempted to be a leader.[11] Perhaps a generation or two later, he started to be seen as one. However, there is absolutely no evidence that in the 1740s–1760s he was one. In his time, there were *ba'alei shem* as reputed as he was; pietists as mystically minded as he was; and kabbalists much more systematic than he was. If by innovator, one implies his anti-ascetic stance on pietism, this makes him into a spiritual innovator but hardly a revolutionary leader of the hasidic movement, as Elior is trying to define him. The Besht was not the

11. Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, 154, 167, 208–209.

head of the yeshiva; he did not have and did not try to create a mass following; he did not rebel against the authorities; and he was not an eighteenth-century Leon Trotsky of Podolia. The claim of his leadership is wishful thinking, as ungrounded in historical reality as the mitnagdic critique of Hasidism. The opponents of Hasidism in Grodno, Minsk, Brody, and Vilna proclaimed in the 1770s that malicious Hasidim dared to change Judaism and therefore should not be tolerated. Elior seems to argue that Hasidim revolutionized Judaism, and this was just wonderful.

If the comparative context calls into question Elior's portrayal of Hasidism, how can one explain the reason hasidic masters chose to call the Besht their teacher? I strongly believe that it is better to acknowledge that scholars cannot answer certain questions than to invent an unproven narrative based on an overarching kabbalistic or mystical discourse that seems to explain everything. Despite Ada Rapoport-Albert's serious attempts to suggest an answer, the question of why prominent Central and Eastern European mystics decided to claim the Besht as their teacher is still an unresolved problem.[12] We do not have sufficient contemporary external and internal evidence to make bold statements.

I also have some questions about Elior's definitions of the movement. "[W]hat caused him to become the founder of Hasidism?" asks Elior about the Besht. Indeed, her assumption is that the Besht knew that he was the founder and wanted to become the founder, and the best thing that a student of Hasidism can do is to identify the causes that allowed the Besht to become the founder. Contemporary primary sources provide no support for this assumption. And one can never be too cautious when dealing with the late nineteenth-century hasidic hagiographies created specifically to portray the Besht as the founder of Hasidism. Elior's portrayal of the Besht would be much more accurate and nuanced if she had followed the advise of Gries to conduct "the troublesome investigation of all those anonymous agents of culture whose contributions are of inestimable value—such as authors, copyists, editors (MalBihaD), and printers."[13]

Among other things, Elior's volume states that the Besht achieved fame as a storyteller. Elior does not elucidate how we know that. If the basis for this claim is the collection of stories, such as *In Praise of the Ba'al Shem Tov* (1814–15), or the image of the Besht in the hasidic lore, it would suffice to elucidate this point by saying that the author deals with the Besht's later image, not with the real Besht in his own sociocultural context. At least contemporary documents tell us nothing about his being a storyteller, let alone famous. Let us assume for a second that the Besht was a gifted storyteller. Why, then, did it take his followers twenty to thirty years after his death to say this out loud? What could have been so dangerous in spreading the Besht's fame as a storyteller in his lifetime? As his contemporary sources—and even late eighteenth-century sources—are reticent in this

12. See Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hasidism after 1772: Structural Continuity and Change," in *Hasidism Reappraised*, ed. Ada Rapoport-Albert (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1996), 76–140.

13. Zeev Gries, "Hasidism: The Present State of Research and Some Desirable Priorities," *Numen* 34, no. 1 (1987): 100.

regard, the attempt of the nineteenth-century hasidic historiography to present the Besht as a talented storyteller should be disregarded. That the book of stories about the Besht has nicely shaped tales does not imply that the Besht himself was a storyteller. Likewise, Elior's claim that "the Besht circle was in awe of him" hangs in the air. One should remember that this "awe" made it into press sixty years after the death of the Besht, when the hasidic movement was in full sway and Hasidim composed stories of their holy history. Generally, *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, Rachel Elior among them, should revisit their conceptual framework, in which sources coexist in a nontemporal fashion and freely talk to one another, as ideas in the Platonic world of forms.

Accurate context has not inspired *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, yet their own ideas have. In one of his essays on the history of Eastern European mysticism, Gershom Scholem advanced a productive concept of the "neutralization of the messianic element" in early Hasidism.[14] His influential essay brought about a quarter-century-long discussion of Jewish millenarian expectations and the rise of eighteenth-century Hasidism. Students of Jewish mysticism agreed that messianism performed some role in the rise of Hasidism, yet they also argued that hasidic masters downplayed messianic imagery—or at least differentiated between messianic expectations, to be enhanced among the faithful, and messianic times, not to be hastened. However, in her intriguing volume *The Messianic Secret of Hasidism*, Mor Altshuler seeks to prove the opposite. Engaged in a productive dialogue with key *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* such as Isaiah Tishby and Gershom Scholem, Altshuler privileges Tishby over Scholem regarding the messianic element in Hasidism as she undertakes an attempt "to retell the beginning of Hasidism as a story of a messianic movement." In her view, the late twentieth-century messianic uplift among the Chabad adepts was not accidental; it exteriorized chiliastic expectations that had been dormant in the bosom of Hasidism. Tracing these expectations, Altshuler chose to research the enigmatic figure of Yehiel Mikhel, the maggid of Zolochev (Złoczów). Seeking to create a messianic context for the principal character of the book, Altshuler resorts to the holy epistle of the Ba'al Shem Tov, the letter he wrote to his brother-in-law, Gershon of Kuty (Kutover).

Altshuler uses the methodology of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* yet needs a much better engagement with the ideas of her colleagues. Recently, the holy epistle became the focus of a fierce debate among historians of Hasidism.[15] Yet even stalwart opponents such as Immanuel Etkes and Moshe Rosman agreed that the Besht differentiated between himself and the Redeemer in describing his ascent to heaven.[16] The holy epistle emphasized the messianic moment, connected it to

14. See Gershom Scholem, "The Neutralization of the Messianic Element in Early Hasidism," in *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 176–202 (first published in 1970).

15. See the polemical comments by Haviva Pedaya, "'Iggeret ha-kodesh le-Besht: nusaḥ hatekst u-temunat ha-'olam—meshiḥiyut, hitgalut, 'ekstazah ve-shabta'ut," *Ẓiyon* 70, no. 3 (2005): 311–54, and Rosman's answer to her, ibid. For the versions of the holy epistle and comments questioning Rosman's approach, see Etkes, *The Besht*, 272–88.

16. See Rosman, *Founder of Hasidism*, 99–113; and Etkes, *The Besht*, 80–87.

the spread of Beshtian teachings, but did not identify the Besht himself with the Messiah. Its plain meaning seems to be that time and society had not ripened yet. Therefore, the coming of the Messiah was delayed until the time when Beshtian teachings could win the hearts and minds of the people. And, as the Besht himself admitted, it was not up to him to spread his teaching. Altshuler offers an alternative meaning of the Beshtian letter. She argues that the holy epistle emphasized messianism—it did not downplay it. The explicit messianic expectations of the Beshtian letter informed the mid-eighteenth-century *Zeitgeist*, which facilitates Altshuler's portrayal of Yehiel Mikhel, the preacher of Zolochev and the volume's main character, in terms of what Moshe Idel called the "messianic mystics."

Yehiel Mikhel (1726–86) was the scion of an aristocratic Galician family, son and grandson of prominent kabbalists. He served as a preacher in Kolki and Zolochev, established his own prayer group in Brody, and most likely died in Jampol—as Altshuler suggests, excommunicated and embittered. Messianic expectations were pivotal for the Eastern European pietists in general and for Yehiel Mikhel in particular. According to some kabbalistic numerical calculations, the messianic era should have started about 1740; chiliastic expectations were aroused in 1740, suppressed in 1746 (as reflected in the holy epistle), and reawakened in 1772 by R. Yehiel Mikhel, whom Altshuler introduces as a disciple of the Besht, a messianic visionary, and the first hasidic zaddik.

The establishment of Yehiel Mikhel's prayer quorum in 1777 in Brody is a central episode in his career and the event around which Altshuler constructs her narrative. Persecuted by the Brody *kahal* for their schismatic behavior, the members of Yehiel Mikhel's group had to operate in secret. At their gatherings, they imitated Safed kabbalists practicing *yeḥidot* (unifications) before prayer and strove to link their souls to the souls of Israel and all living beings. During the Shavuot night vigil, Yehiel Mikhel performed a *tikkun*, the fixing of the souls. When he gave his sermon, his listeners felt that the *shekhinah* (Divine Presence) spoke through him, revealing God's glory in public. Isaac of Radvil, Yehiel Mikhel's son, wrote later that his father "came to repair either himself or his generation, as it is written that the zaddik is called the 'pillar of the world,' for the world rests on the zaddik" (80). Departing from his reflections, Altshuler arrives at the conclusion that Yehiel Mikhel was the first hasidic zaddik and his group of followers, the first hasidic court.

Let us consider Altshuler's evidence. Isaac of Radvil compares his father to a zaddik; he does not say that his father was a zaddik. His comparison is entirely metaphorical. He does not imply that Yehiel Mikhel acted as a public figure, had pilgrims coming regularly to his court, collected the "soul ransom" moneys (*pidyonot*), prayed for the well-being of his followers, acted as a conduit to unite his disciples to the divine grace, provided spiritual relief for the needy, appointed slaughterers and preachers, gave public sermons, distributed social relief moneys, or had a mass following. Of all those conditions characterizing the operation of a hasidic court, Yehiel Mikhel's group displayed perhaps one, if any: the unification of the group members around the preacher, who helped his colleagues achieve *devekut*, cleaving to God. And this characteristic does

not suggest that Yehiel Mikhel was a zaddik. To advance such a claim, one needs to do serious comparative work, placing him, for example, next to the Maggid of Mezhirich (Międzyrzecz), whose hasidic court preceded Yehiel Mikhel's. The critics of Altushuler's Hebrew book strongly suggested introducing a comparative framework to better balance her arguments, yet as the English version demonstrates, Altshuler preferred not to follow the advice. A comparative framework would momentarily show that commitment to preserving secrecy was not characteristic of hasidic courts, which were always found in the public realm—moreover, at the very epicenter of this realm. Openness and accessibility is exactly what made a court into a court, not secrecy and seclusion.

The encoded practices, secrecy, and seclusion of Yehiel Mikhel's followers characterized the exclusive and elitist mystics—the hasidim—not the new Hasidim rallying around their zaddik. There is hardly anything in Yehiel Mikhel's group similar to the zaddiks' courts of the later period. Rather than a court, it was, as Altshuler soundly suggests, an independent prayer assembly with altered liturgy, an association of kabbalists "whose activities conform to a pattern characteristic of earlier groups" (61, 108). This is in full agreement with Yehiel Mikhel's depiction as a zaddik in the traditional meaning of the word: a righteous person among the pious. As he emerges from Altshuler's study, Yehiel Mikhel stood at the head of a traditional elitist group of Eastern European pietists who were absorbed with the study of Kabbalah. Altshuler offers no evidence to suggest that Yehiel Mikhel was a zaddik in the sociocultural or theological meaning of the word. The evidence she brings is at variance with her own conclusions, particularly if one considers the treatment of Yehiel Mikhel's father, also an old-style hasid, as a zaddik. Furthermore, the links between Yehiel Mikhel and his followers have nothing to do with the forced conclusion that the hasidic movement "originated from a circle of messianic kabbalists, led by a charismatic leader—R. Yehiel Mikhel—and motivated by a clear although esoteric vision of corporeal and celestial redemption" (204). The preacher of Zolochev would be better served if he were portrayed as a celestial kabbalist in seclusion rather than as an earthly group leader of the pious acting in public.

Like Mor Altshuler, Jan Doktór may be said to illustrate some of the key methodological principles of the *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* trend—both productive and faulty. His Polish-language book *The Beginnings of Polish Hasidism* is yet another attempt at the messianic conceptualization of Hasidism. Doktór seeks to present messianism as the fulcrum of early modern religious developments in Eastern Europe. Yet Doktór goes further than Altshuler, clustering under a single rubric of the messianic movement not only the early hasidic masters but also the sabbateans of the 1660s, the crypto-sabbateans of the late 1690s, the *ba'alei shem* of the 1720s, the Besht of the 1740s, Jacob Frank and the Frankists of the 1750s, some Lithuanian rabbinic leaders of the 1760s, and the followers of the Besht of the 1770s.

To solidify his conceptualization, Doktór considers early modern Jewish messianism as a sporadic process. Messianism comes in waves: Each wave raises the movement to its crest and then makes it fade. Doktór traces Hasidism back to the period following the 1648–49 Khmel'nyts'kyi massacres, when new

ascetic tendencies rapidly spread among Eastern European Jews and informed their new pietistic values. Doktór is perfectly aware of the fundamental works of modern Jewish scholars differentiating between the lowercase pietistic hasidim and the uppercase Beshtian Hasidim, yet he labels them indiscriminately as Hasidim sharing the same set of behavioral patterns and theological views. Contrary to the existing evidence, Doktór advances a united messianic genealogy in which such crypto-sabbatean figures as Yehuda Hasid, Haim Malakh, and Nehemia Hayun emerge as the older colleagues of the Beshtian Hasidim.

In his treatment of crypto-sabbateans and early eighteenth-century pietistic-minded kabbalists, Doktór relies mostly on the eighteenth-century Rabbi Jacob Emden and the early twentieth-century researcher David Kahana, who doggedly followed Emden's identifications.[17] Emden labeled as a sabbatean anybody he disliked, and he disliked many. His idiosyncratic misanthropy, a disguise for his religious zeal, should have made Doktór question the veracity of some characteristics that Emden gave to his contemporaries. Instead, Doktór identifies rabbinic leaders, vagabond preachers, or sedentary kabbalists as sabbateans by association based on a biased source. Although he admits that the Besht was skeptical about Sabbateanism, Doktór—exactly as Rachel Elior does—surrounds him with the *ba'alei shem* and pietists known for their messianic and sabbatean enthusiasm. Thus, Doktór introduces the messianic framework to characterize every endeavor of the eighteenth-century Hasidim. For example, the pilgrimage of the Besht, Nahman of Horodenka, and Gershon of Kuty to the Holy Land occurred, as Doktór maintains, around the chiliastic year of 1740 and had messianic connotations. Critical remarks of the Besht about some rabbinic teachings also revealed his unabashed messianic pretensions. After 1747, states Doktór on the basis of unproved data and misreading of sources, the Besht turned from a skeptical attitude toward messianism to a full embrace of it. In his letter to Gershon of Kuty, maintains Doktór, the Besht presented himself as chosen by Heaven as a messianic messenger—and this new messianic stance helped the Besht to gather messianic-minded hasidim around him.

The moment Doktór abandons the path of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* and moves beyond the ideational, his conceptualization becomes more reliable. Doktór advances a detailed and well-documented exploration of the pilgrimage of Yehuda Hasid and his crypto-sabbatean brothers from Poland to East Central Europe to Jerusalem, of the establishment of crypto-sabbatean groups between Fürth and Żółkiew, of Haim Malakh's agitation in Europe, and of individual leaders of the crypto-sabbatean movement. He bases his narrative on the old printed German pamphlets and diaries of the Halle Institutum Judaicum missionaries. Testing the ground before launching the missionary campaign, those Christian activists traveled and spoke to various Eastern European Jews about Jewish religious pursuits, conflicts in the communities, and key religious symbols. Although the Christian missionaries inspired a messianic enthusiasm of their

17. See David Kahana, *Toldot ha-mekubalim ha-shabta'yim ve-ha-ḥasidim* (Odessa, 1913–14).

own, most of their observations seem valid and shed new light on the development of crypto-Sabbateanism. Doktór's new evidence widens what is known so far about Yehuda Hasid's and Haim Malakh's activities. However, Doktór's attempt to link crypto-sabbateans to the Besht follow a different methodology and therefore furnish a fascinating yet entirely groundless conceptualization of the hasidic movement. Doktór has proven his command of the Eastern European Jewish schismatics.[18] But his overall conceptualization of the messianic and sabbatean origins of Hasidism is entirely derivative, let alone erroneous.

Star-struck Hasidim look upon earth

Zeev Gries, who works mostly with the material of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* (such as Hebrew and Yiddish published sources), has long realized that the methodology of his school does not work. His experiments with new approaches have turned him into one of the sharpest critics of that trend. His critique is particularly amazing because he seems comfortable among historians of ideas, works mostly with internal Jewish sources, and does not have Slavic languages to reconstruct sociocultural Eastern European context. To revisit some heavenly *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* premises, Gries turns to the history of Jewish book lore.[19] Kabbalistic and hasidic ideas, maintains Gries, come from books and manuscripts with their own histories comprising the travails of the manuscript, the intent of the publisher, the story of a printer and his printing press, the peculiarities of the circulation of a book, the frequency of its printing, and the way it was perceived by readers. The history of kabbalistic works and manuscripts constitutes a pivotal sociocultural aspect of Hasidism. Only one chapter of Gries's volume *The Book in the Jewish World, 1700–1900* is relevant to my discussion, yet it eloquently speaks to the necessity of taking the history of ideas down to earth by presenting and exploring it as a history of books and printing.

Gries uses the history of book print to challenge Scholem's conceptualization of early Hasidism as a reaction to, or a result of, the spread of Kabbalah. Gries reads bibliographies as novels; he shows that kabbalistic books first published in the sixteenth century—including *Sefer ha-Zohar*—were not reprinted until the second half of the eighteenth century. Neither in the sixteenth nor in the seventeenth century was there any significant increase in the printing of kabbalistic books. Before the breakthrough developments in Żółkiew in the second half of the eighteenth century, the printing presses responsible for publishing kabbalistic works could be counted on one hand. Also, basic kabbalistic books, as the manuscript collections worldwide show, did not enjoy wide circulation. Nobody preached the bringing of Kabbalah to the masses in the first half of the eighteenth

18. See Doktór's publication of Jacob Frank's writings, *Księga słów Pańskich: ezoteryczne wyłady Jakuba Franka*, 2 vols. (Warsaw: Semper, 1997); and his research into the Frankist movement, *Jakub Frank i jego nauka: na tle kryzysu religijnej tradycji osiemnastowiecznego Żydowstwa polskiego* (Warsaw: Instytut Filosofii i Socjologii PAN, 1991).

19. See Zeev Gries, *Sefer, sofer ve-sipur be-re'shit ha-ḥasidut* (Tel-Aviv: Ha-kibbuts ha-meyukhad, 1992).

century. If the seventeenth century saw an increase in interest, asks Gries, why was there no increase in the publishing of kabbalistic works or the copying of manuscripts?

Taking the history of the Jewish book as a yardstick, Gries challenges *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* who place homilies and homiletic concepts at the center of hasidic theology. Look at what Hasidim brought to press and reprinted, suggests Gries. Works preaching the practice of *kavvanot* (intentions), *bitul ha-yesh* (self-abnegation), or *devekut* (cleaving to God) were not popular at all, whereas narratives on the wonder-working zaddikim enjoyed mass success. If the increasing interest in Kabbalah was the result of the mid-seventeenth-century sabbatean movement, and if the spread of Kabbalah in the eighteenth century was a reaction to the rise of the hasidic movement, how can one use kabbalistic theology to account for the spread of Hasidism? Gries points to social and communal experience as paving the way for *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* exploration and obliquely acknowledges that *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* have been unable to explain the origins and spread of Hasidism.

Another good example of the attempts of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* to abandon their celestial dwelling and move elsewhere is the Russian-language volume by Igor Turov, *Early Hasidism: History, Theology, Contacts with the Slavic Surrounding.* Turov wrote the first half of the book as a review of the early stages of the development of Hasidism, drawing from an impressive amount of English- and Hebrew-language secondary sources, most of which are not available in any language in any of the libraries of the former Soviet Union. Turov relegates his own contribution to the two last chapters of his volume, in which he attempts to give a new spin to Yaffa Eliach's consistently rejected hypothesis connecting Hasidism and eighteenth-century Russian Orthodox sectarians.[20] Turov agrees with modern scholars' critique of Eliach's theory, according to which the Besht inherited the esoteric tradition of the Russian Orthodox schismatics. Nevertheless, he considers the Slavic religious context too important to be disregarded. He does not supply the reader with an identification of the parallelism that he traces between the contemporary Russian Orthodox practices and hasidic innovations, yet he seems to suggest an intensive cross-fertilization of Jewish and Slavic culture based on a shared pool of values.

First, he points to the similarities between hasidic groups and Russian Orthodox voluntary brotherhoods, which emerged as a response to the inculcated Catholicism in eastern Poland populated by the Russian Orthodox. As hasidic groups rallied around a zaddik and used a grassroots network to preach the hasidic gospel, these Christian brotherhoods rallied around their own communal patriarchs and went grassroots to preach Russian Orthodoxy to the simple folk. Second, Turov depicts the similarities between Jewish and Christian popular beliefs as characterized by the centrality of magic and occult. Third, Turov notices an important liturgical revivalism among the Russian Orthodox,

20. Yaffa Eliach, "The Russian Dissenting Sects and Their Influence on Israel Baal Shem Tov, Founder of Hasidism," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 36 (1968): 57–83.

reminiscent of similar changes in hasidic liturgy in the early eighteenth century. Russian Orthodox thinkers, discovers Turov, criticized the commonly practiced prayer. They sought to transform their believers by making their prayers permeate every act of their daily lives and regarded prayers as an intentional, not a mechanical, experience. Turov points to striking affinities between these revivalist liturgical innovations among Russian Orthodox thinkers and the revision of prayer among Hasidim.

Departing from *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* ideological concerns, Turov turns to some institutional similarities between the Russian Orthodox *startsy* (elders) and the zaddikim. Both groups provided spiritual and physical healing and acted as intermediaries between God and their followers. As the Russian Orthodox believed in the holiness of the *startsy* and came to them for blessings and magical healing, likewise, Jews felt awe before the zaddikim and flocked to their courts for spiritual and physical accommodation. The cults of the elders and the zaddikim cast a pietistic spell on the local population. The picture becomes particularly tempting for further research, as Turov garners proof from ethnographic studies discussing how Christians resorted to Jewish zaddikim in cases of need. Yet Turov's knowledge of Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian cultures and his command of Hebrew and Church Slavonic could have produced a much better outcome. The next step requires a thoroughly reconstructed sociocultural context, which would bring Turov's highly productive yet purely theoretical insights down to earth. Then, perhaps, one would discover a paramount difference between the Russian Orthodox *startsy* and the hasidic masters: Unlike the latter, the former stayed in the countryside, cherished their asceticism, and did not drink.

Landing Hasidism Poland and Russia

David Assaf once noticed that historical scholarship lacks a basic systematic sketch of the full historical, biographical, and chronological picture of Hasidism in Poland.[21] Glenn Dynner made an ambitious attempt to fill this gap by tracing the spread of Hasidim in central Poland from the 1750s to the mid-nineteenth century. A follower of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*, Dynner has published what is most likely to become the standard book on a previously underresearched subject. His *Men of Silk* is a meticulously documented revision of the received common sense regarding hasidic leadership as an antimercantile, anti-aristocratic and democratically oriented institution seeking to recruit followers among the needy, the poor, and the uneducated. The opposite is the case, maintains Dynner. To challenge the romanticized historiography of hasidic masters, he traces their social functions, patterns of behavior, genealogical links, and economic ties. Using an impressive corpus of hundreds of previously unexplored Polish archival documents, Dynner proves that the Polish hasidic leaders came from aristocratic families, recruited followers from among the rabbinic elite, and were the populists rather

21. David Assaf, "Ḥąsidut be-folin ba-me'ah ha-19—maẓav ha-meḥkar u-sekirah bibliografit," in *Ẓadikim ve-'anshei ma'aseh: meḥkarim be-ḥasidut Polin*, ed. Rachel Elior, Yisrael Bartal, and Chone Shmeruk (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994), 357.

than democratic leaders. Dynner applies to nineteenth-century Poland Moshe Rosman's dispelling notions about zaddikim as social revolutionaries and their followers as demotic, small-town folk individuals.

The Polish context furnishes a productive discussion of the hasidic–mercantile elite links. In contrast to the suggestions of such antihasidic historians as Heinrich Graetz and Simon Dubnow, Dynner portrays the hasidic movement as a modern social phenomenon that bears resemblance to its medieval predecessors. Economic and social context helps him dissipate the prevailing myth of mystical-minded hasidic masters detached from real life. On the contrary, the zaddikim enjoyed patronage and direct financial support from the rising Jewish bourgeoisie. Such industrial pioneers, future bankers, and army purveyors as the scions of the Wolberg, Mandelsberg, Lipschutz, and Bergson families performed a remarkable role in sponsoring the zaddikim of their choice. They employed hasidic masters and their closest disciples in their commercial enterprises, defended hasidic commercial and religious interests before the state authorities, and had their children marry the children of zaddikim. To compensate for these efforts, the zaddikim interceded with the supreme celestial authority on behalf of their donors—a reciprocity that Dynner wittily calls "bask[ing] in divine glory by proxy." Rejected as despised parvenus and unable to earn prestige within the underemancipated Polish society, members of the Jewish financial elite could instead acquire social visibility by supporting the zaddikim.

Dynner's contextualization makes obsolete yet another bit of received wisdom dominating the *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* scholarship: that Hasidism was a democratic and popular movement. As Dynner shows, hasidic masters emerged from the internecine elite conflict between the exclusive kabbalists and the more populist-oriented new Hasidim. The latter had an upper hand, empowered themselves, and created an entire hierarchy of communal posts under their control. According to Dynner, Polish hasidic masters rested their prestige on their noble provenance, sought ties with the mercantile elites, and adopted royal behavior. Thus, hasidic masters functioned as Jewish communal elites and were treated as Jewish communal elites. Their often misunderstood populism represented only one side of their elitist self-awareness.

The *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* focus allows Dynner to look into the earthly pursuits of the zaddikim. In contrast to their brethren in Volhynia or Podol provinces, Polish hasidic masters demonstrated a greater degree of political activism. Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, summoned in the 1840s to contribute to the committee on Jewish education and collaborate with the Ministry of People's Education, was an anomaly among the zaddikim in the Russian empire, who by and large were politically invisible. Yet Polish zaddikim were different, particularly in view of the late nineteenth-century activism of the Polish Orthodox camp and the creation of the Agudat Yisrael, the first political organization of Jewish religious traditionalists.[22] Dynner sees the activism of Polish zaddikim as responsible for the success

22. On this theme, see Gershon Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916–1939* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1996).

and rapid spread of the movement. The hasidic leaders aggressively took ascetic hasidim out of the elitist *kloyz* and brought them to communally oriented *bet midrash* (prayer houses) and eventually to the synagogue, into which they imported the Lurianic liturgy. The process of making pious *hasidim* into new-style *Hasidim* constituted what scholars today call the hasidic movement.

The analytical approaches of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* help demonstrate that Hasidim strove to reconcile kabbalistic ideology with a pragmatic perception of reality. Dynner explains this unique hasidic nexus as placing the concept of *'avodah be-gashmiyut*, worship through corporeality, at the center of hasidic praxis. Elaborated for the first time by Jacob Joseph from Polonnoe, this concept justified the hasidic metamorphosis from an elitist pietistic movement into a full-fledged social undertaking. Moreover, if holiness was to be found in the material world, there was nothing sinful in material bounty: Hasidic courts could thus adopt royal behavior. From this perspective, the activities of the communal institutions now became part of the *'avodah*, the utmost level of Judaic worship deriving from the Jerusalem Temple service—something Dynner could have elaborated in more depth and in a deeper diachronic perspective. By the same token, worship through corporeality shaped the positive attitude of Polish Hasidim toward *yikhus*, usually understood as prestigious family status. In many cases, it was a family lineage, and not just charisma, that generated the success and mass following of a hasidic leader. Ultimately, worship through corporeality informed individual pursuits of Polish Hasidim, who were full-time merchants and professionals such as Simha Bunem, the head of Pszysucha's court, a trained pharmacist, a grain and lumber merchant, a theatergoer, and perhaps even a gambler.

However attractive the intellectual understanding of hasidic ideology to explain the spread of the movement, Dynner departs from the *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* focus on hasidic doctrines, suggests a reorientation along the lines of social-historical inquiry, and advances a synthetic approach incorporating *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* patterns of thought into his thoroughly reestablished social and cultural context of a stalwart *ḥasid de'ar'a.* Against the sociocultural backdrop, Dynner elaborates his ongoing sharp dispute with Marcin Wodziński, also a follower of the earth-bound *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*, regarding the number of Hasidim in Poland. Unlike their colleagues in Russia and Galicia, the champions of Jewish enlightenment in Poland tolerated Hasidim because of their moderate behavior, social concerns, and cultural openness, maintains Dynner, and not because of the quantitative insignificance of Hasidim in early nineteenth-century Poland, as Wodziński has argued. Again, the context of the nineteenth-century demography and statistics helps Dynner explain why the available numbers, collected by Wodziński, should not be taken for granted: He reminds us that women, more often than men, became attached to hasidic masters, yet they were systematically left out of what the moderns might call a misogynistic official record.[23]

The Dynner–Wodziński controversy is a dispute between two *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*; as such, it hones their methodology, promises thought-provoking

23. Dynner, *Men of Silk*, 151–52, 158, 181–83.

insights, and enhances the methodological sophistication of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a.* Yet one should take into consideration that Wodziński's contribution is not limited to the quantitative aspect of hasidic population. In his volume *Haskalah and Hasidism in the Kingdom of Poland: A History of Conflict*, Wodziński looks into a heavily charged ideological realm—the clashes between the pious and the enlightened Hasidim and maskilim. Trying to overcome the bias of previous scholars—Raphael Mahler, among others—Wodziński suggests leaving the ideological and moving into the social. His attention to the sociocultural, quantitative, and demographic context makes him an asset among the younger generation of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*, earth-bound Hasidim. The conflict between various groups of Polish Jews, he argues, developed on a communal level; its participants were in daily contact, and their immediate contacts framed their day-to-day social reality, the only accurate context for understanding maskilim and Hasidim.

Though the Kingdom of Poland was legally part of Russia, and later, in the 1830s, Nicholas I crowned himself as Polish ruler, Wodziński reminds us that the Polish situation was different than the Russian one. Poland functioned as a semi-independent entity; Nicholas I started to circumscribe the last vestiges of its independence only after 1830. Before that time, radical enlighteners were overrepresented in the Polish government. Long before Russia established its institute of expert Jews (*uchenye evrei*) to advise governors and ministers on Jewish issues, Polish authorities regularly employed enlightened Jews to design Jewish reforms, especially in education. The Polish government empowered maskilim during the early stages of the movement, allowing them to publish their writings, dominate the *dozory bóżnicze* (new synagogue boards substituting for the *kahal*), manage social welfare institutions, establish an enlightened rabbinical school, institutionalize themselves as a social group, and eventually become financially independent from Jewish society. Most importantly, argues Wodziński, Polish maskilim sought and found a way to reform the community without radicalizing it. They focused on regenerating Jews into the "righteous and useful"; anti-talmudic assaults were peripheral in their program, and the most important representatives among them found no contradiction between traditional Jewish values and the emerging Polish nationalism.

Accurate contextualization along the lines of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* methodology furnishes Wodziński's important observations, as on the moderate, if not sometimes positive, attitudes of Polish maskilim toward Hasidism. Unlike vociferous mitnagdim, who treated Hasidim as heretics as dangerous and as central to contemporary sensibilities as the sabbateans were in the seventeenth century, Polish maskilim perceived Hasidim as a peripheral and not entirely negative phenomenon. Such early Polish enlighteners as Jacques Calmanson (1722–1811), the doctor of King Stanislaw August, in his proposal on Jewish reforms, pitied the naïve hasidic masses and criticized the swindling hasidic leadership. Unlike their blatant antihasidic polemicists in Galicia, such as Josef Perl (1773–1839), Polish maskilim treated Hasidim as a curiosity, no more dangerous than other mystical sects. Whereas Abraham Jakub Stern, Polish enlightener, mathematician, and inventor, saw hasidic prayer houses as the epicenter of Jewish obscurantism and argued for their closure—something the Poles would not do—other Polish

maskilim consistently emphasized the difference between moderate Polish hasidic zaddikim and those Galician charlatans across the border. Wodziński indicates that some harbingers of Polish enlightenment defended Hasidim as a "righteous, noble, and valuable, even if not flawless, religious movement" (146). Others emphasized that Hasidim did not deviate from the commandments of the Old Testament and could not be treated as a harmful sect. Samuel Peltyn, the traditionally educated self-made enlightened editor of the Polish-language Jewish newspaper *Israelita*, defended Hasidim for their faithfulness and reliability. Furthermore, a few of the Polish enlighteners regarded Kabbalah as an inherent element of Judaic tradition that resonated with many Jews.

Wodziński proves that Polish maskilim considered Hasidim a threat to enlightenment, not to Judaism. Testing a quantitative explanation, he maintains that Hasidim were not numerous in central Poland at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Nor were they as central to the Polish Jewish community as other scholars, influenced by the contemporary polemical literature, used to think. Wodziński neatly collects the data on Hasidim in a number of Polish provinces and estimates the total to be as low as 3 percent and as high as 9 percent of the overall Jewish population, too insignificant to threaten maskilim, who did not feel like waging war against the insignificant Hasidim.

In light of Dynner's discussion of the "moderate" hasidic masters in central Poland, Wodziński's studies suggest a different interpretation. Unlike the blatant critique of Hasidism among maskilim in Russia, there was no bitter fight among maskilim against Hasidim in central Poland. Polish maskilim were moderate integrationists rather than radical reformers and had no reason to uproot moderate Polish Hasidim. The geographic context might also be telling: Whereas in Russia, Hasidim resided in the Pale of Settlement and most maskilim lived either on its fringes (Vilna, Riga, Odessa) or in the capitals outside the Pale, in Poland, Hasidim lived side-by-side with maskilim in Lublin and Warsaw and were neither privileged nor segregated. Ultimately, Wodziński's and Dynner's arguments agree perfectly in regard to the social involvement of Polish Hasidim and maskilim. Both scholars noticed that strong ties between Polish zaddikim and the emerging economic elite made them more open to nontraditional society. Moreover, enlightened Polish Jews familiarized themselves much better with Hasidim than their Galician, Russian, and German brethren did. Therefore, Wodziński may well do without his low estimates of hasidic populations.

With the *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* contextualization principle firm in hand, Ilia Lurie opens a discussion of a pivotal feature of Hasidim from White Russia's provinces of the Pale of Settlement: their continuous quest for power. Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, known as the *Ẓemaḥ Ẓedek*, is a protagonist in Lurie's Hebrew-language volume *The Chabad Movement in Czarist Russia 1828–1882*, yet Lurie is far from creating a scholarly biography of this much-acclaimed hasidic leader, the third rebbe of the Chabad movement. He is more interested in how the Chabad court functioned rather than what it preached. Lurie uses both internal Hebrew and external Russian documents to contextualize the structure, network, and functions of the hasidic court, resorting to methodological tools of cultural history (Peter Burke) and social anthropology (Victor Turner). Lurie's

methodology allows him to portray the Chabad movement as a complex phenomenon with its own the center and periphery rather than as a homogeneous movement. Lurie introduces levels of hasidic culture, defining them as elite and popular, and conceptualizing the movement as an interaction between the two. His research challenges *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, who, more often than not, are unable to differentiate among the tiny hasidic ruling elite, the closest disciples of hasidic masters—numbering in the dozens—and the masses—numbering in the thousands—portraying them indiscriminately as Hasidim. Lurie questions one of the important premises of the previous scholarship, asking to what extent the "masses" were familiar with the Chabad ideology, shared the knowledge of the *Tanya* (the founding book of the movement), and belonged to the adepts of the rebbe.

Not ideational realms or theology but earthly power and its distribution were the driving mechanisms of the Chabad court, claims Lurie. Following David Assaf's detailed reconstruction of the court of Israel of Ruzhin, Lurie meticulously explores the relations between the rising Chabad court and the fading *kahal.* The Chabad leadership did not immediately replace the *kahal.* And the *kahal* did not continue to exist unchallenged, as one might think after reading Azriel Shokhat's influential article,[24] in the areas of Chabad control. Rather, the presence of two types of authority triggered a prolonged tension that eventually integrated the court and the communal authorities into a new type of power institution. The rebbe served as its legal authority, endorsed voluntary self-governing institutions, and imposed and collected communal tax to support the court. He also provided an appealing mode of conduct for his immediate followers. He divided his territory to facilitate fund-raising and territorial control, chose his representatives from among the most knowledgeable, and made them responsible for Chabad-imposed tax collecting and preaching the rebbe's gospel to the masses. The Chabad court was organized vertically and ideologically, yet it delegated enough power to its representatives so that internal opposition to the leader could never split the movement.

Ḥasidei de'ar'a, Lurie among them, need to make a better use of the ideas of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'.* Lurie could have enriched his narrative with some *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* concepts, particularly when he gives a "horizontal" spin to Arthur Green's "vertical" conceptualization of the zaddik's royal behavior.[25] The Chabad rebbe, as the Seer of Lublin once put it, behaved as high priest. He donned his impeccable white clothes. He appeared before the masses only on certain occasions. His immediate followers created an aura of holiness around him. He was the only conduit connecting devotees to the divine. He established a double leadership: His sons, as if the imaginary *kohanim le-hediotot* (priests for regular folk), mediated between the people and the zaddik, amplifying the spiritual ecstasy of a visitor who was granted access to the master's court.

24. Azriel Shokhat, "Hanhagah be-kehilot rusiayah 'im bitul ha-kahal," *Ẓiyon* 42 (1977): 143–233.

25. Arthur Green, "Typologies of Leadership and the Hasidic Zaddiq," in *Jewish Spirituality, from Sixteenth-Century Revival to the Present* (New York: Crossroad, 1986–87), 127–56.

As a temple-centered festivity, the zaddik's presence in town boosted trade in Lubavich, enhanced turnover, and served as a spiritual endorsement, if one believes the maskilic evidence, to an enormous amount of Jewish contraband, legalized in the eyes of the Jews through donations to the zaddik's court, which now turned into a simulacrum of the Eastern European, easily accessible Jerusalem Temple.

Lurie's forte is his exteriorization of internal Chabad history, which he integrates and then challenges with the Russian-language nineteenth-century documentary evidence. Illuminating the relations of the Chabad rebbe with the Russian government, Lurie radically alters two contradictory viewpoints: that Menachem Mendel fought aggressively against governmental attempts to impose new Jewish schooling (Michael Stanislawski) and that he passively resisted Russian educational reform of the Jews (Isaac Levitats). Lurie offers an innovative, bold, and far-reaching explanation of the rebbe's behavior. Menachem Mendel did his best to help establish new Jewish schools and urged the Jewish community to accept the imposed governmental educational reforms. He acted this way not because he feared the government but because he strove to win the government's benevolence and sympathy in an ongoing fight between the Chabad and Russian enlighteners. Pinpointing his personal patriotic and progovernment stance, Menachem Mendel pursued a twofold goal. He sought to demonstrate to the Russian officials that the Orthodox camp could and should represent Russian Jewry before the government, as it was more loyal than Russian maskilim. On the other hand, he tried to use his explicit support of the government reform as leverage to allow him to control the teaching of Jewish religious subjects in state Jewish schools. Therefore, Menachem Mendel assisted the authorities in establishing a state school in Lubavich, sponsored the school, supervised the exams, and, more generally, worked hard to dissipate governmental antihasidic prejudice.

The study of Chabad-Lubavich Hasidism implies an intensive revision of the hagiographic sources of the movement. Among other things, Lurie compares the hagiographic narrative presented by Josef Isaac Schneersohn and the corresponding Russian archival evidence and concludes that the Chabad internal historiography reflects twentieth-century sensibilities.[26] The hagiographic Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, sketched by Josef Isaac, is better situated at the head of the semiclandestine Chabad in the Soviet Union, resisting the Bolsheviks' atheistic campaign, rather than in the Russian imperial context of Nicholas I. Menachem Mendel's activities, claims Lurie, had nothing to do with an alleged attempt by the head of the movement to camouflage his clandestine subversive work. On the contrary, his was a far-reaching policy of an astute social leader in charge of an undeclared civil campaign. The rebbe sought to create a positive impression of Chabad and Hasidim in the eyes of the Russian government, do away with the attempts of maskilim to denigrate the hasidic camp before the government, destroy the cooperation between the maskilim and the

26. See Joseph Isaac Schneersohn, *The Tsemach Tzedek and the Haskalah Movement in Russia* (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1962).

government, and eventually prove that the hasidic leadership deserved to be the most reliable representative of the Russian Jewry.

Like Wodziński and Dynner, Lurie underscores the pivotal role of the external Slavic-language evidence, against the backdrop of which internal Jewish texts and events start to make historical sense. Lurie's contextualizing method once and again turns upside-down both the hagiographic and critical scholarly treatment of the subject. His conclusions fit well with recent research into the struggle for leadership among the traditional and the enlightened camp in late imperial Russia. It demonstrates the advantages of the *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* contextualization of internal hasidic history against the general cultural and societal backdrop, altering the received wisdom and opening up new patterns of thinking about Eastern European historiography.

Accommodating the star-struck Hasidim

Whereas most recent books on Hasidism deal with the main trends in the movement, David Assaf's new Hebrew volume *Caught in the Thicket* covers the abnormal, the unique, and the strange in hasidic history. The protagonists of Assaf's book are skeletons in the hasidic family closet. Some of them have been and still are considered so dangerous that hasidic collective memory has bent itself backward to keep the door closed and to pretend that the closet is and has always been empty. Indeed, for the pietistic movement, which construes its history as an uplifting and instructive parable, it is too uncomfortable to cope with such events as the conversion of Moshe, son of Shneour Zalman of Liady, the suicidal self-defenestration of the Seer of Lublin, or the barefaced physical violence against Ḥasidei Bratslav endorsed by Rabbi David Twersky, the zaddik of Talnoe. Nor can the collective hasidic memory explain how Rabbi Menachem Nahum Fridman, a relative of Israel Fridman (Yisroel Friedman), the holy zaddik of Ruzhin, could fall so low as to publish Hebrew books on comparative philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics.

To accommodate the exceptional, Assaf places his protagonists in two apparently irreconcilable contexts: collective memory and social history. The intellectual nerve of *Caught in the Thicket* is the ongoing, century-long clashes between the latter and the former. Assaf provides a wealth of examples demonstrating how hasidic memory—as well as the collective memory of the Orthodox camp at large—tends to obliterate the uncommon and the unlikely. Grappling with the obnoxious is tantamount in hasidic imagination to deviating from the righteous path onto the slippery slope of religious doubts, leading to the abyss of self-destructive bitterness. The past should look holy and should be inhabited by righteous Jewish leaders. Striving to protect the community, hasidic memory imposes its own canonical vision of the past and wipes out the apocryphal. The internal historiography of the hasidic movement stems from collective memory and comes to cleanse it from the troublesome and the exclusive. It is exactly this troublesome and exclusive that is Assaf's focus.

Assaf boldly turns the tables on the hasidic collective memory using the contextualization preached by *Ḥasidei de'ar'a.* He places the received hasidic

wisdom on its head, challenging its ethical premises and demonstrating how the traditional Jewish camp obsessed with its beatification fervor, twists, falsifies, and obliterates important moments of its own history. By doing so, Assaf opens up a vital question: how to critically reassess the internal historiography of the Orthodox Jewry, and how to write a critical history of the Jewish Orthodoxy. His answer is twofold. Above all, one needs to balance internal Jewish sources against one another—not only to emphasize contradictions but also to reconstruct the history of hasidic memory. Authors of hasidic hagiographies might present an entirely false narrative of their past, but the two-hundred-year-long story of their deception is a history that is worth studying. Then—and here Assaf joins other *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*—one needs to appraise the internal against the backdrop of the external evidence, in this case, Russian or Polish social history. In some cases—but not in all—Assaf introduces Russian- and even Ukrainian-language evidence: The chapters in which he does so (on R. Moshe Schneersohn's conversion and on the persecutions of Ḥasidei Bratslav) are the best in his book. In them, Assaf uses newly uncovered archival sources, "external" testimonies (written by converts), maskilic writings and memoirs, and internal hasidic sources. The chapters based on comparative discussion of Hebrew and Russian sources strongly suggest that one cannot write a serious history of Hasidism without engaging Eastern European sociocultural context—and Slavic-language evidence furnishes amazing discoveries.

Assaf's reconstruction of the conversion of Rabbi Moshe ben Shneour Zalman, the son of the founder of Chabad-Lubavich Hasidism, is a good example of how his methodology works. Meticulous social history comes first. Moshe Schneersohn was born about 1784 and became known among his family members as a strange child. The family spent significant sums on his doctors, was aware of his weird behavior, yet honored him with family privileges on par with his brothers. R. Moshe married Shifra, the daughter of Tsevi Hirsh of Ule, a small town in Vitebsk Province. In 1812, when Napoleon's troops moved through Belorussia toward Moscow, R. Moshe ran away to Shklov, where he was imprisoned by the French and condemned to death for spying. He was soon released, however, as the French realized that the alleged spy was mentally challenged. Most likely this dramatic experience intensified R. Moshe's mental illness. Monies raised for him by his brothers passed to his wife, probably for his extensive medical needs. In Ule, R. Moshe befriended Russian lieutenant colonel Puzanov and, apparently under his influence, chose to convert to Christianity. Most likely he converted twice, first to Catholicism and later to Russian Orthodoxy. As a Christian neophyte, he found himself under the protection of the Russian church; prominent church hierarchs taught him the basics of Russian Orthodoxy. Notwithstanding his conversion, his brothers wanted him back home, arguing that he was mentally ill and that his conversion was null and void. Yet Alexander I looked into the matter and forbade sending R. Moshe back home. R. Moshe died in the Obukhovskaia hospital in St. Petersburg, where Ivan Orlai, a Russian medical celebrity, advised sending him for tests and treatment.

Assaf challenges the evidence on which *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* historians used to rely, demonstrating how various groups with a vested interest in this

story used it for propaganda purposes. Some maskilim engaged R. Moshe's personal tragedy to poke fun at hasidim who might have been as crazy and insane as R. Moshe. Mitnagdim spread rumors that he drowned: the one who converted through baptismal waters should be punished by waters, they implied. Jewish converts to Christianity argued that R. Moshe was in good health and did what every Jew should do. R. Moshe's family was reticent on the issue: Seeking oblivion, they preferred to move to the Land of Israel. But Chabad advanced a counter-history, attempting to glorify R. Moshe's memory and make the unfortunate rebbe's son into a martyr. Josef Isaac Schneersohn invented a story recalling the 1263 disputation in Barcelona and having nothing to do with Russian realities. He maintained that Alexander I, known for his mystical proclivities, organized a disputation between Christians and Jews (in fact, imperial Russia knows nothing of the sort). R. Moshe was forced to participate, and when, after his victory, the Synod ordered the disputation be moved from one town in the interior Russia to another, he ran away, went into hiding and died in Radomysl. Indeed, the documents that Shaul Stampfer found in the Minsk archive and shared with David Assaf made all those versions obsolete.

Assaf returns any ideological take on the story to its source—to the realm of imagination, ideas, and agendas, showing that *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* methodology fails to grasp the empirical reality and constitutes reality on its own. His approach is equidistant from both the cynical mockery of maskilim and the outward falsification of Hasidim. One can hardly learn a lot about Hasidism from the drama of R. Moshe; but one can learn a lot from the ways in which various contemporary groups dealt with the abnormal and the strange. Thus, Assaf underscores the necessity for a historian of Hasidism to constantly and consistently move beyond the *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* context.

Hasidic studies between heaven and earth

The modern historiography of Hasidism is split into two opposing groups, star-struck and earth-bound Hasidim, *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* and *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*, respectively, of which the former are more interested in Hasidism, the movement, and the latter in Hasidim, the people. Discussing the ideational aspect of Hasidism, *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* have left no stones unturned. They have produced sophisticated research into the hasidic primary sources, such as homilies, hagiographies, letters, and memoirs. They have introduced productive intellectual patterns that are indispensable for the explanation of hasidic engagement with traditional Jewish sources, biblical or rabbinic. Yet quite often, they refuse to acknowledge that the sources with which they work contain thick literary layers, that they are in most cases thoroughly edited, that they reflect the contemporary agendas and concerns of the editor and the printer and their corresponding audience, and that they manifest the attitudes of the narrator to his narrative. All these concerns do not change the perception among *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* of the trustworthiness of their primary sources. They disagree that hagiographies are much later reflections compiled by a not at all disinterested editor with an eye on the agenda of his contemporary audience. The notion of "hierarchy," whimsically banished from

American campuses, is ostracized from *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* research, too. All sources are important; circumstances shaping and differentiating them—or their genre—are not.

For *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, Hasidism as a stage in the evolution of Judaism is more significant than Hasidim as people among other Jews. *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* claim interest in a social perspective, yet they reconstruct the social context of Hasidism through sources that fit the study of the history of ideas. What has long been assessed in modern humanities as "literature" they still consider "history." They are efficient at treating Hasidism within the context of Jewish mysticism. Yet they need to better engage the social, cultural, comparative religion, and perhaps ethnographic context to explain the specificity of Hasidism as a Polish, Eastern European, or early modern European phenomenon. While they emphasize some overarching aspects of Hasidism such as messianism, they fail to explain the differences and specificities of, say, Josef Karo's messianism and that of Yehile Mikhel of Zolochev. Their Besht is not entrenched in any grassroots reality. He could emerge in seventeenth-century Salonika, eighteenth-century Podolia, nineteenth-century Bobruisk, or twentieth-century Monsey. *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* readily refer to Międzybóż or Kuty, yet the Besht for them is a heaven-dweller who transcended his earthly reality. What they find important about him is his alleged revolutionary role in the making of Hasidism, not what he was for the town-dwellers of the 1750s in the Polish private town of Międzybóż.

Ḥasidei dekokhvaya' have increasingly taken what Hasidim thought for what they did. As the perspective of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* underscores continuities above all, unconnected social events become one. The mid-seventeenth-century Cossack revolution known in Jewish historiography as *gezerot taḥ ve-tat* (the Catastrophe of 1648–49), the late seventeenth-century aftermath of the sabbatean schism, the blood libel cases of the 1740s, and the Haidamaks rebellions of the 1760s—*Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* glue these events onto a historical continuity they call the "crisis." Benjamin Nathans has usefully observed that the notion of crisis has become as important and as meaningless for the study of Eastern European Jewry as the concept of the rise of the middle class for the study of early modern Britain.[27] Yet *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* are comfortable with grand historical narratives: Hasidism for them was and still is a movement emerging as a response to the religious, communal, and political crises in eastern Poland. The question, indeed, is not whether there was or was not a crisis in eighteenth-century Poland but whether we should use the notion of "crisis" to portray Eastern European Jewry over three centuries.

Ḥasidei de'ar'a are also not without flaws, yet they solve their methodological shortcomings by widening the concentric contexts in which they discuss Hasidism. They are quite efficient when it comes to the discussion of what Hasidim were doing, but they need to find better ways to incorporate what

27. Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2003), 8.

Hasidim were thinking—using the experience of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*. Some of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* reject internal hasidic historiography as unreliable, whereas others strive to integrate collective memory, which reflects how Hasidim wanted to be seen and how this outlook diverges from how one should see the Hasidim. *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* increasingly rely on outside sources as much more objective evidence than the internal Jewish. They seem to realize that, compared to Jewish witnesses, Polish or Russian authorities acted as relatively disinterested observers. They provide historians with newly uncovered sources, enabling them to recreate an accurate context for the hasidic movement by looking at the corresponding shtetls in which hasidic masters resided. Yet *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* are much less efficient when they need to discuss what Hasidim were thinking. Some of them, but not all, do not seem to have any positive way of treating the vast corpus of hagiographic sources; they reject most of it as unreliable. Apparently, *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* do not have a response to the question of what to do with hasidic figures for whom we have only tales or other fictitious narratives. There is hardly any doubt that *Ḥaye Moharan* is a hagiography *par excellence* composed by one of the loyal adepts of Rabbi Nachman. Should we dismiss it as a source covering the life of Rabbi Nachman because we do not have any external evidence for the corresponding episodes of his life?

In his review of Assaf's book on Rabbi Israel of Ruzhin, Yosef Dan mentioned that the Scholem school discusses Hasidism through relations between man and God, whereas historians of the Dinur school look into the worldly matters.[28] In fact, the border separating these two trends is more subtle than the one separating social history from the history of thought and the disciples of Scholem from the disciples of Dinur. Two key scholars who, to my mind, represent the clashing groupings, Moshe Rosman and Immanuel Etkes, are both social historians, and yet Rosman's work is the epitome of the methodology of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a*, whereas Etkes's scholarship is firmly embedded in the methodological setting of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*. If one compares David Assaf's dissertation to his book *The Regal Way*, on Israel of Ruzhin, and the latter to his *Caught in the Thicket*, one would discover his consistently growing concern for the methodology, sources, and themes of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a.* Glenn Dynner's *Men of Silk* reflects the author's intent to critically reassess the methodology of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* without leaving its realm. Marcin Wodziński's *Haskalah and Hasidism* and Ilia Lurie's *'Edah u-medinah* demonstrate the strong desire of their authors to become stalwart *Ḥasidei de'ar'a.* Igor Turov's most interesting insights lead him from the heights of *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* into the depths of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* Slavic contextualization. Like most *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*, Zeev Gries works with the published Jewish sources, but he approaches them through *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* methodology. It is particularly amazing that the questions that *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* ask are shaped predominantly by *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*. Furthermore, some *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* were trained (and tolerated) by *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*,

28. Yosef Dan, "R. Yisrael mi-Ruzhin: beyn ẓaddik ha-dor le-ẓaddick ha-'emet," *Mada'ei ha-yahadut* 37 (1997): 297–308, esp. 301.

which makes one think of *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* not only as a school or grouping but also as a stage in the study of Hasidism.

Ḥasidei de'ar'a have already proved that an accurate sociocultural reconstruction is the only way to conduct a serious study of the hasidic movement. To intelligently discuss eighteenth-century Hasidism, one needs to look at Międzybóż, Szpola, and Międzyrzecz and analyze the nineteenth-century movement in such towns as Ruzhin, Talnoe, Makarov, and Sadagora. The better one knows the concrete realities of a shtetl, the better one is able to embed the hasidic masters of flesh and blood in their social setting and understand who they were. Now *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* might want to use a major source of their opponents—internal Jewish sources, (e.g., hagiographies)—and demonstrate to what extent hagiographies were prescriptive, not descriptive sources, illuminating what to believe in rather than portraying life as it was. At the same time, *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'* should balance their insights into the ideational with an accurate contextualization of their sources. Among other things, they should place hagiographies in the context of the time and place in which they were produced and prove that they are historical—but their historicity is different: They accurately reflect the time period in which they saw light, not which they portrayed; they reflect the agenda of the people or groups that produced them, and not the people or groups they claimed to genuinely represent. Ultimately, the representatives of both trends should seek new ways to bring together hasidic theology and hasidic society.

As a person with a vested interest in the hasidic scholarship, I think that the synthesis of what Hasidim thought and what they did is more likely to be achieved within the *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* methodology. But earth-bound Hasidim should not rush to celebrate their triumph. Instead, they should move further away from social into cultural history, hone their methodological tools, and redefine what they understand as an accurate context. This becomes more important as modern humanities deepen and widen what one may call the sociocultural context. If modern social historians do not find ways to sharpen their contextualization tools, in a half century, today's *Ḥasidei de'ar'a* might very well find themselves among yesterday's *Ḥasidei dekokhvaya'*.

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