

The Enigmatic R. David Lida

by Tevie Kagan

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Part I: R. David of Lida and Plagiarism

R. David ben Aryeh Leib of Lida (c.1650-1696) is a fascinating and enigmatic figure. He was the rabbi of multiple communities over the course of his lifetime including Lida, Ostrog, Mainz, and the Ashkenazic community in Amsterdam. He was forced to leave Amsterdam under a cloud of alleged plagiarism and possible Sabbatean beliefs; though he was acquitted of these charges by the council of the four lands (Va'ad Arba Ha-Aratzot), he never recovered from the various accusations. He is not a well-known individual today, yet many of his works survive and are still available in print. This post (the first of two) will present a detailed account of his life and will attempt to see if both the accusations of plagiarism and heretical beliefs have merit.

R. (David) Lida was born in Zwollen, Lithuania into a prominent rabbinical family. His uncle was R. Moshe Rivkes, author of the *Be'er Ha-Golah*. Other family members that Lida cites within his works include R. Yeshaya Horowitz, author of the *Shnei Luchos Habris (Shelah)*, R. Yosef of Pozna, R. Naftali Hertz of Lemberg, and R. Yaakov Cohen of Frankfurt. He was married to Miriam the daughter of R. Wolf Yuspef of Lvov (Lemberg) and had two sons, Nathan and Pesachya, and two daughters. One of the daughters was married to R. Yerucham b. Menachem, who helped prepare *Shomer Shabbos* (one of Lida's early works) for printing, and the other was married to R. Abraham b. Aaron, who helped with the printing of *Shomer Shabbos* in Amsterdam. In his work *Ir David*, Lida testifies^[1] that his primary teacher was R. Joshua Hoeschel b. Jacob of Cracow (c.1595-1663), who was one of preeminent rabbis of the time.^[2]

From 1671 until 1677, R. David was rabbi in Lida. He then served as a rabbi in Ostrog and Mainz, replacing R. Samuel David b Chanoch of Lublin, the author of *Divrei Shmuel* who had passed away. In 1681, Lida left Mainz and became a rabbi in Amsterdam. After being forced out of Amsterdam, Lida appealed to the council of the four lands. By doing so he succeeded in getting himself reinstated in Amsterdam. However, his position was untenable, so he reached a financial agreement and moved to Lvov, where he lived until his death in 1696.^[3]

The following is a list of Lida's works (with the topic covered in parentheses):

- .. *Beer Esek* – Frankfurt on the Oder/Lublin, 1684 (apologetic)
- .. *Beer Mayim Chaim*- lost, never printed (on Code of law)
- .. *Chalkei Avanim*- Fuerth, 1693 (on Rashi's commentary on bible) reprinted in *Yad Kol Bo* under the title *Migdol Dovid*
- .. *Divrei David*- Lublin, 1671 (ethics)
- .. *Dovev Sifsei Yesheinim*- lost, never printed (mishnah)
- .. *Ir David*- Amsterdam, 1683 (incomplete), 1719 (complete) (Homiletics)
- .. *Ir Miklat* – Dyhernfurth, 1690 (613 commandments)

.. [Migdol David](#) –Amsterdam, 1680 (Ruth)

.. *Pitschei She'arim - Pirush Tefilos-* partially printed in *Yad Kol Bo* (prayer)

.. *Shalshelas Zahav*

.. *Shir Hillulim-* Amsterdam, 1680 (poem in honor of dedication of a new Torah)

.. *Shomer Shabbos* – Amsterdam, 1687 printed with *Tikkunei Shabbos*, reprinted in *Yad Kol Bo*, and reprinted separately in Zolkolov, 1804 (laws of Sabbath)

.. *Sod Hashem Sharbit Hazahav*– Amsterdam, 1680 (on circumcision)

.. *Tapuchei Zahav kitzur reishis chochma* – Fuerth, 1693

.. *Yad Kol Bo-* Amsterdam/Frankfurt on the Oder, 1727(Collection)

While in Amsterdam (about 1694), Lida was accused of libel, plagiarism and Sabbatean leanings. Since many of the documents surrounding both controversies no longer exist, we can only attempt to recreate what happened.

Lida is Accused of Libel

R. Yaakov Sasportas (c.1610-1698) has a series of responsa^[4] that refer to the libel case. One of the prominent members of the Sephardic congregation, R. Nissan ben Judah Leib, the brother in law of R. Isaac Benjamin Wolf ben Eliezer Ashkenazi (Chief Rabbi in Berlin and the author of the *Nachlas Binyomin* (Amsterdam, 1682)), claimed that on a trip to Wessel R. Nissan had found defamatory letters about himself and R. Isaac Benjamin Wolf, which R. Nissan alleged were written by Lida. Lida denied having written these letters. R. Nissan submitted copies of the letters to the Sephardic court, presided over by R Yitzchak Abuhav, R Yaakov Sasportas and R Shmuel Deozida. The court requested the original letters, and when they could not be produced, the court decreed that Lida did not write the letters and that he was an upstanding rabbi of the community. The court also demanded that R. Nissan apologize, which he did. Subsequently the Sephardic court sent a letter to both R Wolf Lippman and the Council of the Four Lands requesting they revoke all bans against Lida and to forgive both themselves and Lida. This letter included the signatures of many prominent rabbis of the time, though many of these rabbis may have been influenced by Lida's famous brother-in-law, Yitzchak b. Abraham of Posnan, who was the first signature on the list.

Additionally, Lida himself wrote a work entitled *Beer Esek*,^[5] in which he attempts to clear his name. The work begins with an introductory homily, after which Lida then proceeds to defend himself from the charges of plagiarism. Lida's letter ends off with letters and signatures of approbation..

Charges of Plagiarism

Charges of plagiarism hounded Lida regarding many of his works. The first work that this charge was leveled at was *Divrei David* (Lublin, 1671), an ethical treatise broken up into seven parts, corresponding to the days of the week. On the title page of this work, Lida states that it is culled from the words of Rishonim upon which he added his own additions. The bibliographer, Joseph Zedner (1804-71), in his *Catalogue of the Hebrew Books in the Library of the British Museum* (London, 1867), was the first to note that the text of the *Divrei David* is identical to a part of the text of the *Sefer Yirah* published by Aryeh Judah Loeb ben Aryeh Priluck.

The work itself contains information that is inconsistent with Lida's biography. For example, the author talks about trips to Israel (nos. 6, 77, and 85), serving as rabbi in Israel (no. 46), and refers to a work that he wrote called *Zer Zahav* on the Bible (no.72). At the time *Divrei David* was published Lida was 21 and, as far as we know, never visited Israel, as he never mentions it anywhere else in any of his works. Even more puzzling is that he never authored a work on the Bible called *Zer Zahav*! Interestingly, Gershom Scholem argues that whoever the author of *Divrei David* was the author had Sabbatean leanings as there is a possible Shabbati Zevi reference in the beginning of the section on Shabbos.^[6] Was this work stolen from a previous work? It would appear so; but, in defense of Lida, he admits that he culled his work from other sources. Nevertheless, this would not account for his borrowing of accounts of positions, travels or works written.

The *Sefer Yirah* was first published from manuscript in 1724 (Lida had published *Divrei David* in 1671). The publisher of the *Sefer Yirah*, Priluck, clearly states on the title page that he found a manuscript and had no idea as to whom was its author. Priluck adds statements and revises the original work where he saw fit. One example is in the "morning half" of the "first day," where he adds (in the fifth section) that he already printed a prayer book which was grammatically correct. Most of the other additions are merely clarifications of the earlier work [for example, in the "night section" of the first day he clarifies that the Shema referred to is the one said in bed before sleep (*Kriat Shema al Ha'Mita*)]. Within the section of the fourth day Lida mentions (part 77) that he was in Jerusalem, and he concludes that one should cover their head with a hat when saying grace (*birkat ha'mazon*); yet this last item is not found in the Priluck version of *Sefer Yirah*. In total, there are about twenty slight differences, but most are stylistic, with Priluck changing particular words and verses. The *Sefer Yirah* concludes with a statement that this is where the manuscript ends and that he does not want to add from other sources. The Warsaw edition of 1873 of the *Divrei David* adds an entire section of good traits (*minhagim tovim*). Interestingly the most recent reprinting (Brooklyn, 2006 by R. N.M., German) adds 2 more pages of character traits not found in the Warsaw edition. This would not be the only work that would come under suspicion that Lida wrote.

Lida's most famous work that is under the suspicion of plagiarism is his *Migdol David*, published in 1680 while Lida was still rabbi in Mainz. The work was published with 17 approbations (*haskamot*). While some of the approbations do not mention the work *Migdol David* specifically, by reading them one gets the idea that many felt it was an original work. In his *Beer Esek*, Lida alludes to R. Nisan's claim that accused Lida of stealing the work (R. Nisan did so by saying that Lida "wears the talis of another"). Many believe that this work was really a copy of R. Hayim Ben Abraham

Ha-Kohen's (c.1585-1655)^[7] *Toras Chessed*. For instance, R. Hayyim Yosef David Azulai, writes "truthfully [*Migdol David*] is the work of R. Hayim Kohen, author of the *Tur Barekes...*" (*Shem ha-Gedolim, Marekhet Seforim*, s.v. *Migdol David*). Azulai also cites the Yaavetz (R. Yaakov Emden) and his charge in *Toras Hakanaos* (see below). The Menachem Tziyon attempts to clear Lida's name by showing that many great rabbis attested to his kabalistic knowledge, but ultimately he too leans towards the plagiarism charge.^[8]

The Yaavetz, in his *Toras Hakanaos*, lists a group of works that he charged with having Sabbatean leanings and allusions. He includes Lida's work, not as a potential Sabbatean work,^[9] but rather as a plagiarized one, and, more specifically, to support his claim that Lida's character was suspect, and even possibly Sabbatean. Sabbateans were known to have "double natures," one being outwardly righteous, while the inner being corrupt and immoral (more

about this to come in part 2 of this post, R. David of Lida and Sabbatianism). The Yaavetz shows that Lida took the work but left an allusion to Hayim Kohen's name in the introduction, which states, "ממקור מיים בריכה העליונה" "כה"נא רב"א Lida's choice of words is suspect, as Lida was neither a Kohen nor named Hayim.

More recently, Marvin Heller^[10] has argued that a parable in the introduction to Lida's work alludes to the fact that it is not an original work. The allegory (from the *Zohar*) regards a rooster who finds a pearl while searching for food. Startled by the pearl's beauty, the rooster recoils and wonders what caused the pearl to be hidden. A man, seeing the rooster recoil, stops to see what caused the reaction; when he sees the pearl, he proceeds to give it to the king. As a result, the king honors the rooster. Lida writes: "So to I found in this scroll blossoms and fruit which give forth a brightness, delightful to the sight and desirable to the eye, 'its fruit is good for food' (Genesis 2:9)...when this distinguished book comes to the hand of one who appreciates its value ... and also who *publishes* it will be remembered for good before the King, King of the universe" (emphasis added). This choice of language seems to be referring to a publisher not an author. In Lida's *Ir Miklat*, in the glosses where Lida mentions "my book *Migdol David*,"^[11] Azulai (in his comments) interjects: "He printed it." Eisner seeks to defend Lida, even though he had never seen a copy of the rare *Migdol David*. Eisner argues that since all the charges were found to be groundless in the first case against Lida, so too the plagiarism charges must be false. He attempts to buttress this by showing that Lida had a reputation for being a Kabbalist. In 1681, the notorious anti-Semite Johann Andreas Eisenmenger (ca.1654-1704) visited Amsterdam and wrote about meeting Lida in his *Entdecktes Judentum* (Frankfurt am Main, 1700). He speaks of Lida and how he was a great scholar and Kabbalist. Interestingly, towards the end of the introduction of *Ir David*, Lida states that he hopes that this work will be printed without the mistakes and errors that the printers added to his work *Migdol David*, which he was unable to fix. Is Lida attempting to lay the groundwork for the argument that any troubling pieces within *Migdol David* are not his, but rather the work of the printers?

Slightly more telling about both of the works that are suspected of being stolen is that Lida references them in his other works very infrequently. In contrast, *Ir David* is referenced quite frequently within his other writings. When themes or interpretations are referenced in *Chalkei Avanim* that are supposedly printed in Lida's other works (specifically *Migdol David*) he does not give the work's name, but just the statement "and it is understood."^[12]

Even after his death Lida's works have encountered problems. His son Pesachya printed a collected volume of his works entitled *Yad Kol Bo* (Amsterdam 1727) in which was included a work on Psalms called *Assarah Hillulim*. According to Brill, this was actually written by the Calvinist-Hebraist, [Heinrich Jacob van Bashuysen](#) (1679-1750) and published in *Sefer Tehilim im Pirush ha-Katzar*, Hanau, 1712.^[13]

^[1] [Ir David](#), First Sermon

^[2] See Dembitzer *Kelilas Yofi* Krakow:1893 pg59a-59b

^[3] For the date of Lida's death, see Solomon Buber, *Anshei Shem* (Krakow, 1895), where he recreates the correct date based on approbations Lida had given, which are marked after the date on his tombstone.

^[4]

— *Ohel Yaakov* 15-16

[5] Reprinted in Abraham Eisner, *Toledot Hagaon R. David Lida* (Breslau, 1938) and in Aaron Freimann, *Sefer Hayovel for Nahum Sokolow* (Warsaw, 1904)

[6] See Warsaw edition that actually puts Lida as author and includes that he wrote *Zer Zahav* and *Bris Yitzchok*, which Lida did not.

[7] See Encyclopedia Judaica entry where Scholem states that Lida's plagiarism was well known in Kabbalistic circles before H.J.D. Azulai made it public. Scholem offers no source or examples for this statement. Also interesting to note is that whatever Azulai's thoughts on Lida's character may have been, he still wrote glosses to Lida's work *Ir Miklat*.

[8] See also *Ohr Hayim* (Hayim Michael), where he unequivocally states that it is a stolen work from R. Hayim Kohen.

[9] Yehuda Liebes, in "*Sefer Tzadik Yesod Olam- Mythos Shabetai*" (reprinted in *On Sabbateanism and its Kabbalah: Collected Essays* (Jerusalem, 1995), pg. 303-304, note 22) shows that even *Migdol David* is not free of possible Sabbatean leanings. These could not have come from R. Hayim Kohen as he died before Sabbateanism grew to the movement that it later became.

[10] Marvin J. Heller, *David Ben Aryeh Leib of Lida and his Migdol David: Accusations of Plagiarism in Eighteenth Century Amsterdam*, *Shofar* (Jan. 1, 2001) (translation of text is his).

[11] Commandment 190

[12] For examples see Brooklyn edition 2006—pg. 5, fn 1; pg. 8, fn 8.

[13] For more on Bashuysen, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica* under his name entry. Eisner strongly disagrees and says that it clearly is not a Christian work, and that it includes many ideas from Lida's other works.