

Sabbatianism, especially their *Halachic* antinomianism to have subsided – and certainly within the conservative *Mitnagdic* movement:

כל המצות יש בהם בחי' עלי' וירידות...לפוגמין' [צ"ל לפעמים] עושים רש"ם [רצונו
של מקום] כו'

“All the commandments have an aspect of advance and decline...sometimes one does the will of God, etc.” (Wildmann, *Be'er Yitzchak*, commentary on R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Mayim Adirim*, 1987:4-5).⁵⁸²

If one follows through on the ‘coded “etc.”’ and concludes the sentence, the implication is ‘*sometimes one keeps the commandments...and sometimes one does not.*’ Liebes (2003:31, footnote 236) notes that the printed text of *Be'er Yitzchak* also contains an ellipsis (the ‘three dots’ in the aforementioned excerpt), after “*advance and decline.*” Perhaps the ellipsis serves to indicate that the original manuscript was illegible, or perhaps it suggests that the text was censored. I would imagine that at a time when the students of the Vilna Gaon were using *Sabbatian* terminology and ideology to *counter*, or as they saw it, to *redirect Sabbatianism* while mystically and counterintuitively standing on the shoulders of the ‘*first Messiah*,’ Shabbatai Tzvi – that was radical enough, but they still printed it. However, anything that would have remotely resembled *Halachic* antinomianism – like describing cycles of *Halachic* “*advance and decline*” – would have been overreaching and may have been the reason for what appears to have been a censoring of the text.

Both R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov and his student R. Yitzchak Isaac Chaver made frequent references to the controversial *Nekuda* – or ‘*Pintele*’ – and even interpreted it more pointedly than the *Chassidim* (see sections 5.3.2.3 and 5.3.2.4). In the following extract, R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov discusses two Messiahs. Shabbatai Tzvi is the first Messiah⁵⁸³ and he is associated with the first-century *Talmudic* rabbi turned heretic, Elisha ben Avuya, also known as *Acher*.⁵⁸⁴ The first Messiah, *Acher*, must be ‘fixed’ by the second Messiah corresponding to R. Akiva:

⁵⁸² Translation is mine.

⁵⁸³ ‘First’ and ‘second’ Messiahs are used in the sense of being relative to each other and not necessarily first and second on the chronological stage of history, as we shall see.

⁵⁸⁴ As mentioned earlier, R. Nachman expounded upon the miniscule difference between the written forms of *Echad* (אחד) and *Acher* (אחר) being the *Nekuda* or “*point of the letter Dalet*

ר' עקיבא בסוד...ויצאה נשמתו באחד, שהוא תיקן מה שקלקל אחר...וזה שורש הנקודה של ד' של אחד...וזה הנקודה שורש של זה השער, צדיקים יבואו בו...כי התורה ממתקת הכל...תורה גי' סמא"ל ליל"ת...עו"ן ופש"ע וחטא"ה

“R. Akiva [corresponds] to the secret of...his soul departing [while he recited] Echad, [and he] restores what Acher had damaged...This is the root of the Nekuda [point] of the Dalet of Echad...and this Nekuda [corresponds to] the root of ‘This is the gate [to the Lord]...Tzadikim pass through it’ (Ps. 118:20)...[This method is effective] because the Torah sweetens everything...[The word] ‘Torah’ has the same numerical value [611] as ‘Samael Lilit’...[and also the same numerical value as] ‘[forgiving] iniquity, transgression, and sin’ (Exodus 34:7)” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:116).⁵⁸⁵

The *Nekuda* plays a very significant role in this teaching because it still relates to the first Messiah, Shabbatai Tzvi. This is reminiscent of *Sabbatian Kabbala* where:

היוד היא הנקודה ונשמת המשיח

“the Yud is the Nekuda and soul of the Messiah” (Liebes 2003:28).⁵⁸⁶

This is because “*the root of the Nekuda*” is the “*gate*” through which “*Tzadikim pass through*” (צדיקים יבואו בו). The first three letters of the Hebrew phrase make up the word צבי, or “*Tzvi*.” This teaching emphasises the notion that the spiritual and messianic archetype of a *R. Akiva* can ‘fix’ and ‘sweeten’ the iniquity of an *Acher*, in any of their

(ד),” and the importance of turning the “*Acher into Echad*” (see section 5.3.2.3). R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, a contemporary of R. Nachman, expands on this idea and *Acher* and *Echad* are no longer mere concepts, but become personified as *Acher* (Elisha ben Avuya) who also represents the ‘first Messiah’ (= Shabbatai Tzvi) – who must be redeemed by R. Akiva, the ‘second Messiah.’ R. Akiva (a historical contemporary of *Acher*) represents *Echad* as he died with the word *Echad*, from the declaration of the *Shema Yisrael* (Deuteronomy 6:4), on his lips. Thus, the homiletical tensions between *Acher* and *Echad* as depicted by R. Nachman, are played out more dramatically by R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, with his latter-day personifications of the Messiahs of Elisha ben Avuya and R. Akiva respectively. R. Akiva was also regarded as the most mystical of the four rabbis who entered the *Pardes* (b. *Chagiga* 14b) which may also be an allusion to R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov who was considered even more mystical than the Vilna Gaon (Liebes n.p.:41). The ‘second Messiah’ always redeems the ‘first Messiah.’

⁵⁸⁵ Translation and square brackets are mine.

⁵⁸⁶ Translation is mine.

later formulations, manifestations or incarnations. The difference between *Akiva/Echad* and *Acher* is just the tiny point or *Nekudah* of the *Yud* (י), which turns the rounded *Reish* (ר) of *Acher* (אחר) into the square-shaped *Dalet* (ד) of *Echad* (אחד). The implication seems to be that the initial *Reish* is still needed to act as the ‘base’ or ‘gate’ to form the *Dalet*.

Also, in the text are two references to a *Nachash* (*snake*). The Hebrew word for *snake*, נחש, has the same numerical value (358) as *Messiah*, משיח. Shabbatai Tzvi had strongly identified himself with the image of a snake (see section 2.2.3). In keeping with the mystical concept of spiritual equilibrium, the נחש הקדמוני (*primordial snake*) has to be countered by the other snake, the נחש הטהור (*holy snake*). But it goes even deeper, because although the later Messiah ‘sweetens’ and ‘fixes’ the earlier blemished Messiah, the earlier Messiah – Shabbatai Tzvi in this case – remains a necessary *Nekuda* and ‘gateway’ in the unfolding of the messianic program (Liebes 2003:27, 36).

R. Yitzchak Isaac Chaver refers to the Messiah who redeems Shabbatai Tzvi as נחשא דחיי (*the snake of life*). This may have been based on an interpretative reading of the biblical copper snake (Numbers 21:9) which restored life (וַחַיִּי) to those bitten by the snakes in the wilderness. R. Yitzchak Isaac Chaver explains that the function of the נחשא דחיי (*the snake of life*) is to rectify the earlier Messiah:

והוא נחשא דחיי, וע"י יתבערו אותם דאתיין מסטרא דנחש הקדמוני

“This [later Messiah] is the ‘snake of life,’ and through him are removed [or destroyed] those who come from the ‘earlier/primordial snake’” (Wildmann, *Afikei Yam*, vol. 1, 1994:37-8).⁵⁸⁷

The question, of course, is who does R. Yitzchak Isaac Chaver identify as the final Messiah who redeems Shabbatai Tzvi? In the same text by R. Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, just a few words earlier, are two references to אליהו (Eliyahu or Elijah). While one reference certainly refers to אליהו, Elijah the Prophet, the other reference adds the

⁵⁸⁷ Translation and square brackets are mine.

coded *gershaim* (*inverted commas*) often used by *Sabbatians*, to make אליהו. Liebes comments about the context of this teaching:

קשה לקרוא דברים כאלה על אליהו בספרו של ר"א, בלא לקורשם לרבו הנערץ, ר'
 אליהו חגאון מוולנה

“It is difficult to read these words about Eliyahu in the book by R. Yitzchak Isaac [Chaver], without connecting them to his admired rabbi, R. Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna” (Liebes 2003:37).⁵⁸⁸

The idea of previously failed messianic attempts rectified by the final successful accomplishment of the ultimate messianic act is described in earlier *Talmudic*⁵⁸⁹ and particularly *Kabbalistic* literature. These sources describe one or sometimes two types of snakes that impregnate the doe, איילה (representing the *Shechina*, and sometimes even the *Kelipa* or *evil forces*) and birthing the Messiah (Liebes 1992:21, 39, 45).

There are different formulations of this idea of a snake biting the doe which is derived from interpretations of Psalm 29:9, “קול יהוה יחולל אילות”, *The voice of the Lord causes hinds to calve*” (see section 4.7.5). However, R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov and his student R. Yitzchak Isaac Chaver extend the interpretations of the two snakes beyond anything expressed before. The sexual innuendo is quite graphic as two encounters are described. One encounter is successful and the other not – analogous to the staff of Moses which also alternates as a snake (Liebes n.d.:25). Shabbatai Tzvi was the ineffective Messiah who could only be redeemed by the greater *Tzadik*, the Vilna Gaon, who is described as “נחשא דחיי”, the *living or effective snake*” (Wildmann, *Afikei Yam*, vol. 1, 1994:37-8). The Vilna Gaon himself makes a similar reference to “חויא דחיי”, the *living snake*⁵⁹⁰ (Vilna Gaon, *Biur haHeichalot leGaon, Yaher Or*, 1913:29). The Vilna Gaon writes:

שתרין חויין הזן חד דחיי וחד דמותא

⁵⁸⁸ Translation and square brackets are mine.

⁵⁸⁹ b. *Bava Batra* 16b. Here the *Talmud* simply mentions how the snake, or דרקון (*drakon*) in this instance, bites the opening of the womb of the doe to aid in the birthing process. The later mystical literature expands on this imagery. For the snake injecting “*his impurity into Eve*” see *Zohar* I:54a.

⁵⁹⁰ The two Aramaic expressions, נחשא and חויא both refer to a ‘snake.’

“There are two types of snakes, one is alive, the other is dead” (Vilna Gaon, *Biur haHeichalot leGaon, Yaher Or*, 1913:35).⁵⁹¹

This style of erotic *Kabbalistic* writing (Maciejko 2014:xxv) carries some semblances of *Sabbatianism* (Halperin 2008:3; Liebes 2016:618-9) and is similar to the work *vaAvo haYom el haAyin*, attributed to R. Yehonatan Eibeschuetz, which Maciejko (2014:xix) has described as a “*pornographic text...written in the rabbinic idiom.*” In any case, no matter what idioms or imagery were used to show how the final Messiah is more effective than the earlier ones, it seems that the venerating students of their esteemed teacher, the Vilna Gaon, had little doubt as to who that redeemer was going to be.

In the Vilna Gaon’s commentary on the Torah, the word הוא״ל appears, also with similarly coded *gershaim* (*inverted commas*). This word הוא״ל is taken from הוא״ל, מִשָּׁה בָּאָרְ אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, “Moses *undertook* to expound this Torah” (Deuteronomy 1:5). In the interpretation of the Vilna Gaon on the word הוא״ל (“*undertook*”), he says that at the end of days, Eliyahu will come back to earth as the ‘*Moses of the last generation,*’ and expound on the Torah in its deepest sense. The word הוא״ל (“*undertook*”) has the same Hebrew letters as אליהו (*Eliyahu*).⁵⁹² The Vilna Gaon writes, rather tellingly, that הוא״ל, וסוד נעלם הוא, this concept equating הוא״ל (“*undertook*”) to אליהו (*Eliyahu*), “*is a hidden secret*” (Vilna Gaon, *Aderet Eliyahu*, 1887:331).

Identifying the Vilna Gaon as the Messiah would have resonated with R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov who refers to the new Messiah as a גר (*stranger*).⁵⁹³ In his view, the new Messiah is considered a ‘stranger’ or ‘outsider’ because he is allowed to delve into matters that no other Jews should engage with:

והגואל...נכנס בתוך התהום...והוא דוגמת נפש הגר ממש, שחוקר מה שאסור לחקור
לישראל

“The Redeemer...enters into the abyss...and absolutely resembles the stranger, who investigates that which is forbidden to investigate”

⁵⁹¹ Translation is mine.

⁵⁹² ‘*Eliyahu*’ can either refer to *Elijah the Prophet* or to R. Eliyahu, the *Vilna Gaon*.

⁵⁹³ In addition to ‘*stranger,*’ גר can also mean a ‘*convert.*’

(R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:167).⁵⁹⁴

The students of the Vilna Gaon promoted the idea that he was not just a great Torah scholar, but also an exceptional secular scholar. Although some of his students, like R. Chaim of Volozhin, tried to deny the Vilna Gaon's engagement with secular wisdom and even misrepresented the evidence thereof,⁵⁹⁵ we know that that was not the case:

“[i]t is widely recognized that the Gra [i.e., the Vilna Gaon] had a personal interest in general knowledge, especially the exact sciences; the evidence is abundant” (Shuchat 2023:6).

R. Yisrael of Shklov corroborates this view with some detail:

“This is what he [the Gra] said: All knowledge is necessary for [understanding] our holy Torah... He knew them all thoroughly and mentioned them: algebra, trigonometry, geometry, and music which he praised greatly...He knew human anatomy and all things relevant to this...And regarding the wisdom of philosophy he said that he had studied it thoroughly” (R. Yisrael of Shklov, *Pe'at haShulchan*, 1836:5).⁵⁹⁶

The Vilna Gaon's grandson, R. Yaakov Moshe of Slonim together with his uncle, R. Yehuda Leib, the Gaon's son, testified:

“[The Vilna Gaon] explained the constellations...and their paths...three hundred and three new principles never seen before in the land of Judea. He researched and prepared a wondrous chart of fractions” (*Biurei Zohar*, 1810:Introduction).⁵⁹⁷

The depiction of the Vilna Gaon in such an extraordinary way for a Torah scholar is seen by Liebes as part of the messianic scheme. The Vilna Gaon was allowed to look into matters that no one else was allowed to because that is the function of the Messiah. In this sense, R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov saw the Vilna Gaon, or *Gra*

⁵⁹⁴ Translation is mine.

⁵⁹⁵ “*R. Hayyim consistently omitted all biographical facts relating to the Gaon's knowledge of secular studies*” (Shuchat 2023:5).

⁵⁹⁶ Translation by Shuchat (2023:7).

⁵⁹⁷ Translation by Shuchat (2023:9).

(גר"א) as a stranger, or *Ger* (גר) because only he could enter the secular realms and raise the sparks hidden therein (Liebes 2003:38). In a similar way, the new Messiah would sweeten the teachings of the old Messiah:

המשיח החדש ממתק בחקירתו את...תורתו של משיח הראשון...ומסמל שם את
הלבוש הנוכרי שלבש שבתי צבי אחרי המרתו

“The new Messiah, through his [secular = non-Jewish] research sweetens...the teachings of the first Messiah...and symbolises [and counters] the non-Jewish garment Shabbatai Tzvi adorned himself with when he apostatised” (Liebes 2003:11).

Raphael Shuchat also notices that R. Chaim of Volozhin – even though he tried to deny his teacher’s involvement in secular wisdom – nevertheless describes “*the Gra in almost messianic tones*” (Shuchat 2023:13).

However, Liebes suggests that from the perspective of R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, the Messiah was not to be the Vilna Gaon, who had already passed away when he wrote this teaching. Instead, the ultimate Messiah was to be R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov himself!⁵⁹⁸ He believed he was well qualified for this position because he expounded on the mysteries of the esoteric Torah even more than his late teacher. Perhaps he too (like some of the other students) felt that his teacher may have overstepped the boundaries with his involvement in secular wisdom and therefore failed in his messianic endeavour.

For the purposes of this study, there seems adequate evidence that leading *Mitnagdim* were prepared to work with and refine what they understood as potentially positive elements of *Sabbatianism* and even of Shabbatai Tzvi himself. This, coupled with their adoption of some *Sabbatian* customs, and open references to *Sabbatian* ideology (Liebes 2003:1-3), supports the notion of *Sabbatian* influences on the *Mitnagdic* movement.

⁵⁹⁸ Liebes (2003:39) remains open to the possibility that (at least while the Vilna Gaon was still alive), R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov may have considered his teacher to have been the Messiah. Liebes suggests that R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov’s activities were most likely intended to be “*the completion of the messianic activities of his teacher, השלמה לפעילותו*.”
המשיחית של רבו

6.5 Writings of, and about, the Vilna Gaon

It has always been difficult to ascertain exactly where the Vilna Gaon himself was positioned apropos the interest his students had demonstrated regarding the role Shabbatai Tzvi played in the unfolding of the messianic phases (see previous section 6.4.). Unexpectedly, one area to examine for clues of the Vilna Gaon's position, is the debate over his view on the correct *Halachic* method of writing the letter *Tzadi* (צ) for ritual use in *Sifrei Torah*, *Mezuzot* and *Tefilin*. This seemingly innocuous matter stirred up tremendous controversy amongst his students and should be viewed against a *Sabbatian* background (Liebes n.d.:2).

The letter *Tzadi* (צ) looks like a bent-over *Nun* (נ) with a *Yud* (י) in the top right-hand corner. Just like other Hebrew letters, the top left-hand corner of the (*bent*) *Nun*, already resembles a *Yud* – and, to constitute the *Tzadi*, it additionally has another *Yud* placed on the right. This *Yud* on the right of the *Tzadi* usually faces left just like its counterpart on the left (on top of the *Nun*) and just like every other *Yud* in its normal orientation. However, the mystics would sometimes reorientate the right-hand *Yud*, and either make it face right (as in its mirror image) or they inverted it. We will not deal with the inverted *Yud* but shall instead focus on the mirror-imaged *Yud*, facing right and called the *Yud Hafucha* (the *opposite* or *mirror-imaged Yud*).

Some students of the Vilna Gaon claimed that their teacher had prohibited the use of the *Yud Hafucha*. Others – including R. Aryeh Leib Friedman who dedicated a book to this matter of *Yud Hafucha* – counterclaimed that their colleagues were relying on השערות פורחות באויר, “*assumptions floating in the air*,” and that the Vilna Gaon did not oppose the use of the *Yud Hafucha* at all (Friedman, *Tzidkat haTzadik*, 1954:95). On one occasion in his writings, R. Aryeh Leib Friedman became so angry about the ‘perceptions’ that the Vilna Gaon had prohibited the *Yud Hafucha*, that he severely reprimands those who perpetuated this ‘rumour’ (Friedman, *Tzidkat haTzadik*, 1954:46). Rabbinic literature is replete with opposing views and variant *Halachic* rulings but it seems that something of greater significance was bothering R. Aryeh Leib Friedman in the case of the *Yad Hafucha* (Liebes n.d.:4).

Representing the camp of the students of the Vilna Gaon who claimed that their teacher had prohibited the use of the *Yud Hafucha*, is R. Yisrael of Shklov (considered an expert in expounding the *Halacha* of his teacher). He writes:

והיה מזהיר...[ש]הצד"י כפופין עקומין מאחריו הי' פוסל...והיה אומר דגמירא ליה
 דבא טעות בכתבי' על ידי תלמידי הצבי שבור, שהעתיקו בתוך כ' האר"י ז"ל
 “[The Vilna Gaon] would warn...[against the use of] the ‘bent Tzadi’
 [=צ, as opposed to the ‘straight Tzadi’ or ‘Tzadi Peshuta’ =ק] with the
 thorn [i.e., the tip of the Yud] facing backwards [to the right], as [such
 a formulation of Yud Hafucha] would invalidate it...and [the Vilna
 Gaon] would say that this [mistaken practice] was adopted from a
 forgery to a text of the Ari Zal [R. Yitzchak Luria], by the students of
 ‘Tzi shavur’⁵⁹⁹ [=Shabbatai Tzvi]” (R. Yisrael of Shklov, *Tosefot
 Maaseh Rav, Siman 6, in Tzidkat haTzadik, 1954:46*).⁶⁰⁰

From this source, it becomes apparent that the ostensibly *Halachic* debate over the *Yud Hafucha* is essentially rooted in a *Sabbatian* controversy. The question is what were the circumstances surrounding the alleged *Sabbatian* insertion of the *Yud Hafucha* into the *Lurianic* writings? This, particularly since it is generally understood that R. Yitzchak Luria indeed insisted that *Tefilin* be written *with the Yud Hafucha*.⁶⁰¹

What we have here is not just a *Halachic* debate but a veritable theological polemic, which, as we shall see, concerns the identity of past and present Messiahs. We know from many sources that long before *Sabbatianism*, the custom in both *Ashkenazi* and *Sefaradi* communities was to write the *Tzadi* with a *Yud Hafucha*. The *Zohar* (1:2b) spoke of the *Yud Hafucha* on the *Tzadi* which “מהדר לאחורא,” “faced backwards.” So why would some have claimed that the Vilna Gaon had prohibited the *Yud Hafucha*?

Sabbatian stirrings around the *Yud Hafucha* began more than a century before R. Yisrael of Shklov, with his grandfather (Liebes n.d.:16), R. Yisrael ben Aharon Jaffe also of Shklov.⁶⁰² In the latter’s book entitled *Or Yisrael* (Jaffe, *Or Yisrael, 1702:41*) –

⁵⁹⁹ This is a borrowed expression from *Mishna Bava Metzia* (1:4) referring to acquiring ownership of a crippled deer that broke its leg while in the owner’s field. The ancient legal *Mishna* refers to a “crippled deer,” or “*tzvi shavur*” (*tzvi* means a *deer*), which later in a completely unrelated context, became a convenient and derogatory play on words and a reference to the ‘crippled’ Messiah, Shabbatai Tzvi.

⁶⁰⁰ Translation and square brackets are mine. R. Aryeh Leib Friedman questions this attribution to R. Yisrael of Shklov (Friedman, *Tzidkat haTzadik, 1954:45*).

⁶⁰¹ See Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Shulchan Aruch haRav, Orach Chaim, ch 36* (2008:143).

⁶⁰² Liebes is convinced that the earlier *Sabbatian* activity in Lithuania with rabbis like Heshil Tzoref, coupled with rabbinical families maintaining intergenerational links to their *Sabbatian*

a known *Sabbatian* work (see section 3.1.11) – there is a teaching about the *Yud Hafucha*. It bases itself on the *Zohar* (1:2b) which states that the world could not be created with the letter *Tzadi* because the two *Yuds* did not match each other. However, in the future, the *Tzadi* would be re-established without the *Yud Hafucha* and with the right-hand *Yud* facing the left side as per its usual configuration.

R. Yisrael Jaffe claimed that that time had already arrived and that the messianic era had begun. R. Yisrael Jaffe maintained that there are numerical values that (anachronistically) connect the *Zoharic* teaching to Shabbatai Tzvi because the *Zohar* refers to a future time as, “אתרא אחרא, *another place*” when the *Yud* is restored to its usual configuration. R. Yisrael Jaffe noted that “אחרא אתרא, *another place*,” has the same numerical value of 814, corresponding to God’s name *Sha-dai*⁶⁰³ as well as to Shabbatai Tzvi. Other *Sabbatians*, including Wolf, the son of R. Yehonatan Eibeschutz (see sections 3.1.7 and 3.1.8) also made similar references to this section of the *Zohar* (Liebes n.d.:12). This underscores the notion that the *Yud Hafucha*, although originating in the *Zohar*, was later interpreted within a *Sabbatian* context and even extended into the camp of the Vilna Gaon.

Whichever way one interprets the Vilna Gaon’s alleged invalidation (or otherwise) of the *Yud Hafucha*, there was a strong residual component of *Sabbatian* messianic innuendo – prevalent in Vilna – relating to the way the letter *Tzadi* was to be written (Liebes n.d.:17). As we shall see, in the mystical context of Vilna, the *Yud Hafucha* would have represented the historical incarnations of the incomplete *Tzadi* – the previous Messiahs – who are all conceptualised as the embodiment of ‘Bela’:⁶⁰⁴

זה הבלע הוא הפוך האמונה...הפוך משרע"ה

“Bela represents the [spiritual] inverse [Hafuch] of Emunah [faith]...[and] the [spiritual] inverse [Hafuch] of Moses [the complete

past – like R. Yisrael of Shklov and his grandfather R. Yisrael Jaffe of Shklov – would have contributed to maintaining a strong *Sabbatian* ideological presence in Lithuania.

⁶⁰³ According to the *Aleinu* prayer which concludes all prayer services, in the messianic future all humanity will be united under the name *Sha-dai*. The numerical value of 814 is derived from *Sha-dai* spelt in its ‘full form’ as שן דלת יוד. This *gematria* or numerical value of 814 is perhaps the most common of the *Sabbatian* codes for references to Shabbatai Tzvi (Liebes n.d.:12).

⁶⁰⁴ See below (footnote 613) where Bela, Bilaam, Edom, Seir, *Daat*, *Eirev Rav* (Mixed Multitudes) are equated with Jesus and Shabbatai Tzvi, representing the *Tzadi* and *Yud Hafucha* (inverse *Yud*).

Tzadik]...” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:4).⁶⁰⁵

Bela is depicted as the archetype of the incomplete *Tzadi* while Moses represents the completed *Tzadik*. The various future incarnations of the incomplete *Tzadi* are to play out and run their courses over history until the final Redemption by the *Tzadik*.

Unlike R. Yisrael of Shklov who claimed that the Vilna Gaon had invalidated the *Yud Hafucha*,⁶⁰⁶ R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov adamantly clung to his position that permitted either orientation of the *Yud* of the *Tzadi*, whichever way it faced:

או פניה לגבי הנו"ן, או הי' (וד) מחזיר פניו מהנו"ן...זה לא איכפת לך...ואלו ואלו
 דברי אלוקים חיים

“Whether [the right-hand *Yud*] faces the Nun [as per its standard orientation], or whether the *Yud* turns its face away from the Nun [in a mirror-image]...it makes no difference [and neither orientation will invalidate a scroll]...as [both] ‘these’ and ‘those’ [orientations of the *Yud*] are [compatible with] the words of the living God” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:272).⁶⁰⁷

R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov sees the possibility of incorporating the *Yud Hafucha*, with all its blemishes, into the necessary cosmic messianic schema. R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov continues to emphasise that the orientation of the *Yud* “*makes no difference*,” and it is evident that he is alluding to some form of correspondence between the earlier imperfect *Tzadi* and the later perfected *Tzadik*. The later *Tzadik* is the perfected incarnation of the earlier *Tzadi*. R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov uses coded *gershaim* (*inverted commas*) to allude to possible correlations between the *Yud Hafucha* and *Sabbatianism* and Christianity (see section 6.4):

כי מה שהי' (וד) מחזיר א... (ת) פניו מין הנו"ן, ועומד באחוריו...והיינו 'כי צדי אנת
 וצדיק אנת ואנת צריך למהוי בטמירו', והיינו שסוד צדי, נקרא צדי ונקרא צדיק, כי

⁶⁰⁵ Translation is mine.

⁶⁰⁶ This may have had something to do with the *Sabbatian* affiliation of his grandfather, R. Yisrael Jaffe, who wanted to see the *Yud* of the *Tzadi* in its normal orientation thereby endorsing Shabbatai Tzvi as the Messiah. I'm not sure that R. Yisrael of Shklov went that far, but he may have seen some messianic potential in Shabbatai Tzvi that needed redeeming. That may have been why he was happy to promote the notion of the *Yud* in its usual orientation, and claim that the Vilna Gaon prohibited the *Yud Hafucha*.

⁶⁰⁷ Translation and square brackets are mine.

עשו הוא הצד צי"ד [=צדי]...והוא איש שעיר...והוא ג"כ בדע"ת גי' ער"ב ר"ב, ואין בין זה לזה...כחד חוטא...ומי מפיס ומי יכריע

“This [matter] of the Yud [Hafucha, of the Tzadi] which turns its head away from the Nun [in its mirror-image orientation] and faces backwards...represents the [Zoharic concept of] ‘You are Tzadi and you are Tzadik and you must remain a secret’ [Zohar 1:2b]⁶⁰⁸...This represents the secret of the Tzadi, which is called [both] Tzadi and Tzadik [i.e., the proto-Tzadik or Tzadi, precedes and parallels the final, fixed and completed Tzadik]. Esau [representing Christianity], ‘hunted game’ [Genesis 27:33]. [The Hebrew for ‘game,’ ציד, has the same letters as צדי, Tzadi]...He [Esau] came from Seir.⁶⁰⁹ ...He [Esau] also [corresponds] to Daat [knowledge] [Daat is symbolic of Bilam, who is depicted in the *Talmud*⁶¹⁰ as representing Christianity, and in later literature as representing Sabbatianism as well.⁶¹¹ In this reading, Esau and Bilam are thus conceptually connected. Bilam in Kabbalistic literature is described as the Daat, or knowledge, obtained by the Sitra Achra (Evil Side) because “וידע דעת עליון”, he obtains the knowledge of the Most High” (Numbers 24:16). Bilam is the negative counterpart to Moses who possess the Holy knowledge]. Daat has the same numerical value as Eirev Rav [Mixed Multitude = Sabbatians = 474]⁶¹² And there is no difference between [any] of these two

⁶⁰⁸ The *Zohar* 1:2b describes the *Tzadi* having two *Yuds*, “מהדר לאחורא, facing backwards” to each other. Its meaning had to remain a secret until a point in the (messianic) future when the right-hand *Yud* would be turned around to its regular orientation. The *Sabbatians* later claimed that that time had now arrived.

⁶⁰⁹ According to Genesis (26:9) “עשו אבי אֶדוֹם בֶּהָר שְׁעִיר”, *Esau the ancestor of Edom, in the hills of Seir*”. Both Seir and Edom are therefore associated with Christianity.

⁶¹⁰ b. *Gitin* 57a. Although the *Talmudic* text, in its plain reading, seems to distinguish between Jesus and Bilaam, over time the two personalities became conceptually united (Liebes n.d.:19, footnote137).

⁶¹¹ Particularly in the writings of R. Yakov Emden (Liebes n.d.:19).

⁶¹² The term Mixed Multitude was generally used to refer to the *Sabbatians* (although sometimes it was also used the other way around to refer to the opponents of the *Sabbatians*). In this case the reference to *Sabbatians* seems to be the intent.

[opposing architypes]...except for a single [thin] thread⁶¹³...But who will affect the reconciliation between these [opposing architypes] and who will determine [the outcome]?” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:273).⁶¹⁴

What is revealing about this section of R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov’s writing is the unusual way he creates an equivalence of past Messiahs, Christian and *Sabbatian* (representing the incomplete *Tzadi*). These past Messiahs all build on each other and find expression in the final Messiah (representing the complete *Tzadik*) – seemingly himself, but certainly the Vilna Gaon while he was still alive – who is the only one capable of reconciling, integrating and funnelling all the previous messianic potentials.

Picking up on the abovementioned conceptualisation of Esau and Bilaam corresponding to Christianity, R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov continues to deliberate on how the new Messiah can rectify the previous Messiahs:

וכל טוב גנוז בשביל הצדיק, אך הוא ביד בל"ע מלך אדום, מחמת שבעו"ה חיל
 בלע...ובאמת אח"כ נתקנים בסוד מ"ה החדש...ויודע ענין התורה וסודה על בוריו
 והלכה כמותו בכל מקום

“All good is hidden [away] for the Tzadik, but he is in the hands of Bela [Bilaam is Bela]⁶¹⁵ the king of Edom [Christianity/Sabbatianism], [but] because of our sins, Bela dominates...and in truth afterwards [Bela] will be rectified through the secret of the new Messiah...[who] knows the matter of the Torah and its secrets in its entirety and the law is [decided] according to him in all cases” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:4).

⁶¹³ Thus: Esau is equated to Bilaam who represents the *Daat* of the *Evil Side*. Bilaam/Bela/Esau represent the counterpart to Moses. Esau also represents *Daat = Eirev Rav (Mixed Multitude) = 474*, which equates *Christianity* with *Sabbatianism*. Moses is the complete ‘*Tzadik*,’ while the Messiahs of Christianity and *Sabbatianism* represent the incomplete ‘*Tzadi*.’ There is no difference between ‘*Tzadik*’ and ‘*Tzadi*’ except for a “*single thread*,” and therefore they can be reconciled (Liebes n.d.:19).

⁶¹⁴ Translation and square brackets are mine.

⁶¹⁵ According to *Eitz Chaim* 8:4 (1961:113) “בלעם הוא בלע, *Bilaam is Bela*.” *Etz Chaim* records the *Lurianic* teaching of the Ari, as compiled by his student, R. Chaim Vital. However, while Bilaam is Bela, Bilaam represents the Bela that has not been refined. Once Bela is refined and ‘sweetened’ he becomes Moses. R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov viewed Shabbatai Tzvi as the Bilaam who could be transformed into the Bela (and becomes like Moses) – or, put the other way, Shabbatai Tzvi was the potential Moses/Mashiach who deteriorated into Bilaam but he could still be redeemed (Liebes n.d.:85-6).

At the time of his writing, it seems that R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov was referring to his teacher as the new messianic candidate. The Vilna Gaon certainly knew “*the matter of the Torah*” because he was regarded as a *Gaon* (*genius*). He also knew *Kabbalah* and “*its secrets in its entirety*,” and he commanded unparalleled *Halachic* authority.

R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov’s writings move into deeper christological associations and become a conceptualisation of what appears to be a most unusual – especially for rabbinic writings – chain or dynasty of Messiahs that include: 1) Jesus (בִּן, *Ben*, ‘son’ in Hebrew or בִּר, *Bar*, ‘son’ in Aramaic); 2) Shabbatai Tzvi (בוֹר, *Bor*, ‘pit’); and 3) the Vilna Gaon (בְּאֵר, *Be’er*, ‘water well’). Linguistically these names are similarly constructed and they also prefigure and reflect each other conceptually. In an astonishing piece of coded writing, we find:

סוד בִּן. ובִּן אֱלֹקִים אֲדֹנָי גִּי בְּאֵר...וְהוּא בִּר שֶׁל בְּרֵאשִׁיית...בְּסוּד בִּר בּוֹר
 בְּאֵר תְּרִיג, שֶׁהוּא תְּכֵלִית בְּרִיאַת הָעוֹלָם, וְזֶה בִּן נִתְבָּרר...וּבְאֵר מִשָּׁה אֵלֵיהּ
 “The secret of [the word Ben] ‘son’:⁶¹⁶ The [expression] ‘son of God and Lord’ has the same numerical value (203) as ‘well’ [Be’er, representing Eliyahu, the Vilna Gaon]. This [‘son,’ Ben in Hebrew, or] Bar [‘son’ in Aramaic] represents the **Bar** of **B**ereishit [the first two letters of ‘In the Beginning’ (Genesis1:1)]⁶¹⁷...[This forms part of] the secret of Bar [Jesus], Bor [Shabbatai Tzvi,⁶¹⁸ and] Be’er [Vilna Gaon]⁶¹⁹ who together have the numerical value of Taryag [תְּרִיג = the

⁶¹⁶ The Hebrew formulation בִּן (just like מִיָּה) can be read as common *Kabbalistic* names of God (*Ban* and *Mah*). However, in the context of redeeming previous Messiahs, it seems to carry its literal connotation of *ben* or ‘son’ together with its Christological insinuations; as well as *Mah* acting as an abbreviation for *Mashiach heChadash*, the ‘new Messiah’ who redeems the old Messiahs (Liebes n.p.:59, footnote 592).

⁶¹⁷ This is remarkably similar to the New Testament’s John 1:1-3 which has Jesus participating in the creation of the world.

⁶¹⁸ The expression ‘*Bor*’ (בוֹר) is an acronym for “וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ, and there was a hunger in the land” (Ruth 1:1). As mentioned earlier, this *spiritual hunger* was considered a positive consequence of Shabbatai Tzvi. This way *Bor* corresponds to *Shabbatai Tzvi* as R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov confirms: “וַיְהִי רָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ בּוֹר” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Menachem Zion*, 1987:3).

⁶¹⁹ The text continues “וּבְאֵר מִשָּׁה אֵלֵיהּ, *Be’er* [represents the completion of rabbinic law through] Moses and Eliyahu [Vilna Gaon].” *Be’er* = Moshe = Eliyahu (Vilna Gaon) who

613 commandments of the Torah],⁶²⁰ which is the purpose of the creation of the world, because the ‘son’ [Ben] has been purified...and Be’er [represents the completion of rabbinic law, Taryag, through] Moses and Eliyahu [Vilna Gaon]” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:303).⁶²¹

Each Messiah builds on the potential of their predecessor just like the *Be’er* (water well) of the Vilna Gaon fills the empty *Bor* (pit), dug by Shabbatai Tzvi, who, in turn, ‘fixed’ aspects of the *Bar/Ben* (son). The word *Ben* has the same numerical value as *Eliyahu* (= 52) and when read within the context of the coded inverted commas, the message is that *Eliyahu* (the Vilna Gaon), who corresponds to Moses, can ‘fix’ the *Ben* who is also connected to Shabbatai Tzvi. This ‘dynasty’ of Messiahs allows the ultimate messianic *Tikun* affected by the Vilna Gaon to remedy the previous Messiahs.

R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov continues to allude to Christianity in his typical coded writing style with copious *gershaim* (inverted commas) on significant words that require extra interpretation:

מחמת עונותינו נסתתר אלהינו בשביל זה בבע"ל הדין הזה...שורש ב"ן סטד"ה

“Because of our sins, God is hidden due to this accused/litigant [Baal hadin] [i.e., Shabbatai Tzvi]⁶²²...rooted in ben Satada [a Talmudic reference to Jesus⁶²³]” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.1, 2001:66).

We have seen that there is an equivalence between Esau, Bilaam, Bela, *Daat* of the *Evil Side* and *Eirev Rav*. They represent the spiritual counterparts of Moses. In *Lurianic Kabbalah*, Bela represents the holy ‘sparks’ that became absorbed (נבלעים = absorbed

combine to ‘fix’ the *Bor* (Shabbatai Tzvi) and the *Ben/Bar* (Jesus). Eliyahu corresponds to and represents the Moses of the generation (Liebes n.d.:62).

⁶²⁰ According to this reading, the accumulated messianic potentials of Jesus, Shabbatai Tzvi and the Vilna Gaon together represent the ‘wholeness’ and ‘completion’ of the 613 Commandments.

⁶²¹ Translation is mine. The last phrase בא"ר מש"ה אליהו corresponds to the earlier referenced verse הוֹאִיל מֹשֶׁה בְּאֵר, “Moses undertook to [expound this Torah]” (Deuteronomy 1:5). The word הוֹאִיל (*undertook*) has the same letters as אליהו (*Eliyahu*), the Vilna Gaon.

⁶²² The word בעל *Baal* has the same numerical value as צבי *Tzvi* = 102.

⁶²³ b. *Shabbat* 104b. The section of ‘ben Satada’ has been removed from many editions of the *Talmud* because of the censors. It is, however, found in the Steinzaltz edition. Liebes (n.d.:36, footnote 318) explains ‘ben Satada’ to be a generally accepted reference to Jesus.

= בלע = Bela) within *Tuma* (*spiritual impurity*) (Liebes n.d.:27, footnote 215). Bela becomes the archetype representing an obsession with overt mysticism and spirituality at the expense, and in place, of *Halachic* observances. This is why Bela represents Christianity and *Sabbatianism*. The extreme spiritual seekers of Christianity and *Sabbatianism* ‘fell’ because of a spiritual הבלענות (*gluttony*) and coveting of secrets of the Torah that were far too deep and not meant for them:

כי הקב"ה נותן לו חכמה ומגלה לו בסוד, סוד ה' ליראי

“for the Holy One...gives wisdom and reveals secrets, [as it states in Psalms 25:14] ‘The secrets of the Lord are for them that fear Him’”⁶²⁴
 (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:4).⁶²⁵

The earlier incarnations of the *Tzadi*, therefore, made the mistake of coveting and overemphasising mysticism, spirituality and secrets while not being entirely worthy of such endeavours. As a result, they subjugated the primacy of the *Halacha*. This required remedial action necessitating R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov and the Vilna Gaon to enter those very realms that Jesus and Shabbatai Tzvi had entered into but superseding them in matters of *Kabbalah* (Liebes n.d.:36, 37). They had to supersede them in the knowledge of mysticism in order to remedy them and bring them back to the Law. In fact, their involvement in *Kabbalah* had to exceed even that of Moses:

והבא לחקר חפץ להיות יותר ממשה רבינו

“And the one who comes to delve [into this remedial Kabbalah] needs to [be more proficient] even than Moses our Teacher” (R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov, *Kitvei haGramam zal*, vol.2, 2001:4).⁶²⁶

R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov was not all that unusual in trying to rectify previous Messiahs because, as we have seen, even the Baal Shem Tov saw an aspect of the

⁶²⁴ Besides a desire for extreme mysticism, the *Sabbatians* emphasised *Emunah* (*belief*) over *Halacha*. The one who ‘fixes’ *Sabbatianism* must have a more serious approach that is congruent with *Yirah* (*awe*) – not just *belief*. This would necessitate a concomitant acceptance of *Halacha* that was lacking with the *Sabbatians*. The serious and conservative *Halachic* approach of the Vilna Gaon was, therefore, also seen as befitting the new Redeemer worthy of the “secrets” which are specifically “for them that fear Him,” and not for the other Messiahs (Liebes n.d.:39).

⁶²⁵ Translation and square brackets are mine.

⁶²⁶ Translation and square brackets are mine.

Messiah in Shabbatai Tzvi and had tried to 'fix' him with a *Tikun* (*spiritual rectification*). The same may be said about R. Nachman of Breslov (see section 5.3). The difference was that the Baal Shem Tov gave up on his spiritual ambitions to rectify Shabbatai Tzvi, whereas R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov believed he, himself, had accomplished this goal and had completed the *Tikun* (Liebes n.d.:35).

Additionally, where R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov radically differed from the approach of the Baal Shem Tov and R. Nachman of Breslov, was in his relationship to Christians and Christianity. Around this period, there was much Christian missionary activity in the Holy Land, under the patronage of the London Society. They were well-organised and kept accurate and meticulous records. The members of this organisation held fast to their belief that the redemption of the Jews would herald the redemption of mankind, and the return of Jews to their homeland would be one of the early signs confirming the unfolding of that plan. They were very keen, therefore, to document the waves of Jewish immigration to the Holy Land (Morgenstern 2006:viii).

In an unusual messianic irony, the *Perushim* the missionaries shared some common interest – so much so that R. Shlomo Hershel Berliner, Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of London, wrote unapprovingly of the situation:

“And see, the...Perushim in the Holy Land play up to them [the missionaries]. Alas for the embarrassment...would that our co-religionists...were still living in the Diaspora” (R. Shlomo Hershel Berliner, *miKitvei R. Shlomo Hershel Berliner miLondon*, n.d.:528).

R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov was known to have often engaged with these missionaries and even managed to return some Jews, who they had converted to Christianity, back to Judaism. He did this by showing the apostates the role they could play as Jews in the process of Redemption. These Anglican missionaries were able to exert political pressure on the Turks to allow the *Perushim* to rebuild the ruins of the *Churva* synagogue (Liebes 2003:40). R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov's association with Christians, therefore, must be viewed within the context of his determination to 'fix' all previous Messiahs, including Jesus.

On the other hand, R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov was not the first to use the image of the *Nun* and *Yud Hafucha* compounded together to form the letter *Tzadi* as a symbol of Christianity in general, and of Jesus, in particular. Liebes (n.d:20) shows that in both the *Zohar* and *Sefer haBahir*, the *Tzadi* with the *Yud Hafucha* was

sometimes understood to allude to Jesus (possibly even to the acronym *Yeshu haNotzri* or *Jesus, the Christian*). In the *Midrashic* work *Otiyot deRabbi Akiva* (especially the earlier manuscripts of the work) – which Liebes suggests may be the originator of the *Zoharic* interpretation – the letter *Tzadi* is directly associated with Jesus. R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov was, therefore, comfortable combining such paradoxical theologies seamlessly, in a way that even surpassed the masterful attempts of the *Sabbatians* to do the same (Liebes n.d.:23).

Before concluding this section, we must briefly explore the role the Vilna Gaon himself had to play in the messianic theology of his students. The Vilna Gaon is well-known but little understood. His inner character, writes Liebes (2016:609), “*except for a few exceptions, is different from the way he is commonly perceived.*”⁶²⁷

The Vilna Gaon had been surprisingly ambivalent when it came to responding to R. Eibeschuetz’s written request that he weigh in on the Emden-Eibeschuetz controversy (see section 3.1.7). Although R. Eibeschuetz – who was charged with and convicted of writing *Sabbatian* amulets (Liebes n.d.:17) – claimed that the Vilna Gaon had exonerated him, the fact is that the latter effectively only apologised for not wanting to get involved in the controversy. Leiman (2001:260) suggests this may have been due to the Vilna Gaon’s relatively young age of thirty-five and the great distance between Vilna and Hamburg, the centre of the controversy. Liebes, however, dismisses both Leiman’s suggestions. Instead, he proposes that the Vilna Gaon was not prepared to condemn or “*expose the blatant Sabbatian content*” of the amulets because aspects of them “*may not have been all that far removed from the spirit of the school of the Vilna Gaon*” (Liebes n.d.:17).⁶²⁸ Maciejko (n.d.:79-80) seems to confirm this with evidence that rabbis from both Vilna and Mir in Lithuania supported R. Yehonatan Eibeschuetz over R. Yakov Emden.

Turning to his mystical commentaries, the Vilna Gaon was particularly engaged with variant *Kabbalistic* depictions of Moses, who is said to emerge again and again in every generation. Sometimes the ‘new’ Moses is depicted as the final arbiter of the law struggling to create a unified and single umbrella of authoritative *Halachic* practice. This would have resonated with the scholarly and commanding image of the Vilna Gaon. Other times the ‘new’ Moses is depicted as not being so pedantic about

⁶²⁷ Translation is mine.

⁶²⁸ Translation is mine.

Halachic practice and is somewhat of a mystical ‘non-scholar.’ This depiction of Moses did not match that of the Vilna Gaon, and he found other ways to interpret this non-scholarly portrayal of Moses. But other times Moses is depicted as someone despised by the rabbis of the generation. This description of a despised Moses would have resonated with the Vilna Gaon, not as applying directly to himself, but rather as alluding to Shabbatai Tzvi. Liebes understands the Vilna Gaon as identifying particularly with this last description of a despised Moses, and in his present incarnation, he is determined to ‘fix’ the blemishes of parts of his own soul in its previous incarnation as Shabbatai Tzvi. The Vilna Gaon alludes to the *Kabbalistic* notion that Moses can ‘fix’ his previous incarnations (Vilna Gaon, *Biur haHeichalot leGaon, Yahar Or*, 1913:28).

Liebes (2016:604) makes it clear that there are no direct references to Shabbatai Tzvi in the published writings of the Vilna Gaon. This is not surprising, though, because he stuck to a rule that only allowed for citations from traditional Rabbinic and *Zoharic* sources. He would not even quote from the later *Lurianic* sources even though he drew copiously from them. This makes it difficult to know what the Vilna Gaon’s approach was on these matters and whether or not R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov took his intricate messianic theology directly from his teacher.

Nevertheless, Liebes (2016:604, 614) insists that the Vilna Gaon did consider Shabbatai Tzvi to be a major link in the messianic dynasty that may even have represented an aspect of the Gaon himself. This way, Shabbatai Tzvi was considered some manifestation of a previous incarnation of the Vilna Gaon, and now – as the Vilna Gaon – he had an opportunity to rectify Shabbatai Tzvi. Liebes arrives at this conclusion after analysing numerous classical mystical teachings the Vilna Gaon chose to focus on that deal with reincarnations and *Tikunim* of leaders like Moses and R. Akiva. If this rather radical conclusion of Liebes is correct, it shows an unexpected yet fundamental *Sabbatian* influence on the very heart and leadership of the *Mitnagdic* movement. But even if Liebes is not correct, the textual evidence he adduces from the writings of the students of the Vilna Gaon is more than adequate to show a fundamental influence of *Sabbatianism* – even though it required remedy and *Tikun* – on the *Mitnagdic* movement in general.

6.6 Synthesis

Any later theological counter-reaction to an earlier and threatening theology indicates the significant influence and effect the original theology must have had to elicit the response of the counter-theology. In the case of the *Mitnagdim* and the *Sabbatians*, that influence is even stronger because the *Mitnagdim* were prepared to enter the spiritual realms of the original theology, *Sabbatianism*, and elevate, 'fix' and release its perceived potential. If the *Mitnagdim* admitted to a latent spiritual potential lying dormant within *Sabbatianism*, and if they were prepared to somehow work with it, this indicates that the influence was not just evident but profound. This is compounded yet further when we consider the theological implications of including such a controversial figure as Shabbatai Tzvi as a *fundamentally necessary* stepping stone in the ambitious cosmic and messianic endeavours of the leaders of the *Mitnagdic* movement.

CHAPTER 7

SYNTHESIS

7.1 Motivation and relevance

I was motivated to undertake this study because *historic theologies* – certainly in the Jewish world and particularly those closer to present times – have a direct bearing on *contemporary theologies*. Despite the popular perception that contemporary theologies are exclusively rooted in the ancient past and have essentially remained unchanged through time, investigations like this study reveal that theologies, instead, are multiple links in longer chains that bind us to the past. Each link is interlocked and has a bearing on the other. *Sabbatianism*, however, was not just a small isolated link because during its peak “almost all” (Zeitlin 1979:100) of the respected rabbis and their followers supported it – and even during its ‘decline,’ large numbers of important rabbis remained committed to, or at least fell under the “allure” (Kahana 2012:589-616) of, the movement. Studying the aftermath of *Sabbatianism* is particularly relevant for these times because it influenced “every significant movement to have emerged in the 18th and 19th century” (Carlebach 1990:15). It remains relevant to this day when

“messianism is again a dominant and urgent theology in the Jewish world which seems to have largely forgotten the facts, let alone lessons of its messianic history” (Michal 2022a:156).

7.2 Research problem

This study had to confront a number of research problems on theological, societal and historical levels. One was that although Shabbatai Tzvi and the Baal Shem Tov were only separated by a short period of time – and people who had seen the former had also seen the latter – most scholarship has refused to connect the two in terms of theological influence even though both were mystical movements.

Another problem was that some scholars did not acknowledge that *Chassidism* was even concerned with messianism. Yet another problem was that as soon as Shabbatai Tzvi was shown to have been a false Messiah, all those who had previously followed him had either revised their history or dramatically reframed it. Civil records

were destroyed on the instruction of both lay and religious leadership. Theological evidence within the religious literature had also been tampered with and censorship was rife to cover up perhaps the greatest messianic upheaval and crisis of Jewish history. These problems were compounded by the fact that four different groups referred to themselves as '*Chassidim*,' and they all operated within the same geographical space and time frame.

Complicating the research problem yet further was the matter of coding used to hide but hint at *Sabbatian* ideas, in the works that actively engaged in some of its teachings. On all levels, therefore, the facts had been hidden. Most scholars, while adducing various theories as to the causes of both *Sabbatianism* and *Chassidism*, did not always see a causal connection between the two. This study, therefore, had to go against the flow and tenor of most scholarship to present its case. Scholem (1971b:n.p.) described the problem succinctly when he wrote:

“No chapter in the history of the Jewish people during the last several hundred years has been as shrouded in mystery as that of the Sabbatian movement.”

Petrovsky-Shtern (2008:146) was one of the few to recognize a:

“highly complex, murky, and underresearched interaction between...sabbateans and Hasidim.”

This study has been an attempt to fill that “*underresearched*” lacuna.

A technical problem was that much research remained locked within scholarship in the Hebrew language and has never been presented in English. This study, therefore, had to draw on multiple Hebrew primary and academic sources and has presented some of this research in English for the first time. Perhaps the greatest problem, though, remains the very real and inevitable controversial nature of a theologically sensitive study like this.

7.3 Aims and objectives

In this study, I set out to achieve five aims:

- To examine (as per chapter 2) the development, character and spread of post-apostasy *Sabbatian* mysticism as it intersected with the emergence of the *Chassidic* movement; to include the scholarly debate over the causes and

intentions of the *Chassidic* movement; to discuss whether or not *Chassidism* was influenced by the *Sabbatian* movement and to present my *literature and personalities* approach in arguing for that influence.

- To examine (as per chapter 3) the complex structures of a society saturated with secret *Sabbatians* during the period between *Sabbatianism* and *Chassidism*; to examine key personalities like R. Avraham Rovigo, R. Chaim Malach, R. Yehuda Chasid, R. Yehonatan Eibeschuetz, R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto and others for *Sabbatian* gleanings or leanings; to demonstrate that *Sabbatian* influences penetrated well into the eighteenth century.
- To examine (as per chapter 4) the proliferation of mystical and ethical literature that served as conduits for *Sabbatian* ideology, including important works like *Kav haYashar*, *Chemdat Yamim* and *Sefer haTzoref*.
- To examine (as per chapter 5) the reliability of some internal *Chassidic* accounts of its history including *Shivchei haBesht* and the *Kherson Geniza*; and to examine R. Nachman of Breslov's attempt to 'fix' *Sabbatianism*.
- To examine (as per chapter 6) *Sabbatian* influences on the *Mitnagdic* movement as evident in the writings of R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov and other students of (and including) the Vilna Gaon.

7.4 Methodology

The methodology adopted in this literature study has been *descriptive*, *evaluative*, *explanative* and *textual*. The historical background and theological systems and *texts* have not only been *described* and *explained* but subjected to *evaluation* to determine whether or not they fall within the parameters as set out by the hypothesis. In other words, the intention behind the selection of all the research material in this study was to support the prevalence of overt and covert *Sabbatian* influences at the critical moments of confluence of three great theological movements in modern Jewish history, *Sabbatianism*, *Chassidism* and *Mitnagdism*. The overarching methodology has been to demonstrate how both the rabbinic *literature* of that period, and the rabbinic *personalities* who produced it – usually leading and influential rabbis – indicate significant *Sabbatian* influences on the *Chassidic* and *Mitnagdic* movements. This is in keeping with the subtitle of this study: “an excursion into *messianic Kabbalah* and its *disseminators* in the aftermath of Shabbatai Tzvi.”

7.5 Research results

Chapter 1 introduced the overall style, structure and methodology of this study, including chapter division, orthography, and a list of abbreviations. It described the hypothesis, motivation and relevance, research problem, aims and objectives, to prepare the reader for an enquiry into the legacy of *Sabbatianism*, one of the most powerful movements in Jewish history.

Chapter 2 dealt with the counterintuitive expansion of mystical *Sabbatian* literature and activity in the post-apostasy era when its doctrine was successfully reworked to accommodate the unexpected conversion of the Jewish Messiah to Islam. It described the backdrop of itinerant healers and *Baalei Shem*; dealt with the rise of the *Chassidic* movement within that very milieu; presented a scholarly overview of the causes of *Chassidism*; and introduced the writer's '*rabbinic literature and personalities approach*' which was used throughout this study. The doctrinal adaption of *Sabbatian* theology to the post-Shabbatai Tzvi era, together with the rise of the *Baalei Shem* – many (most?) of whom were *Sabbatian* – together with their concomitant and nascent *Kabbalah*, established a context that was conducive to the birthing of a new movement. Despite this, the literature review highlighted how most scholarship was reluctant to see significant causal connectivity between *Sabbatianism* and *Chassidism*. However, as a rabbi, and not a sociologist or historian, I focussed more on *rabbinic literature and personalities* to try uncover that connectivity.

Chapter 3 dealt with the structures of a society saturated with *Sabbatian literature*, as well as rabbinic *personalities* who demonstrated the allure *Sabbatian literature* held even for those purported to be mainstream rabbis. It examined the identities and activities of secret *Sabbatians* as well as *Sabbatian* expositors, and demonstrated how major rabbinic personalities like R. Yehonatan Eibeschuetz, R. Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, R. Pinchas Katzenellenbogen and many others had interactions, in varying degrees, with *Sabbatianism*. Many of these rabbis can be seen as bridging personalities connecting *Sabbatianism* and *Chassidism*.

Chapter 4 dealt with the proliferation of mystical and ethical literature and explored their usage as possible conduits for *Sabbatian* ideology. It examined well-known works like *Kav haYashar*, *Chemdat Yamim*, *Sefer haTzoref* and others for hidden, and often

unconcealed, *Sabbatian* content. Such works, particularly the *Sefer haTzoref*, were shown to have a direct bearing on not just *Chassidism*, but on the Baal Shem Tov himself. Its author, R. Heshil Tzoref, has been identified by some as R. Adam Baal Shem, the mythical/mystical teacher of the Baal Shem Tov.

Chapter 5 dealt with the question of the reliability of some internal *Chassidic* accounts of its own history including *Shivchei haBesht* and particularly the *Kherson Geniza*. This chapter also examined R. Nachman of Breslov's apparent attempt to 'fix' *Sabbatianism*. It argued that the *Kherson Geniza* was a forgery intended to introduce a bias in favour of a *Chabad* hegemony in *Chassidic* history. It was demonstrated that the possible *historical revisionism* within the *Chabad Chassidic* tradition may have reflected a parallel process of *theological reinterpretation* within the *Breslover Chassidic* tradition – both processes not boding well for the reliability of the claims by internal *Chassidic* sources that they were untouched by *Sabbatianism*.

Chapter 6 dealt with unexpected *Sabbatian* influences on the perceived conservative *Mitnagdic* movement during the early nineteenth century. It examined the writings of the students of the Vilna Gaon and some of the ideology and possible ambivalences of the Vilna Gaon himself when it came to *Sabbatianism*. A common theme was the spiritual rehabilitation of Shabbatai Tzvi and the Christian Messiah. With multiple references in these writings by the students of the Vilna Gaon to Shabbatai Tzvi and *Sabbatian* ideology, it was argued that even the *Mitnagdic* movement was subjected to generally unknown yet intense *Sabbatian* influences.

7.6 Hypothesis

In keeping with my hypothesis and combining the various findings and research results within the different chapters of this study – and after undergoing *theological analyses* of manifold rabbinic *literature* as well as the multiple rabbinic *personalities* who produced and read that literature spanning the periods of Shabbatai Tzvi, the Baal Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon – I hope to have adduced sufficient argument and presented a reasonable body of evidence to validate my hypothesis and state that:

The Chassidic and Mitnagdic movements had fundamentally been subjected to multiple Sabbatian influences through personal rabbinic

contact and causal doctrinal links. Because mysticism always spills over into the public domain (Scholem 1979:69) it has been possible for this study to trace and quantify the extent and significance of these influences.

7.7 Proposal for further study

At the beginning of this study, we noted that:

“Sabbatianism is the matrix of every significant movement to have emerged in the 18th and 19th century, from Hasidism to Reform Judaism, to the earliest Masonic circles and revolutionary idealism” (Carlebach 1990:15).

Liebes (2003:1) similarly notes that *Sabbatianism* is often recognised as the ideological incubator for the movements of *Chassidism*, *Haskala* (the Enlightenment) and modern Zionism. However, with Liebes’ exposure of *Sabbatian* influence on the *Mitnagdim*, particularly on the students of the Vilna Gaon (see sections 6.2 and 6.3) the extent of the *Sabbatian* role in the history of modern Zionism deserves more attention. The students of the Vilna Gaon embarked upon a series of large-scale *Aliyot* during the early nineteenth century and they openly identified with the *Sabbatianism* of their “*fellow Ashkenazim*” who also made *Aliyot* under the *Sabbatian* leader, R. Yehuda Chassid, a century earlier around 1700.⁶²⁹ *Aliya* was an important concept for *Sabbatians* who saw it as part of the process necessary to realise the messianic return of Shabbatai Tzvi. Historically, this often-overlooked *Sabbatian Aliya* is most significant:

“Indeed, the aliyah of Sabbateans around 1700 is often considered the first modern mass-movement of Jews to the Land of Israel, and is thus a precursor of the Zionist project” (Goldish 2018b:519).

Ginsberg (1906:359) points out that many *Sabbatians* “*claimed to be of Palestinian birth,*” demonstrating an awareness of the centrality of belonging to the Land of Israel in *Sabbatian* thought.

⁶²⁹ The expression “*fellow Ashkenazim*” is extracted from a manuscript by R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov. It forms part of the introduction to his *Shaar haTzimtzum* and was published in Frumkin, *Toledot Chachmei Yerushalayim*, vol. 3 (1928-1930:158-9).

Morgenstern (2006) also detects an early form of Zionism in the next wave of *Aliya* a century later by the students of the Vilna Gaon and on the “*instruction*” of the Vilna Gaon. This again raises the issue of the role *Sabbatianism* played in these two early stages of modern Zionism.

Etkes (2004:6), however, contra Morgenstern and Liebes, severely counterclaims that the notion of “*the Gaon of Vilna and his disciples as ‘the first Zionists’*” is a “*myth.*” In the foreword to Etkes’ book, David Biale writes:

“The Gaon of Vilna had no special messianic teaching, Kabbalistic or otherwise. He never gave instructions to his disciples to immigrate to the Land of Israel, especially not for messianic reasons. The whole argument is fabricated...[and] is based on a historical fallacy that seeks to erase the secular modernist origins of Zionism” (Etkes 2024:viii).

To add to the tension over the ideological roots of modern Zionism, in 1899, R. Sholom Dovber Schneerson, the fifth *Chabad Rebbe* – in an initiative that has come to haunt his legacy – equated Zionism with *Sabbatianism*. Under the auspices of the anti-Zionist *Machzikei haDat*, he:

“sponsored the idea of an open attack on the entire Zionist movement... [this led to] thousands of copies of letters signed by well-known rabbis, branding Zionism a Shabbetaean cult that aimed ‘to uproot the tenets of our faith’” (Greenbaum 1995:138).

This was responded to by R. Shmuel Rabinowitz who published documents containing over one hundred signatures of rabbis supporting Zionism. This, in turn, was followed by a book, *Or la Yesharim*, which countered with anti-Zionist letters signed by another one hundred rabbis. The latter publication then prompted R. Shloimele haCohen of Vilna to respond:

“The producers of this book have done a great injustice by characterizing 200,000 Jews who believe in Zionism as heretics, disbelievers, and Shabbetaens for they include hundreds of rabbis, eminent scholars and righteous men” (Greenbaum 1995:139).

Whichever way one chooses to interpret these events, the notions of *Sabbatianism* and modern Zionism were included by many important rabbis in the same sentences. Exploring the question, possibility and extent of *Sabbatian influences on the modern Zionist movement* may be a worthwhile matter for further study.

7.8 Conclusion

After examining an unexpectedly large agglomeration of *rabbinic literature* containing overt and covert *Sabbatian* references, and identifying numerous *rabbinic personalities* who produced and read those texts – spanning Shabbatai Tzvi, the Baal Shem Tov and the Vilna Gaon – it is difficult *not* to see a common *Sabbatian* thread weaving through this relatively short period of time.

It is important, however, to note that despite their subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) references to *Sabbatian* ideology, the students of the Vilna Gaon, for example – just like R. Nachman of Breslov and some of the other personalities examined in this study – often continued to view Shabbatai Tzvi as the ultimate source of heresy (Liebes 2003:35). Nevertheless, they exhibited a paradoxical mystical theology that essentially justified the use of heretical and unauthorised *Sabbatian* material to *transform* it into ‘holiness.’ This type of post-*Sabbatian* theology is built on the conceptualisation of its ability to *elevate* latent aspects of ‘holiness’ inherent and dormant within the original and heretical *Sabbatian* writings (Liebes n.d.:1).

This rather multi-layered and complex mystical approach suggests the emergence of a new form of what I would describe as a liminal theological space, where aspects of two opposing camps began to merge in both their terminology and theology – while, at the same time emphasising official and sharp distinctions between them (see section 5.4).

The notion of *Sabbatian* influences on the *Chassidic* and *Mitnagdic* movements does not necessarily imply that those movements became *Sabbatian* in essence – although it does not entirely exclude that possibility either. Where exactly these and other groups and personalities positioned themselves within that liminal spectrum, hopefully, will come out clearer in further research. At least for now, the mystical irony suggests that much of this *literature* as well as many of these *personalities* were openly, avowedly and officially anti-*Sabbatian* on one level – while maintaining significant, crucial and sometimes coded *Sabbatian* elements on another level.

That said, regarding other rabbis who were known *Sabbatian* leaders, like R. Heshil Tzoref of Vilna – their *Sabbatianism* and intent to perpetuate the *Sabbatian* movement, was manifest and clear. With them, there was no liminal theological space and they played no small part in the development of *Chassidism* and *Mitnagdism*.

Ultimately, it can be argued that whichever way one chooses to evaluate and interpret the intention and motivation behind all the *rabbinical literature* and of all the *rabbinic personalities* examined in this study, there is one inescapable conclusion:

In whatever formulation or conceptualisation, and whether directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, there were indeed and undeniably Sabbatian influences on the Chassidic and Mitnagdic movements.

TERMINOLOGIES

Terminologies used in this study are explained as follows:

Aggada

The non-legal aspects of rabbinic literature. “*Ancient Jewish lore forming especially the nonlegal part of the Talmud*” (Merriam Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary).⁶³⁰

Amora

A sage from the Amoraic period (210-450/500 CE) “*A term which designates the ‘interpreter,’ who communicated audibly to the assembled pupils the lessons of the rabbinic teacher. It is also used as a generic term for the rabbis of the post-mishnaic period, whose activities were centered on the interpretation of the Mishnah*” (Shmuel Safrai, Jewish Virtual Library).⁶³¹

Ashkenazim

Jews of German origin. *Ashkenaz* is the Hebrew word for Germany. Today the term is loosely used to apply to all western Jews, to distinguish them from Hispanic and eastern Jews from West Asia, known as *Sefaradim*. “*The name Ashkenaz was applied in the Middle Ages to Jews living along the Rhine River in northern France and western Germany. The center of Ashkenazi Jews later spread to Poland-Lithuania and now there are Ashkenazi settlements all over the world. The term ‘Ashkenaz’ became identified primarily with German customs and descendants of German Jews*” (Shira Schoenenberg, Jewish Virtual Library).⁶³²

Aliya

Literally ‘*going up.*’ The immigration to the Holy Land.

Aveira

Sin.

⁶³⁰ Online source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Aggadah>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

⁶³¹ Online source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/amora>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

⁶³² Online source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ashkenazim>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

Aveira Lishema

Literally ‘*Holy Sin.*’ I have capitalised Holy Sin as it is a translation of the Hebrew mystical concept of *Aveira Lishma* (a sin for the sake of Heaven).

Baal Shem

An itinerant wonder worker and theurgical healer active from around the sixteenth century. *Baalei Shem* (plural) were usually seen as members of the lower strata of the unofficial Jewish intelligentsia, “below contract rabbis and study Kabbalists.”⁶³³

Birurim

The mystical notion of separating good from evil.

Birur Nitzotzot

The mystical term describing the conceptualisation of ‘*refining*’ or ‘*brightening*’ fallen (spiritual) ‘*sparks.*’

Chalitzá

The rabbinic process that negates the biblical requirement of *Yibum*, or levirate marriage. See *Yibum*.

Chassidei Ashkenaz

A mystical movement founded by R. Yehuda heChassid (1150-1217) that flourished in Germany and France during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The movement was influenced by some of the earlier *Merkava* techniques and included some folk Germanic superstitions. “A *Jewish mystical, ascetic movement in the German Rhineland during the 12th and 13th centuries*” (Wikipedia).⁶³⁴

Chassidim

Followers of the *Chassidic* movement (also referred to in this study as *Chassidism*).

Chassidism

⁶³³ Online source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baal_Shem. Retrieved on 01 November 2022.

⁶³⁴ Online source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashkenazi_Hasidim. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

The mystical movement that followed in the wake of the ‘revelation’ of R. Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760), and continues to this day. Also sometimes referred to as *Hasidism*. Although the term is usually used to describe the *Chassidim* of the Baal Shem Tov, historically, several groups also called themselves Chassidim. These included the twelfth and thirteenth-century *Chassidei Ashkenaz*, or German Pietists around the German Rhineland. During the period on which this study focuses, there were *four* significant sects which all referred to themselves as ‘*Chassidim*’ operating within the same geographical space and time frame; namely, the *Sabbatians*, *Frankists*, the followers of R. Natan Adler of Frankfurt, and the followers of the Baal Shem Tov.

Converso

A Converso is a Jew who outwardly converted to Catholicism but inwardly continued to remain loyal to Judaism. *Conversos* were also known as *crypto-Jews* and *New Christians*. The *Converso* began to emerge in Spain from the time of the persecutions between 1391 and 1492, all those Jews remaining openly true to their faith were expelled from Spanish soil by the Alhambra decree. The *Converso* was also known by the pejorative *Marrano* which means ‘swine’. “[*Converso is the*] designation used in Christian Spain and Portugal for Moorish or Jewish converts to Christianity. It was sometimes applied also to their descendants. Unlike the epithets *Marranos*, *alboraycos*, or *tornadizos*, the term *Conversos* has no derogatory implications” (Jewish Virtual Library).⁶³⁵

Diachronic

“[*R*]elating to the changes in something, especially a language, that happen over time.”⁶³⁶ The diachronic approach can also be described as a historical-critical approach.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ Online source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/conversos>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

⁶³⁶ Cambridge Dictionary. Online source: <https://www.bing.com/search?q=DIACHRONIC+%7C+meaning+in+the+Cambridge+English+Dictionary.&form=ANNNB1&refig=cc416c37310e4cfda93fe0a1d34e4f4a>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

⁶³⁷ See footnote 32.

Deveikut

The mystical attachment and cleaving to the divine through prayer and meditation. A form of personal redemption and communication with God to the point of *unio mystica*. “The theological basis of this ideal was the belief, originated in the Kabbalah, that God is omnipresent (‘The whole earth is full of his glory’; Isa. 6:3), and therefore his light dwells even in physical objects, and sparks of that light are captured even in impure and evil objects...Thanks to their charismatic leadership, the tzaddikim obtained authority over the community that basked in their shadow. The simple man, incapable of achieving such a communion with God, is to cling to the tzaddik, become his hasid (adherent, follower) and thus achieve communion indirectly” (Brown 2013:344).

False Messiah

It can certainly be argued that ‘*failed Messiah*,’ or the more neutral expression, ‘*messianic claimant*’ should be used as a description of Shabbatai Tzi. There have been attempts to ‘neutralise’ the messianic component of Shabbatai Tzvi [as we see in the case of the Baal Shem Tov (*Shivchei haBesht* tr. by Ben-Amos and Mintz 1994:86-7)], and to ‘rectify’ Shabbatai Tzvi [as we see in the case of R. Nachman of Breslov (Liebes 1995a)]. Even some of the students of the Vilna Gaon, under R. Menachem Mendel of Shklov – representing the *Mitnagdim* – maintained that Shabbatai Tzvi was the ‘*false messiah*’ as opposed to the Vilna Gaon who now became the ‘*true messiah*’ (Morgenstern 2006:x). Additionally, I choose to use the expression ‘*false Messiah*’ because, under Jewish or *Halachic* law, to qualify as the Messiah, certain basic conditions must be met:

“[T]he Messianic king will...renew the Davidic dynasty, restoring it to its initial sovereignty...build the Temple and gather the dispersed of Israel...the observance of all the statutes will return to their previous state. We will offer sacrifices, observe the Sabbatical and Jubilee years according to all their particulars as described by the Torah” (Maimonides, *Hilchot Melachim* 11:1).

If these conditions are not met, then based on these stipulations, a ‘*failed Messiah*’ or ‘*messianic claimant*’ cannot be regarded as the Jewish Messiah – and all the ‘*failed Messiahs*’ and ‘*messianic claimants*’ indeed claimed that they were the actual Messiah. In keeping with this basic and non-mystical *Halachic* conceptualisation of the

Jewish Messiah – and since this study concerns Jewish movements where messianic conceptualisations play a critical role – I use the expression ‘*false Messiah*.’

Galut

Exile

Gaon

The honorific *Gaon* was used for the heads of the Talmudic Academies of Sura and Pumbedita in Babylonia between the sixth and eleventh centuries. It was later also used to describe exceptional rabbis such as the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797).

Ger

A convert to Judaism.

Gematria (plural: *gematriot*)

Numerical value. The Hebrew alphabet carries a numerical value for each of its characters, with *alef*=1, *bet*=2, *gimmel*=3 and so on. There are different and more complicated forms of *gematriot*.

Gershaim

Inverted commas. The post-*Sabbatian* writings of many secret *Sabbatians* adopted a style using *gershaim* on top of words they intended the reader to interpret with coded references to either Shabbatai Tzvi or *Sabbatian* ideology.

Ha’alat Nitzotzot

The mystical term describing the conceptualisation of “elevating” fallen (spiritual) “sparks.”

Hashkafa

A term describing a cultural or popular form of theology often representing various religious and political factions. *Hashkafa* may also mean ‘*worldview*’.

Halacha

Jewish legal and ritual law.

Halachic

Of a legal and ritual nature.

Haskalah

The Jewish Enlightenment movement was dominant in Central and Eastern Europe between around 1770 and 1881, ending with the rise of Jewish nationalism. “*Literally, Haskalah comes from the Hebrew word sekhel, meaning ‘reason or intellect’ and the movement was based on rationality. It encouraged Jews to study secular subjects, to learn both the European and Hebrew languages, and to enter fields such as agriculture, crafts, the arts and science*” (Shira Schoenenberg, Jewish Virtual Library).⁶³⁸

Haskama

Pl. *Haskamot*. Approbation as in a written endorsement of a book.

Kabbalah

Jewish mysticism. In *Talmudic* times (0-500 CE) and post-*Talmudic* times until the thirteenth century, Jewish mysticism was known as *Heichalot* (*Palaces*) and *Merkavah* (*Chariot*) literature. It later took the form of *Zoharic* literature with the publication of the *Zohar* in around 1290. From the sixteenth century, the *Zohar* was largely presented through the prism of R. Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi (1534-1572) and became known as *Lurianic Kabbalah*. From the time of the Baal Shem Tov, *Kabbalah* was made more accessible to the masses with the development of *Chassidut* (the mystical literature of the Chassidim).

Kelipot

Literally ‘*Husks*.’ The mystical notion of negative *husks* or *shells* which cover up and hide the inner essence.

Lurianic Kabbalah

The mystical doctrines of R. Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi (1534-1572) and his students. R. Luria is also known as the Ari and is considered the father of modern Jewish

⁶³⁸ Online source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-haskalah> Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

mysticism (*Kabbalah*). He was based in Safed in the Galilee region of Ottoman Syria, now northern Israel.

Marrano

A pejorative for converso (see Converso).

Maskilim, Haskala

Members of the Jewish Enlightenment movement (*Haskala*). The movement was active between the 1770's and 1881.⁶³⁹

Merkava and Heichalot literature

An early, pre-*Zoharic* form of mysticism as practised in *Talmudic* and post-*Talmudic* times up to the thirteenth century.

Mezuza

Pl. *Mezuzot*. Scrolls containing scriptural verses (Deuteronomy 6:4–9, 11:13–21) inserted into a rectangular covering and affixed to the doorposts of Jewish homes.

Midrash

Pl. *Midrashim*. A style of biblical exegesis that expands the text from its narrow and literal meaning. The earliest *Midrashim* come from the second-century AD, although much of their content is older.

Mitzvot

Commandments or religious observances. Rabbinic Judaism requires the theoretical fulfilment of 613 *Mitzvot*. Not all are applicable today as some depend on factors such as the existence of the Temple.

Perushim

Literally 'Ascetics' or 'Separatists'. In this study, the name *Perushim* refers to the group of disciples of the Vilna Gaon who *separated*, ideologically, from the *Chassidim*, and who immigrated to the Holy Land after 1808. Historically, *Perushim* also refers to the earlier Pharisees active during the Second Temple times.

⁶³⁹ Online source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-haskalah>. Retrieved 28 April 2024.

Rebbe

A *Rebbe* is the designation for the leader of a *Chassidic* group or sect. The *Rebbes* usually follow a dynasty model of succession where the son or son-in-law of a deceased *Rebbe* is the next in line for the leadership position.

Reish Galuta

Reish Galuta is Aramaic for *Rosh Galut* (Hebrew), the *Head of the Exile* or *Exilarch* (Greek loan translation). While the Jews were in exile in Babylonia in post-Second Temple times, the leadership was divided between a religious figure, the *Gaon*, and a political figure, the *Reish Galuta*. Technically the *Reish Galuta* had roots going back to the First Temple era. The *Reish Galuta* was held in high esteem as he represented the Davidic dynasty. “*The government of Babylonian Jewry for the first 12 centuries C.E. lay in the hands of the exilarch*” (Jewish Virtual Library).⁶⁴⁰

Sabbatianism

The mystical movement that followed in the wake of the ‘revelation’ of the messianic claimant Shabbatai Tzvi (1626-1676), and continued long after his death and well into the twentieth century.

Sabbatian Kabbalah

The mystical doctrines produced by the leaders of the *Sabbatian* movement, particularly those of R. Natan of Gaza (1643–1680) and R. Avraham Miguel Cardozo (c.1626–1706).

Sefaradim

Jews of Spanish origin. Today the term is also used to describe eastern Jewish communities of West Asia. “The descendants of Jews who left Spain or Portugal after the 1492 expulsion are referred to as Sephardim. The word ‘Sephardim’ comes from the Hebrew word for Spain, Sepharad...” (Rebecca Weiner, Jewish Virtual Library).⁶⁴¹

Sefer Torah

⁶⁴⁰ Online source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/exilarch>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

⁶⁴¹ Online source: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/sephardim>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

Pl. *Sifrei Torah*. A handwritten scroll of the *Torah* (*Pentateuch*) from which the weekly Torah portions are read in the synagogue.

Sefirot

The mystical conceptualisations of ten divine *emanations*, or *spheres*, through which the Ein Sof (Infinite One) manifests, and continuously creates all forms of existence outside of itself.

Siddur

Prayer-book.

Shabbat

The Jewish Sabbath.

Shaar Blat

Frontispiece or title page of a book.

Shechina

God's presence

Shiryon

Armour. In the context of this study, *Shiryon* is used to refer to a mystical concept in R. Nachman of Breslov's once-secret writings, '*Maaseh miShiryon*.' In this sense, a *Shiryon* is said to protect so efficiently "*that when they kill you, you will come alive again; and then if they kill you once again, you will come alive again*" (R. Nachman of Breslov, *Maaseh miShiryon*, in *Hitgalut veTikun*, Mark 2011:186).

Synchronic

"[R]elating to something, especially a language, at a particular point in time, without considering how it developed to that point" (Cambridge Dictionary).

Tana

Pl. Tanaim. A sage from the *Tanaic* period (10-220 CE). “*The period of the Tannaim, which lasted about 210 years (10-220 C.E.), is generally divided by Jewish scholars into five or six sections or generations...*” (1906 Jewish Encyclopedia).⁶⁴²

Tefilin

Phylacteries. Leather straps wound around the arm and worn during the morning services on weekdays.

Tikun

The mystical notion of *restoration* or *fixing*, often of holy sparks which had fallen from their former glory.

Tosafist

A rabbi of the *Tosafist* period - spawned by Rashi (1040-1105) - lasted about two hundred years, encompassing the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and ending with R. Meir of Rothenburg (d. 1293). The term *Tosafists* generally refers to the rabbis of the early period of the *Rishonim* (1038-1500) who lived specifically in *Ashkenaz* (Northern France and Germany). The word *Tosafot* can also refer to a body of exegetical literature defined as: “*Critical and explanatory glosses on the Talmud, printed, in almost all editions, on the outer margin and opposite Rashi's notes. The authors of the Tosafot are known as Tosafists ('ba'ale ha-tosafot')*” (Joseph Jacobs and M. Seligsohn, 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia).⁶⁴³

Tzitzit

A four-cornered garment with ritually wound fringes on each corner.

Yibum

Levirate marriage. Deuteronomy 25:5-10 specifies that the brother of a man who died before producing children must marry his brother's widow. ‘*Levir,*’ is Latin for

⁶⁴² Online source: <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14240-tannaim-and-amoraim>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

⁶⁴³ Online source: <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14457-tosafot>. Retrieved on 24 February 2022.

'husband's brother.' Online source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/levirate>. Retrieved on 08 April 2024. See *Chalitzah*.

Yeshiva

Pl. *yeshivot*. A Jewish religious school or academy.

Zohar

A foundational mystical work that was first published in Spain around 1290. Traditionally the work is said to have been authored by Shimon bar Yochai an early *Tanna* in the second century CE. Academic research, however, indicates it may have been authored one thousand years later by Moshe de León (1240-1305):

“I have come to accept in substance the contention of Graetz – itself only the most articulate expression of a whispered tradition of centuries – that the Spanish Kabbalist Moses de Leon must be regarded as the author of the Zohar” (Scholem 1941a:159).

This was the dominant scholarly view until it was challenged by Yehuda Liebes in the 1980s who suggested a theory of multiple authors, instead:

“The Zohar is the fruit of a whole group that together dealt with the Kabbalah on the basis of a common tradition and ancient texts” (Liebes 1988:5).

The authorship of this important mystical source remains a contentious issue today.

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Genesis 1:2

Genesis 1:3

Genesis 25:26

Genesis 26:5

Genesis 26:9

Genesis 27:33

Genesis 30:37

Genesis 32:5

Exodus 12:38

Exodus 17:16

Exodus 34:7

Numbers 14:24

Numbers 14:37

Numbers 20:19

Numbers 21:9

Numbers 23:21

Numbers 24:16

Deuteronomy 1:5

Deuteronomy 6:4–9

Deuteronomy 11:13–21

Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Deuteronomy 31:12

Mishna

Avot 6:6

Bava Metzia 1:4

Kiddushin 4:14

Talmud (Gemara)

- b. *Bava Batra* 16b.
- b. *Bava Batra* 121b
- b. *Chagiga* 14b
- b. *Gitin* 57a
- b. *Sanhedrin* 99b
- b. *Shabbat* 104b
- b. *Yuma* 54b

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