

Mattityahu Strashun (1817–1885) and His Relationship with the Early Founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

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Abstract

This paper will explore a lesser known and underexplored member of the nineteenth-century Haskalah, Mattityahu Strashun (1817–1885) from Vilna, Lithuania, and his personal relationship to *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars such as Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) and Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport (Shir, 1790–1867) and its effect on his scholarship. I will outline Strashun's methods of study by locating him within the historical and cultural world in which he was born and lived. I argue that three distinct contemporaneous movements influenced his scholarly achievements: the Russian Haskalah, Strashun's local intellectual circle that embraced the teachings and methods of R. Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman of Vilna (Vilna Gaon, 1720–1797), and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. I will demonstrate that each of these three – with particular focus on the influence of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and its leading scholars – are apparent in Strashun's scholarship and worldview. Additionally, I will provide examples of correspondence between Strashun and leaders of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* that illuminate his personal relationships with these scholars.

1. Introduction

Mattityahu Strashun was born in Vilna on October 1, 1817, and died there on December 13, 1885.¹ His renowned reputation was due as much to his scholarship as to his philanthropic and communal activities.² He combined

¹ Many thanks to Dan Rabinowitz and Rabbis Yosef Dubovick and Shimon Shimanowitz for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

² For biographical information on Mattityahu Strashun, see: Hillel Noach Steinschneider: *Ir Vilna (City of Vilna)*, Vilna 1900, pp. 283–287; Shalom Pludermacher: *Zikaron le-Chacham. Zeh Sefer Toledot ha-Rav ha-Gaon, he-Chacham ha-Kolel Rabbi Mattityahu Strashun*, in:

both when he bequeathed his extensive library, replete with contemporary Haskalah literature, to the community of Vilna after his death, along with funding to maintain it as a communal library, thus creating one of the first public Jewish libraries.

In recent years, the history of his library and the Strashun public library has been the subject of various monographs and articles.³ To date, however, Strashun's writings and correspondence have still not been explored. Nevertheless, Mattityahu Strashun was a prolific author, having written over three hundred articles published in newspapers, journals, supplements, and commentaries on various printed books at the authors' request.⁴

Shortly after Strashun's death, a volume of his glosses on *Midrash Rabba* (The Major Homilies) was published, entitled *Mattat-Yah* (God's Gift), wherein Strashun demonstrates an impressive usage of and familiarity with *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, i.e. with the methods of contemporary philology, grammar and textual criticism, bibliography, and history. In 1969, the Jerusalem-based publishing house *Mossad Rav Kook* (Rabbi Kook Institute) printed a selection of Strashun's articles entitled *Mivchar Ketavim* (Selected Writings).⁵

Since the writings show that *Wissenschaft des Judentums* clearly and sustainably influenced Strashun's scholarship, it is the goal of this paper to systematically examine and analyze the impact of *Wissenschaft* on his traditional, or rather, Orthodox methodologies and oeuvre. In order to properly assess Mattityahu Strashun's involvement with and usage of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* methods and ideals, it is first important to outline the historical

Mattityahu Strashun *Mattat-Yah* (The Memory of a Sage. This is a Biography of the Great Genius and Wise One Rabbi Mattityahu Strashun), in: Mattityahu Strashun: God's Gift, Vilna 1893, pp. 7–38; Zvi Harkavy: Rabbi Mattityahu Strashun, in: Naftali Ben Menahem, *Aresheth* 3 (1961), pp. 426–29; Zvi Harkavy: Rabbi Mattityahu Strashun (1816–1885), in: Shimon Federbusch (ed.), *Chochmat Yisrael be-Europa* (Jewish Studeis in Europe), 3 vols., Jerusalem 1965, pp. 345–355. See also Jacob Mark: *Be-Mehi'tsatam shel Gedolei ha-Dor*. Biographiot, Sofrim, Amerot ve-Sihot Chulin shel Gedolei Yisrael be-Dor ha-Kodem (In the Generation Leader's Inner Sanctum), Jerusalem 1958, pp. 237–247, originally printed in Yiddish in: *Gedolim fun Unser Tsayt* (The Great Men of our Time), New York 1925, pp. 359–372. Interestingly, there are some noticeable differences and omissions in the Hebrew translation.

³ See Frida Shor: From "Likute Shoshanim" to "The Paper Brigade." The Story of the Strashun Library in Vilna, Tel Aviv 2012 (Hebrew); Dan Rabinowitz: *The Lost Library. The Fate of the Strashun Library in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (forthcoming).

⁴ For the most current bibliography of his writings, see Shalom Pludermacher: *Shirei Minhah*, in: Strashun, *Mattat-Yah*, pp. 39–80.

⁵ Mattityahu Strashun: *Mivchar Ketavim*, Jerusalem 1969, hereafter *Ketavim*. Most of the material by Mattityahu Strashun that I am referring to in this article can be found in this volume.

and cultural world in which Strashun was born and lived, namely the two intellectual movements that may have influenced him the most: *Wissenschaft* and the Haskalah. Secondly, the paper turns to Strashun's lifeworld and education, and the third intellectual movement that shaped his thought: the scholarly circle around the teachings and methods of R. Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman of Vilna (1720–1797), also known as “Gaon of Vilna” or “Vilna Gaon.” Based on this description of his intellectual and religious influences, I will trace specific aspects of Mattityahu Strashun's writings that directly or indirectly reference these three distinct movements.

2. The *Zeitgeist* of Strashun's World: *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and Haskalah

Wissenschaft des Judentums is the academic study of Judaism using modern methods of research, such as philology, textual criticism, and comparison of manuscripts, for an all-encompassing scope of inquiry. In 1818, Leopold Zunz (1794–1886) published the essay *Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur* (Something on Rabbinic Literature), in which he outlined the mission of *Wissenschaft*.⁶ Given the impact of Zunz's article as well as his later works, it is not surprising that particularly Zunz's writings became significant for Strashun's thought. Zunz's most important work which had a lasting impact on academia until today is *Die Gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden historisch entwickelt* (The History of the Jewish Sermon), first printed in 1832. Chanoch Albeck (1890–1972), in the introduction to the Hebrew translation of this work, stressed that its importance today is more in the methods that it outlined on

⁶ For a Hebrew translation of this text, see Paul R. Mendes-Flohr: *Modern Jewish Studies. Historical and Philosophical Perspectives*, Jerusalem 1979, pp. 81–100. About this essay, see Ismar Schorsch: *Leopold Zunz. Creativity in Adversity*, Philadelphia 2016, pp. 18–20; Leon Wieseltier: *Etwas Über Die Jüdische Historik. Leopold Zunz and the Inception of Modern Jewish Historiography*, in: *History and Theory*, 20 (1981) 2, pp. 135–149; Amos Bitzan: *Leopold Zunz and the Meanings of Wissenschaft*, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 78 (2017) 2, pp. 233–254. (Thanks to Menachem Butler for pointing me to these last two sources.) For an overview on Judaic Studies, see the introduction by Shimon Federbusch (ed.), *Chochmat Yisrael be-Ma'ariv Europa* (Judaic Studies in Western Europe), vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1958, pp. 9–24; Shmuel Mirsky: *Introduction*, in Shimon Federbusch (ed.), *Chochmat Yisrael be-Ma'ariv Europa* (Judaic Studies in Eastern Europe), vol. 2, Jerusalem 1963, pp. 5–64. For biographical details, see: Hirsch Jakob Zimmels: *Leopold Zunz. His Life and Times*, London 1952; Schorsch, *Creativity in Adversity*.

how to analyze and define rabbinical literature critically and academically than in Zunz's conclusions.⁷

Besides Zunz, the chief rabbi of Prague, Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport (1790–1867, hereafter “Shir,” following his acronym), became particularly important for Mattityahu Strashun's thought.⁸ Shir was famous for his monographs on the history of the *Paytanyim* (liturgists) such as Eliezer Ha-Kalir (end of sixth Century), and *Geonim* (giants), especially Nathan of Rome (1035–1103), the author of the important dictionary *Sefer Aruch* (The Set Book).⁹ These historical biographies of renowned Talmud interpreters were the first of their kind.¹⁰ At the same time, Shir demonstrated his expertise in linguistics and knowledge of foreign languages. This is also visible in his uncompleted but equally impressive work, *Erech Milin* (The Importance of Words), published in Prague in 1852, an encyclopedic dictionary which focused on the origins of ancient names and words. In this later work, Shir proved his impressive command of both the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud, their parallels in early *midrashic* texts, and their historical context.¹¹ Shir's work had a demonstrable impact on Leopold Zunz's writings.¹²

A generation prior to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the Haskalah movement (Jewish enlightenment) shared some similar goals with *Wissenschaft* and had equally different foci and styles.¹³ Disciplines encouraged by Maskilim were

⁷ Chanoch Albeck: *Chadrashot Be-Yisrael* (The Homiletic Genre in Israel and Their Historical Chain): Jerusalem 1947, pp. 19–20. On the significance of Zunz's study, see also Schorsch, *Creativity in Adversity*, pp. 80–82; Günter Stemberger: *Leopold Zunz. Pioneer of Midrash Research*, in: *EJJS Newsletter* 15 (2004), pp. 33–49. (Thanks to Menachem Butler for pointing me to this article.)

⁸ On Shir, see: Simon Bernfeld: *Toledot Shir* (Rabbi Shlomo Yehuda Rapoport). Tsiur Kulturi me-Chayyav, Zemano, u-Poaluto ha-Maadait (A Biography of Shir [Rabbi Solomon Judah Rapoport. A Cultural Sketch of his Life, Times and Scientific Work], Berlin, 1899; Isaac Barzilay: *Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport* (Shir) and His Contemporaries. Some Aspects of Jewish Scholarship of the Nineteenth Century, Tel Aviv 1969; Nathan Shiffriss: *Shelomo Yehudah Rapoport* (Shir), 1790–1867. Torah, Haskalah, Wissenschaft des Judentums, and The Beginning of Modern Jewish Nationalism (unpublished Hebrew dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 2011).

⁹ All essays are to be found in Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport: *Toldot Gedolei Yisrael* (History of Great Jewish Leaders), 2 vols., Jerusalem 1969.

¹⁰ See Gerson D. Cohen: *The Reconstruction of Geonic History. Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures*, Philadelphia 1991, pp. 99–155.

¹¹ Chanan Gafni: *The Mishnah's Plain Sense. A Study of Modern Talmudic Scholarship*, Tel Aviv 2011, pp. 175–188 (Hebrew).

¹² See Schorsch, *Creativity in Adversity*, pp. 87–89.

¹³ On Russian Haskalah, see Michael Stanislawski: *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews. The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855*, Philadelphia 1983; Mordechai Zalkin: *A New*

especially grammar (*dikduk*), the study of the Hebrew Bible, and knowledge of foreign languages and academic disciplines. For example, in 1828 Isaac Beer Levinsohn (1788–1860), the father of Russian Haskalah, published his classic work *Teudah Be-Yisrael* (Vocation in Israel) in Vilna.¹⁴ In this highly influential work, the author demonstrated the importance of knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, grammar, languages, and the academic disciplines, based on numerous Jewish sources and partly drawing on Shir's writings.¹⁵ Before the Haskalah, Rabbi Eliyahu ben Sholomo Zalman, known as the "Gaon" (Genius) resided in Vilna. Gradually, he began to have an impact on a small group of people through his teachings and writings that overlapped with those of the Haskalah and later, particularly as academic Jewish learning developed with *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. He encouraged study of the Hebrew language and Hebrew Bible, as well as the acquisition of scientific knowledge.¹⁶ For example, the Gaon encouraged a critical method focusing on a careful reading, even emending the text, with references to and close examination of parallel source texts.¹⁷ The Gaon of Vilna's impact on Eastern European Maskilim was significant.¹⁸

Dawn. The Jewish Enlightenment in the Russian Empire. Social Aspects, Jerusalem 2000 (Hebrew); Joshua Levinsohn: The Early Vilna Haskalah and the Search for a Modern Jewish Identity (unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, 1999). For recent works highlighting some of the differences, see Gafni, Mishnah's Plain Sense.

¹⁴ Immanuel Etkes: For the Sake of Heaven. Hasidim, Mitnagdim, Maskilim and Their Interrelations, Jerusalem 2016, esp. pp. 272–289 (Hebrew).

¹⁵ See, for example, what Shmuel Finn writes about himself, reprinted in Shmuel Feiner: S.J. Fuenn. From Militant to Conservative Maskil, Jerusalem 1993, p. 71. See also Shmuel Barantchok (ed.): Vilna, Yerushalayim de-Lita. Dorot aharonim 1881–1939 (Vilna, Jerusalem of Lithuania. The first Generations 1881–1939), Tel Aviv 1983, esp. pp. 184–186; Zalkin, New Dawn, pp. 239–240. Levinsohn's work even received a letter of recommendation from Rabbi Avraham Abbaleh (1762–1836), the chief judge of the religious Jews in Vilna at the time, cf. Etkes, For the Sake of Heaven, p. 309.

¹⁶ Stefan Schreiner: The Vilna Gaon as a Biblical Scholar. A Reappraisal, in: Israelis Lempertas (ed.), The Gaon of Vilna and the Annals of Jewish Literature, Vilna 1998, pp. 128–136. See also Jay Harris: How Do We Know This? Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism, Albany 1995, pp. 234–239; David Fishman: Russia's First Modern Jews. The Jews of Shklov, New York 1995, pp. 104–108; Immanuel Etkes: The Gaon of Vilna. The Man and His Image, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 60–68 (Hebrew).

¹⁷ On the Gaon's methods and teachings, see Lawrence H. Schiffman: The Vilna Gaon's Methods for Textual Criticism of Rabbinical Literature, in: Israelis Lempertas (ed.), The Gaon of Vilna and the Annals of Jewish Literature, Vilna 1998, pp. 116–127; Yaron Zilberstein: The Vilna Gaon. Thought and Exegesis on the Jerusalem Talmud, in: Israel Rozenson / Yosef Rivlin (eds.), The Vilna Gaon's Disciples in Eretz Yisrael. History Thought Reality, Jerusalem 2010, pp. 131–163 (Hebrew); Yaakov Shmuel Spiegel: Chapters in the History of the Jewish Book, Scholars and their Annotations, Ramat Gan 2005, pp. 423–470 (Hebrew).

¹⁸ See Etkes, The Gaon of Vilna, pp. 44–83; Etkes, For the Sake of Heaven, pp. 253–271. See also Eliyahu Stern: The Genius. Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modern Judaism, New Haven

Leopold Zunz and Shir were equally influenced by Azariah de Rossi's (1512–1577) *Meor Einayim* (The Light of the Eyes), in which the author had employed critical methods, including philology and comparative linguistics.¹⁹ Many of these methods eventually became trademarks of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.²⁰ The work also influenced people affiliated with the school of the Gaon of Vilna, such as Mattityahu Strashun's father, Rabbi Shmuel (Samuel) ben Joseph Strashun (1793–1872).

3. Mattityahu Strashun's Life and Education

The above-mentioned setting is essential to understand the intellectual world in which Mattityahu Strashun grew up. Born into a wealthy family, Strashun received an excellent Jewish traditional education first by his father, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun. Besides the typical subjects like the Hebrew Bible and Talmud, Mattityahu Strashun was also taught other subjects that children of his age usually did not learn, such as Hebrew grammar and foreign languages. He married at the age of fourteen, remained in Vilna until his death, and was able to continue his studies uninterrupted in great wealth.

Mattityahu Strashun became a prolific writer. The range of his numerous writings is remarkable, covering literally all areas of Jewish studies. On various topics, he dealt with basically all texts of the Jewish tradition from the Bible to contemporary literature, philosophy, history and bibliography.²¹ Much of his knowledge was of course garnered by studying the books in his vast library that he painstakingly built and maintained.²² However, Strashun was

2013. For an excellent bibliography of everything related to the Gaon, see Yeshayahu Vinograd: *Thesaurus of the Books of the Vilna Gaon. Detailed and Annotated Bibliography of Books by and about the Gaon and Hasid R. Eliahu b. R. Shlomo Zalman of Vilna*, Jerusalem 2003 (Hebrew).

¹⁹ On this work there is extensive literature, see for example Bezalel Safran: *Azariah de Rossi's Meor Eynaim* (unpublished dissertation, Harvard University 1979). (Thanks to Menachem Butler for this source); Lester Segal: *Historical Consciousness and Religious Tradition in Azariah De Rossi's Meor Einayim*, New York 1989; Robert Bonfil: *Azariah De Rossi: Selected Chapters from Sefer Meor Einayim*, Jerusalem 1991 (Hebrew).

²⁰ Leopold Zunz even examined De Rossi's biography, see Leopold Zunz: *A Biography of Rabbi Azariah De Rossi*, in: Kerem Hemed (Delightful Vineyard) 5 (1841) pp. 131–158; Leopold Zunz: *Addenda to A Biography of Rabbi Azariah de Rossi*, in: Kerem Hemed 7 (1843) pp. 119–24 (both Hebrew).

²¹ See footnote 3 about a partial bibliography of his works.

²² For a catalogue of the Hebrew section of his library, see Zvi Hirsch Itzakowski: *Likutei Shoshanim* (A Gathering of Roses), Berlin 1889.

not merely a collector of books but, more importantly, a curator of their content.²³ Strashun's works are impressive not only in regard to the great range of topics he dealt with but also because of their depth and originality. Various descriptions of him mention that he had a photographic memory.

There is scholarly consensus that Mattityahu Strashun learned about the works and methods of the Gaon of Vilna from his father, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, known by his acronym "Ra-Shash." Shmuel Strashun is best known for his glosses on the Talmud and Midrash, published in 1858 as *Hagahot HaRashash* (Glosses of Rabbi Shmuel Strashun).²⁴ While it is unknown who Rabbi Shmuel Strashun's teachers were, it is certain that he was influenced by the Haskalah but even more by the Vilna Gaon's methods. His glosses clearly reveal that he utilized works from the school of the Gaon.²⁵ For example, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun was famous for carefully reading texts and emending them in quest of a proper reading, not based upon manuscripts, but upon a comparison with parallel texts along with his deductive acumen.²⁶

Rabbi Shmuel Strashun penned glosses to texts that were commonly known to people influenced by the Gaon of Vilna. These include his extensive comments on the *Midrash Rabba*, a work neglected by many contemporaries.²⁷ Furthermore, he annotated Zvi Hirsch Katzenelbogen's (1796–1868) commentary work *Netivot Olam* (Pathways of the World), published in Vilna in 1822.²⁸ In his glosses on the Talmud, Strashun placed an emphasis on the Hebrew language, an area neglected by many scholars but popular among

²³ See, for example, Mattiyahu Strashun: Mivchar Ketavim, Jerusalem 1969, pp.30, 218, 244, where he quotes some of his "rare" books.

²⁴ See Steinschneider, *Ir Vilna*, pp. 250–252; Mordechai Zalkin: Samuel and Mattityahu Strashun. Between Tradition and Innovation, in: Yermiyahu Aharon Taub/Aviva E. Astrinsky (eds.), Mattityahu Strashun, 1817–1885. Scholar, Leader, and Book Collector, New York, 2000, p. 1–28. (Thanks to Dan Rabinowitz for this source.); Tzvi Harkavy: Toledot ha-RaShaSh u-Ketavav (Origins of the Rasash and his Writings), in: Tzvi Harkavy (ed.), Mekorei ha-Rambam. Samuel Strashun, Jerusalem 1957, pp. 53–58; Shua Engelman: Rabbi Samuel Strashun (Harashash) and his Haggahot on the Babylonian Talmud (unpublished dissertation, Bar Ilan University 2008 (All references in Hebrew).

²⁵ Jay Harris: Rabbinic Literature after the Death of the Gaon, in: Izraelis Lempertas (ed.), The Gaon of Vilna and the Annals of Jewish Literature, Vilna 1998, pp. 88–95; Dovid Avraham: Pinkso Shel Shmuel (Notebook of Samuel), Jerusalem 2001, pp. 100–101.

²⁶ See Engelman, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, pp. 115–175.

²⁷ See Gil S. Perl: The Pillar of Volozhin. Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin and the World of Nineteenth Century Lithuanian Torah Scholarship, Boston 2013, pp. 42–60.

²⁸ On this work, see: Hermann L. Strack: Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash, Cambridge 1996, pp. 22–30. See also Perl, Pillar of Volozhin, pp. 85–86, 52–53.

those who were influenced by the Gaon of Vilna.²⁹ A similar linguistic and philological orientation became the method of the Haskalah and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.³⁰

There are other aspects of Rabbi Shmuel Strashun's work that are even more in line with *Wissenschaft des Judentums* methods and ideals. In 2011, the Jerusalem publishing house *Machon Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem Institute) printed a collection of indexes on thousands of topics found in Shmuel Strashun's writings, entitled *Pinkas Shel Shmuel* (Notebook of Samuel). A careful examination of the indexes reveals many topics touched upon in his glosses, showing that he devoted many comments to historical issues related to the Hebrew Bible, the sages of the Mishnah, and the Talmud.³¹

Other non-traditional areas of interest in Rabbi Shmuel Strashun's writings deal with mathematics and academic disciplines such as astronomy and geography.³² This too, could possibly be traced to the Gaon of Vilna's influence, who valued the natural sciences. Moreover, Strashun can be found on a list of subscribers (*Pränumeranten*) in the first edition of Isaac Ber Levinsohn's aforementioned *Teudah BiYisroel*. This demonstrates not only his interest in owning the work but also indicates his interest in actually using it.³³ Two other works are quoted several times by Strashun in his glosses: de Rossi's *Meor Eynayim*,³⁴ and the *Biur* (Commentary [on the Hebrew Bible]) by Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), which both have a strong emphasis on language.³⁵ It can thus be said that Rabbi Shmuel Strashun's writings display a strong influence from the school of the Gaon of Vilna as well as many similarities and overlaps with methods of the Haskalah and *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

²⁹ Engelman: Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, pp. 227–234; Avraham, *Pinkso Shel Shmuel*, pp. 7–39.

³⁰ Engelman, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, pp. 221–240.

³¹ Engelman, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, pp. 209–213; Avraham, *Pinkso Shel Shmuel*, pp. 7–39.

³² Engelman, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, pp. 322–722; Avraham, *Pinkso Shel Shmuel*, pp. 161–174.

³³ On the subscribers, see Shynayer Z. Leiman: A Note on R. Bezalel Alexandrov's (*Mishkan Betzalel*) and its *Prenumeranten*, The Seforim Blog, November 28, 2016, <http://seforim.blogspot.com/2016/11/a-note-on-r-bezalel-alexandrov-and-its.html> (last accessed October 6, 2016).

³⁴ Engelman, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, p. 237.

³⁵ Engelman, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, pp. 234–235. These works are absent from the otherwise complete listings in Avhrhom, *Pinkso Shel Shmuel*. See also Meir Hildesheimer: Moses Mendelssohn in Nineteenth-Century Rabbinical Literature, in: *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 55 (1988), pp. 79–133.

4. Going Beyond the Father: Mattityahu Strashun's Writings

It may not surprise that all the methods just mentioned are blatantly visible in Mattityahu Strashun's writings as well. Like his father, he authored glosses to the Talmud.³⁶ Mattityahu Strashun clearly employed methods affiliated with the school of the Gaon of Vilna, such as emending texts, using parallel texts from the Talmudim, and including a special focus on language and grammar. Furthermore, his glosses display knowledge of many of the Gaon's comments. Also similarly to his father, Mattityahu Strashun authored glosses to the *Midrash Rabbah*, printed in his work *Mattat-Yah*, and notes on Zvi Hirsch Katzenelenbogen's commentary *Netivot Olam*.

However, Mattityahu Strashun took his intellectual ventures to yet another level. Whereas the school of the Gaon of Vilna in general and his father in particular emended texts, Mattityahu Strashun went further and used the classic work of Rabbi Nosson Rabinowitz (1835–1888), *Dikdueki Sofrim* (Scribal Emendations) for his emendations.³⁷ Also in other areas, he went beyond his father. Whereas Shmuel Strashun quoted Moses Mendelsohn's Bible commentary, Mattityahu Strashun made much more extensive use of this work.³⁸ Furthermore, he used and quoted other works by Mendelsohn, such as *Jerusalem: On Religious Power and Judaism*.³⁹ The same is true for de Rossi's *Meor Eynayim*, which Strashun quoted extensively throughout his writings.⁴⁰ While Shmuel Strashun quoted numerous academic works, Mattityahu Strashun used such works even more frequently and quoted them. In fact, he wrote in passing that he had read scientific works already at a young age, particularly *Reshit*

³⁶ Unfortunately, there is only a very small part of his glosses on the tractates Eruvin and Bava Basra. These glosses, however, were first printed in the Vilna edition of the Babylonian Talmud, printed in Vilna between 1880 and 1886. They can be found in the back of the volumes. The glosses on Eruvin see pp. 44a–44b; the glosses on Bava Basra see pp. 80–84.

³⁷ See, for example, his glosses on tractates Eruvin, in Babylonian Talmud (Vilna edition), p. 44b, and notes on Talmud 11b, 13b, and 19b.

³⁸ For example, Strashun, Ketavim, pp. 17, 93; Mattat-Yah, pp. 4b, 7b, 12b, 26a, 39a.

³⁹ See the latest edition of the work: Moses Mendelssohn: Jerusalem oder über die religiöse Macht und Judentum, ed. by David Martyn, Bielefeld 2001. Strashun, Ketavim, p. 93; Mattat-Yah, pp. 15a, 38a.

⁴⁰ Strashun, Ketavim, pp. 169–172, 134–135, 223, 230, 238. See the comments of Perl, The Pillar of Volozhin, pp. 110–111.

Limudim (First Teachings) of Baruch Linda (1758–1849), a *maskilic* scientific textbook.⁴¹

When in 1860 the moderate Vilna Maskil Shmuel (Samuel) Joseph Fuenn (1818–1890) published his classic encyclopedia on prominent scholars of his city, entitled *Keriyah Nemunah* (Faithful City), Fuenn wrote in the introduction that he had asked his close friend Mattityahu Strashun to add his comments to the work and described him as well-versed in the literature of the *Chochmat Yisrael* (Jewish Studies).⁴² Strashun justified his extensive notes and comments by way of the Talmud. Although he had no proper university training, it becomes clear from these additional comments and his further writings that he can be seen as an excellent historian, critical scholar, and bibliographer. Many other essays, some of which are collected in the volume *Mivchar Ketavim* (Selected Writings), also demonstrate this additional facet.⁴³

Another intensification beyond the teachings and writings of his father is Mattityahu Strashun's usage of Isaac Baer Levinsohn's *Teudah BiYisrael*. Taking this relationship to the next level, Mattityahu Strashun corresponded with the author about the work. In one of the letters to Levinsohn, he confessed that the work had a tremendous impact on him.⁴⁴ In contrast, in one of his earliest published articles, he respectfully criticized one of Levinsohn's essays.⁴⁵ Besides his correspondence with Levinsohn, Strashun was in contact with many other Maskilim, particularly those from his hometown of Vilna. He participated in the first *maskilic* journal of Vilna scholars, *Prihei Tzafon* (Flowers of the North), contributing articles to the journal.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Strashun, *Ketavim*, p. 251. Yet, Strashun writes negatively about Baruch Linda earlier in Strashun, *Ketavim*, p. 240. On Linda, see Tal Kogman: *The "Maskilim" in the Sciences. Jewish Scientific Education in the German-Speaking Sphere in Modern Times*, Jerusalem 2013, pp. 49–86.

⁴² Reprinted in Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 169–172. On Fuenn, see See Feiner, S.J. Fuenn, pp. 1–47.

⁴³ See, for example, Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 234–242, which is a masterful essay against a historical essay of the scholar Yakov Reifman (1818–1994) about David Gans (1514–1641).

⁴⁴ On the correspondence, see Isaac Baer Levinsohn: *Sefer HaZihronot*, Warsaw 1899, pp. 49–50. See also Isaac Baer Levinsohn: *Sefer ha-Kolel Igerot Ratso' ve-Shov bein Yitzhak Be'er Levinzon u-Vein Hakhmei Doro* (Isaac's Well, a Thesaurus of Correspondence Between Isaac Ber Levinson and Scholars of His Generation), Warsaw 1899, pp. 42–46.

⁴⁵ Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 227–228.

⁴⁶ The articles are reprinted in Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 213–228. On the journal, see Mordechai Zalkin: *The Periodical 'Pirhei Tsafon' and Its Role in the Social System of the Haskalah Movement in the Russian Empire*, in: *Keshet* 35 (2007), pp. 63–69; Etkes, *For the Sake of Heaven*, p. 305; Shalom Pludermacher, *Zikkaron le-Chakham*, p. 15; Feiner, S.J. Fuenn, p. 181. (Thanks to Dan Rabinowitz for this source.)

5. Mattityahu Strashun's Reception of Zunz and Shir

Mattityahu Strashun developed unique skills and interests through his education by his father Rabbi Shmuel Strashun. Despite his study methods and personal relationships, Mattityahu Strashun is hard to place as a modern Jewish scholar, and even as a Maskil. As Gil Perl describes him, “he walked the virtually invisible line between traditionalist and maskilic scholarship.”⁴⁷ Many accounts of his life describe Mattityahu Strashun as just a learned and gifted man. In contrast to that simple assumption, I would like to suggest an additional explanation for his outstanding knowledge and talents: It was his familiarity with the methods of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and his exchange with scholars of the Jewish academic movement that helped him outshine many of his contemporaries. While it is known that he was in correspondence with many *Wissenschaft* scholars, his relationships with Leopold Zunz and Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport (Shir) stand out.

In his writings, Mattityahu Strashun showed a great familiarity with Zunz's work.⁴⁸ Zunz's works had a great influence on Strashun in developing critical methods, and possibly added to his great interest in the Midrash literature. For example, in his writings, Mattityahu Strashun described at length the manuscript of an early Midrash.⁴⁹ Similar to Zunz, he was interested in the prayers and liturgy and authored various articles on these topics.⁵⁰ He demonstrated his knowledge in this field when, at the author's request, he added a number of comments to Levi Kletsky's *Erech Tefillah* (An Estimation of Prayer).⁵¹

Strashun often gave a detailed background on historical persons and events, as in the case of the great Jewish poet and philosopher Rabbi Yehudah Halevi (1070–1141), for which he used current historical knowledge to critically

⁴⁷ Perl, *The Pillar of Volozhin*, p. 110. I am not labeling Mattityahu Strashun a “Maskil” as others have, for reasons beyond the scope of this paper. But just to list one support for this claim: In 1900, Hillel Steinschneider published a lexicon of the Vilna scholars, entitled *Ir Vilna* (City of Vilna). Only in 2003, the second part of the work was printed from a manuscript for the first time. This part was devoted to the Maskilim of Vilna, many of whom Steinschneider knew personally. Yet, Steinschneider, who knew Strashun well, lined him up with the scholars of Vilna but not the Maskilim in the first volume.

⁴⁸ Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 31, 104, 144, 161, 169, 236, 251; Mattat-Yah, p. 130.

⁴⁹ Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 166–168.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 92–98.

⁵¹ Levi Kletsky: *Erech Tefillah* (Order of the Prayer), Vilna 1868, pp. 134–142.

analyze the traditional legends of the poet's life.⁵² Similar to Zunz, bibliography was a field of great importance for him, not least in his capacity as a book collector.⁵³ Moreover, in his work on the *Midrash Rabbah*, he often used his knowledge of ancient languages and philological methods to decipher and understand textual variants.⁵⁴

Similarly, Shir had a great impact on Mattityahu Strashun, as particularly the philological references in his writings show.⁵⁵ Since Strashun was especially interested in the history of the *Geonim* of the Middle Ages, he built on Shir's famous monographs about individual Geonim, such as when he discussed the usage of *geonic* material in order to better understand Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040–1105), called Rashi, or Moses Maimonides (1135/38–1204).⁵⁶ In his work on Rabbi Nathan ben Jehiel (1030–1106) and his lexicon, the *Aruch* (Prepared), Shir raised the question whether Rashi had used the *Aruch* for his commentaries. Following Shir's research, Strashun added numerous sources and notes to this issue.⁵⁷

In some parts of his writings, one can trace Mattityahu Strashun's tremendous respect for Zunz and Shir. At the end of a lengthy discussion about the famous work *Besamim Rosh* (Incense of Spices) by Saul Hirschel Berlin (1740–1794), Strashun wrote that he had heard that “[...] the *great critical* one, Dr. Zunz, wrote a special article on the *Besamim Rosh* [Incense of Spices] and who is like him in such things, but the work did not reach me yet.”⁵⁸ Elsewhere, he wrote: “*my friend* the wise and great critical, Zunz, did not see. [...]”⁵⁹ Shir's name also appeared often in Mattityahu Strashun's writings, usually with

⁵² Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 215–217. See Eliezer Brodt: The Death and Burial of Rabbi Yehudah Halevi in Eretz Yisroel and the Cairo Geniza, in: *Yeshurun* 25 (2011) pp. 754–775.

⁵³ See, for example, Strashun: *Ketavim*, pp. 213–228, 233.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Strashun: *Ketavim*, on Greek see pp. 36, 59, 143, 250; on others, see 80, 83, 157, 162, 209; *Mattat-Yah*, pp. 7b, 10b, 15a, 15b, 17b, and many more.

⁵⁵ Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 35, 48, 82, 97, 98, 100, 105, 107, 128, 145, 184, 194, 248, 239; *Mattat-Yah*, pp. 167, 174, 192, 202, 219.

⁵⁶ On Rabbi Hananel, see Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 107–109. On Rashi and the Geonim, see Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 105–106. On Rambam and Geonim, see Strashun, *Ketavim*, p. 114.

⁵⁷ Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 100–104. See also Shamma Friedman: Rashi's Talmudic Commentaries and the Nature of Their Revisions and Recensions, in: Zvi Steinfeld (ed.), *Rashi Studies*, Ramat Gan 1993, p. 173. See also Strashun, *Neirot ha-Emunah* (Lights of Truth), in: *Ha-Karmel* 1 (1861) 40, p. 324.

⁵⁸ Strashun, *Ketavim*, p. 161, my emphasis, E.B. On Hirschel's *Besamim Rosh*, see Moshe Samet: Chapters in the History of Orthodoxy, Jerusalem 2005, pp. 45–66 (Hebrew); Eliezer Brodt: Notes and Additions to Nitei Sofrim, in: *Yeshurun* 24 (2010), pp. 425–427 (Hebrew).

⁵⁹ Mattityahu Strashun: *Mincha BiLulah*, in: *Ha-Karmel* 1 (1861) 40, p. 323, my emphasis, E.B.

great respect, even when he disagreed with him. For example, Strashun wrote about Shir: “*My friend Shir* [...] that most of history is revealed before him and there is almost nothing in *Chochmat Yisrael* [Jewish Studies] and its history that is not known to him.”⁶⁰

6. Mattityahu Strashun’s Personal Relationship to Zunz and Shir

In addition to Zunz’s and Shir’s influence on Mattityahu Strashun through their writings, Strashun had a personal connection with both scholars. However, there is little proof about the nature of Strashun’s personal relationship to Shir and Zunz. It is known that, in 1855/56, Strashun traveled across Europe and visited various scholars.⁶¹ One of the places he visited was Prague and the city’s old Jewish cemetery.⁶² Among the scholars he visited in Prague was Shir. Strashun wrote in passing that “the great Gaon and teacher Rav Shir of blessed memory *told me*...”⁶³ This demonstrates his personal connection to Shir. However, the correspondence that may have followed the personal encounter or even existed before that is lost.

Sadly, the same is true for the connection between Strashun and Zunz. Although in the various archives no original correspondence can be found between the two men, the references in their writings as well as the transmission of letters in Strashun’s printed *Mivchar Ketavim* (Selected Writings) show that the connection existed. For example, in 1841 and 1843, Zunz published a lengthy history of the scholar Rabbi Azariah de Rossi in the Hebrew journal *Kerem Chemed* (Sweet Vineyard). In the second edition, Zunz added new material which he had collected since the first publication. Among these additions were sources provided by Mattityahu Strashun, to whom Zunz referred in his notes as the “wise one.”⁶⁴

Additional evidence of the personal relationship between Strashun and Zunz can be found in an article written in the journal *Ha-Karmel* (Mount

⁶⁰ Strashun, *Ketavim*, p. 145, my emphasis, E.B.

⁶¹ About this trip, see Pludermacher, *Zikkaron le-Chacham*, p. 17; Mattat-Yah, p. 50b.

⁶² Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 131, 235.

⁶³ See Strashun, *Ketavim*, p. 98, my emphasis, E.B.

⁶⁴ Leopold Zunz: *Tosefot le-Toledot R’ Azariah min ha-Adumim*, in: *Kerem Hemed* 7 (1843), pp. 119–24. Zunz quotes him four times in this essay.

Carmel) in 1863, in which Strashun discussed Zunz's work on Rashi.⁶⁵ In 1840, Simon Bloch (1810–1879) had translated Zunz's article into Hebrew. Strashun criticized Bloch's translation, not least for adding material without Zunz's authorization. Strashun also noted that Bloch did not attempt to receive from Zunz any new material or corrections. Finally, Strashun mentioned a letter from Zunz to himself, written on August 22, 1842, which enclosed the original German edition of Zunz's essay. In his letter, Zunz also expressed his disappointment with Bloch's translation.⁶⁶

Moreover, other letters from the 1840s indicate the personal correspondence between Strashun and Zunz, for example when Strashun wrote about a rare *Siddur* (prayer book) he owned, that "in 1844, the wise and outstanding critic, Zunz, requested to borrow it by letter," upon which Strashun sent it to him.⁶⁷ His willingness to lend a valuable rare book attests to Strashun's high regard for Zunz.

In light of this, the following observation remains unclear. Based on a letter he wrote, printed in three parts in the two volumes of the Vilna journal *Prihei Tzafon*, Mattityahu Strashun penned a historical, biographical and bibliographical essay about the philosopher Rabbi Shem Tov Falaquera (1225–c. 1295), using a wide range of sources, including several manuscripts in his possession.⁶⁸ In the entry on the work *Sefer Ha-Maalot* (Book of Attributes), he omitted the note that this was the subject of Zunz's doctorate, completed in December 1820, entitled *De Schemtov Falkira* (On Shem Tov Falaquera).⁶⁹ The answer to the omission could be that this essay was written by Strashun at the young age of nineteen. While he quoted various manuscripts and even used the works of the Protestant theologian Johannes Buxtdorf (1564–1629), this was still in the early years of his career. He probably did not know all of Zunz's writings at that time. Moreover, as far as we know, his correspondence with Zunz began only a year or two later.

However, Mattityahu Strashun's first published essay was a copy of a letter that he wrote to someone about Rabbi Shem Tov Falaquera. Taking this

⁶⁵ Leopold Zunz: Dreifaches Verzeichnis, Abschriften und Ausgaben des (Rashi) Commentars betreffend, in: *Zeitschrift für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 1 (1822), pp. 349–366.

⁶⁶ Reprinted in Strashun, *Ketavim*, p. 104. In Mattityahu Strashun: Omissions and Corrections, in: *Ha-Karmel* 3 (1877) 11, p. 640, he noted another mistake in Bloch's translation and said, "however my friend the author Dr. Zunz wrote it correctly."

⁶⁷ Strashun, *Ketavim*, p. 144.

⁶⁸ Reprinted in Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 213–228.

⁶⁹ Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 214. See also Schorsch, *Creativity in Adversity*, p. 25.

observation further, I would suggest that perhaps this letter to an unknown addressee was actually written to Zunz himself. Evidence to support this assumption can be found in a footnote in the letter, written before 1841:

“You already know from me from my letter to you about the precious work *Meor Eynayim* [...] and the thefts from it. [...] I gave you a list of over thirty sources like this; now here is another source which I did not write in that list.”⁷⁰

This note deals with plagiarism from de Rossi’s *Meor Eynayim*. As mentioned above, this book was the subject of another correspondence between Strashun and Zunz. If my conclusion are correct, one could note another observation. At the end of this letter, Mattityahu Strashun included a postscript to a previous letter, writing that he had made many more discoveries about Rabbi Shem Tov Falaquera but would only include some of them, as he had just received a new book from his friend Isaac Ber Levinsohn who had also dealt with Falaquera but had made a few mistakes about this subject. One may argue that Strashun was shifting from “being similar” to a *maskilic* scholar and moving forward towards Leopold Zunz and the methods of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.⁷¹

7. Mattityahu Strashun’s Attitude to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

From Strashun’s writings, it becomes clear that he bought, received, and used the works of Zunz and Shir. Moreover, it can be assumed that Strashun knew Zunz and Shir in person and corresponded with them. The question remains, however, what his attitude to *Wissenschaft des Judentums* really was.⁷²

In an essay from 2004, Michael A. Meyer described “two persistent tensions within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.”⁷³ According to Meyer, the first source of tension refers to its specific conception and the question of whether it was a secular “*Wissenschaft*” based upon the methods of classical studies and

⁷⁰ Strashun, Ketavim, p. 217.

⁷¹ Many thanks to Dan Rabinowitz for this suggestion.

⁷² I wish to thank the anonymous peer-reviewer of my essay whose suggestions led me to this analysis.

⁷³ Michael A. Meyer: Two Persistent Tensions within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in: Andreas Gotzmann/Christian Wiese (eds.), *Modern Judaism and Historical Consciousness*, Boston 2007, pp. 73–89. On the state of research, see Kerstin von der Krone/Mirjam Thulin: *Wissenschaft in Context. A Research Essay on the Wissenschaft des Judentums*, in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 58 (2013), pp. 249–280.

philology or, on the other hand, more a Jewish theology that relied on historical research but first and foremost aimed to re-define modern Judaism. The second source of tension refers to the conflicting intentions of the protagonists to either influence the perception of Judaism in Christian society, or transform Judaism and contemporary Jewish life. Meyer assumes that Leopold Zunz and numerous *Wissenschaft* scholars of the first generation were mainly concerned with being accepted in regular secular universities, influencing the perception of Judaism among non-Jews, and helping it gain recognition in the world of general scholarship. Later adherents sought to use it as a religious enterprise to re-define Judaism, a non-Orthodox religious revival to inspire Jews to attach themselves more closely to their Jewish past. This aspect was found much more in the second generation of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* scholars such as Abraham Geiger (1810–1874), Zacharias Frankel (1801–1875), and Heinrich Graetz (1817–1891), and was especially visible in their efforts to create rabbinical seminaries. For example, Frankel wrote that there could be no Judaism if there were a lack for the love of Jewish *Wissenschaft*.⁷⁴

These important observations documented by Michael A. Meyer may give us insight into Strashun and his attitude towards *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. It seems fairly safe to conclude that Strashun was attached to the methods of *Wissenschaft* – but nothing more. He remained an Orthodox Jew. While he felt that these tools were immensely beneficial for his learning, he did not use them to invoke changes. More ideological aspects of *Wissenschaft* that Zacharias Frankel and other scholars of the second generation were proposing were completely foreign to Strashun. Thus, Zunz, who was more concerned with the methodology of *Wissenschaft* than with pursuing a religious renewal or re-definition of Judaism, was closer to Strashun. Strashun used Zunz's works and was even in contact with him.

Although Strashun owned the works of scholars of the second generation like Frankel and was aware of their ideas, they remain almost absent in his works.⁷⁵ Strashun's attitude towards Shir supports this assumption. In 1862, Max Meir Halevi Letteris (1800–1871) published an attack on Shir in the

⁷⁴ For the quote from Frankel, see Meyer, *Two Persistent Tensions*, p. 81.

⁷⁵ See, for example, the catalogue of Strashun's library: Hirsch Itzakowski: *Likutei Shoshanim*, 52, #1029 and 131, #2517. However, although he owned them, he did not quote these works, see, for example, Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 57, 90.

Hebrew newspaper *Ha-Maggid* (The Messenger).⁷⁶ This attack was in response to an article Shir had written in an earlier issue about Letteris.⁷⁷ Letteris had announced that he intended to publish a journal in which he would print letters from scholars of the time. Shir was worried that some of the letters would not be from worthy and God-fearing scholars.⁷⁸ Soon after Letteris' attack on Shir, a three-part anonymous defense of Shir was published, actually penned by Mattityahu Strashun.⁷⁹ Strashun attacked Letteris sharply, criticizing his various publications over several pages.⁸⁰ Further, he outlined some of Shir's merits and explained his point of view on the subject.

The attack seems to be out of character for Strashun, who avoided personal disputes. Therefore, his public defense of his friend Shir should be understood as an exception. In his article series, Strashun accused Letteris for not being well-versed in Talmud and having devoted most of his life to poetry and the Hebrew language. While Strashun stressed their importance and emphasized that Letteris' contributions were valuable, he berated Letteris for criticizing Shir, as he was far from being a Talmud scholar. Instead, Strashun pointed to the fact that Shir had studied Jewish poetry from a young age but his main focus was Talmud and that he was a recognized expert in it already in his youth:

"It's clear from his works and letters that he put all his strength in holiness, investigating Bible, Talmud, Midrash, Poskim [deciders], responsa and in investigating all aspects of its early origins [...] already in his youth [...] he showed his greatness in Talmud and his amazing glosses to the Avnei MeLuim [Setting Stones] [...] by his father in law the Gaon. [...] And the great Gaon R[abbi] Yaakov Lorberbaum [1772–1832] [...] gave him the Smicha [rabbinical ordination]."

Shir had expressed a deep concern in his response to Letteris, one which Strashun wholeheartedly endorsed, namely that one had to be careful not to allow this publication because it would attack Judaism from the inside. By

⁷⁶ Meir Letteris: Heneni Key Kuratei Lee, in: *Ha-Maggid* 6 (1862) 27, p. 213.

⁷⁷ Shlomo Y. Rapoport: Bechinat Darchei Hadat, in: *Ha-Maggid* 6 (1862) 24, p. 194.

⁷⁸ This saga has been systematically dealt with in Nathan Shiffriss' excellent dissertation, cf. Shiffriss: Shelomo Yehudah Rapoport (Shir), pp. 311–318. However, Shiffriss does not refer to Strashun's role in the confrontation between Shir and Letteris.

⁷⁹ The three articles are reprinted in Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 194–201. See also Shiffriss, Shelomo Yehudah Rapoport (Shir), p. 317n582. Strashun wrote under various pseudonyms, many of them noted in Saul Chajes: *Pseudonymen-Lexikon der hebräischen und jiddischen Literatur*, Vienna 1933. See also Pludermacher, *Zikkaron le-Chacham*, p. 18.

⁸⁰ Strashun, *Ketavim*, pp. 196–198.

all accounts, Shir was much more concerned with the modern methods of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* than with implementing them on a practical basis. Shir's biographer Isaac Barzilay refers to the attack, explaining that:

"They excepted the founder of critical Jewish historiography to draw, as they did, the religious and philosophical conclusions of his own method and apply them to the problems of the present-day Jewry. This, however, Shir never did nor intended to do."⁸¹

In this respect, Shir shared an approach with Strashun in having no intention to re-define Judaism.

During Strashun's lifetime, an Orthodox *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was founded which was much more in line with his own attitude. The movement formed around the Berlin rabbinical Seminary for Orthodox Judaism, founded by Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer (1820–1899).⁸² This seminary was founded to combat Zacharias Frankel's Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau and its attempts to create a moderate reformed Judaism.⁸³ While the methods of *Wissenschaft* were also employed at the Berlin Orthodox seminary, their ideology was more similar and in line with Strashun's.⁸⁴

8. Conclusion

In light of recent academic interest in Leopold Zunz and Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport (Shir), and especially in regard to the two-hundredth anniversary of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, I attempted to demonstrate a relatively unknown personal connection between these scholars of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and the Vilna-based scholar Mattityahu Strashun. It is apparent that Strashun was influenced by and utilized the methods of modern scientific inquiry of Judaism, which he learned about from the writings of and personal contacts

⁸¹ Barzilay, Shlomo Yehudah Rapoport, p. 61.

⁸² David Ellenson: Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy, Tuscaloosa 1990; Jacob Sinason: The Rebbe. The Story of Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer, New York 1996.

⁸³ Andreas Brämer: Rabbiner Zacharias Frankel. Wissenschaft des Judentums und konservative Reform im 19. Jahrhundert, Hildesheim 2000; Uri (Adolf) Kober, Beit ha-Midrash be-Breslau (The Rabbinical Seminary in Breslau), in: Shmuel Mirsky (ed), Mosdot Torah be-Europah be-Vinyanam uve-Hurbanam (Jewish Institutions of Higher Learning in Europe. Their Development and Destruction), New York 1956, 605–633 (Hebrew).

⁸⁴ On this movement, see Asaf Yedidya: Criticized Criticism. Orthodox Alternatives to Wissenschaft des Judentums, 1873–1956, Jerusalem 2013.

with three schools of thought of his time, the school of the Gaon of Vilna, the Haskalah movement, and eventually from the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. When he employed the critical methods in his writings, especially in his works on the Talmud, he surpassed not only Shir but also the father of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Leopold Zunz, who did not conduct much research on the Talmud. In fact, it seems that Strashun did years and decades before what, in the end, the Orthodox Jewish academics at the Berlin Seminary for Orthodox Judaism and its followers today would do when studying Jewish texts and traditions. Mattityahu Strashun's attitude towards *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as a religious enterprise to re-define Judaism was also similar to the branch of Orthodox *Wissenschaft* that would eventually be institutionalized in the Hildesheimer seminary.