CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DAVID BEN ARYEH LEIB OF LIDA
AND HIS MIGDAL DAVID ACCUSATIONS OF
PLAGIARISM IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY AMSTERDAM¹

David ben Aryeh Leib of Lida (c. 1650–96) was chief rabbi of several communities, among them the Ashkenaz community of Amsterdam, and the author of highly regarded books. His career was clouded, however, by charges of slander, Sabbateanism, and plagiarism. Although exonerated of the first two charges, the cloud of literary piracy has cast a continuing shadow over Lida’s reputation. Two of Lida’s works, Migdal David and Divrei David, are attributed to other writers. The article addresses the validity of those charges, finds that Lida himself alluded to the fact that he was not the author, and suggests that he expressed regret, albeit in an enigmatic manner, in a later work.

Hayyim ha-Kohen … Migdal David on Ruth, printed by others but certainly [written] by him.

Migdal David commentary on Ruth. In truth, the author was Hayyim ha-Kohen, author of Tur Bareket … (Shem ha-Gedolim).²

R. David ben Aryeh of Lida (c. 1650–96) is an arresting but enigmatic figure. A person of considerable stature, chief rabbi of several communities, among them the Ashkenaz community of Amsterdam, he was the author of highly regarded books, often reprinted to this day.³ This image is offset, however, by the controversy and charges that tarnished his reputation, foremost that he was a follower of Shabbtai Zevi, and, secondarily, that he was a slanderer and plagiarist.

¹ The original version of this article was published in Shofar 19:2 (West Lafayette, Ind., 2001), pp. 117–28.
² Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, Shem ha-Gedolim ha-Shalem with additions by Menachem Mendel Krengel (Jerusalem, 1979), Ma’arakhet Gedolim het 33 and Ma’arakhet Seforim mem 32 [Hebrew].
³ Lida’s other works, many printed posthumously, include: Sod HaShem (Amsterdam, 1680); Be’er Esoh (Frankfort on Oder/ or Lublin, 1684); Shomer Shabbat (1687); Ir Miklat (Dyhernfurth, 1690); Helkes Ezenim and annotations to Jehiel Melli’s Taqquhei Zahav (Feurth, 1693); Ir David (Amsterdam, 1719); and Tod Kol Bo (Frankfort on Main, 1727). He also wrote a commentary, Be’er Mappim Hayyim, on the Tur Shulhan Arukh O. H., for which he received approbations but it was never printed.
Given Lida’s prominence, and that his books are still current and available, it is somewhat of an anomaly that he is so little known. It is the purpose of this article to briefly recount the essential features of David ben Aryeh of Lida’s life, the charges and disputes that clouded his reputation, and, in greater detail, to review the charge of plagiarism brought against him. Lida has had both defenders and detractors; it has not, however, been previously recognized that he clouded the issue, issuing disclaimers, informing readers that a text was not original, while, simultaneously and more prominently, taking full credit for a disputed work’s authorship.

Lida was born into a family with rabbinic antecedents in the Lithuanian community of Zwollen. His father had been rabbi in Zwollen, and he was a nephew of R. Moses ben Naphtali Zevi Rivkes, and among the leading students of R. Joshua Hoeschel ben Jacob of Cracow, one of the preeminent rabbinic figures of the time. Lida officiated as rabbi in a number of communities in eastern Europe, beginning, in 1671, with Lida, in Grodno, Byelorussia, the source of the family name—his son R. Pethahiah and his grandson, R. David Benjamin, also served there in the same capacity—and subsequently in Ostrog and Mainz, Germany. These were followed by his appointment, in 1681, as the chief rabbi of the Ashkenazic community in Amsterdam, succeeding R. Meir Stern of Fulda (d. 1679).

The Jewish community of Amsterdam, originally of Sephardic composition, saw an influx of Ashkenazim after the Thirty Years War in Germany and the Chmielnicki massacres in Poland, so that by 1674 the Jewish population of Amsterdam numbered 2,500 Sephardic and 5,000 Ashkenazic Jews. In addition to the existence of separate Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities, the latter were, if formally united, riven

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1 Abraham Abba Eisner, *Toledot ha-Gaon Rabbi David Lida* (Breslau 1938), p. 8, who also notes that Lida quotes Torah in the name of his grandfather in *Helki Evenim*.
2 Moses ben Naphtali Zevi Rivkes (d. 1671–72) was the author of *Be’er ha-Golah* (Amsterdam, 1660–61) on the *Shulhan Arukh*, reprinted in all subsequent editions of that work.
3 Joshua Hoeschel ben Jacob (1595–1663), rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Lublin and afterwards in Cracow, numbered among his students R. Shabbetai ben Meir ha-Kohen (Shakh) and R. Samuel Koidanover. Among his published works are *Toledot Aaron* (Lublin, 1682), republished with additions as *Haddotai Halakhot* (Frankfort, 1725), and *Hanukkat ha-Torah* (1880). Other works remain in manuscript. Concerning Lida and Joshua Hoeschel see Hayyim M. Dembitzer, *Kelilat Jo* (Cracow, 1893), I, p. 68a, and II, p. 59a–59b [Hebrew].
4 Concerning Jewish immigration to Amsterdam see Joseph Kaplan, “Amsterdam and Ashkenazic Migration in the Seventeenth Century,” pp. 22–44, and Jonathon Israel,