**The Siege of Krasne and Hagiographic Metahistory in *Shivhe ha-Besht***

Questions about the historiographic value of *Shivhe ha-Besht* and the very possibility of viewing the book as a historical source have occupied researchers for years. Despite the broad range of views that have been expressed in this context, the extraordinary historical importance of the book is undoubted. Generations of historians have wrestled with two main questions: What kind of information can the text of this book yield with its special nature borne in mind, and in what way can this information contribute to our understanding of the society from which the Hasidic movement grew and evolved?

This article examines one component of the rich narrative tapestry of *Shivhe ha-Besht*—the way historical events are reflected in the work. As a point of departure for this investigation, a passage in *Shivhe ha-Besht* that describes the Haidamak siege of the town of Krasne is subjected to a textual comparison with a description of the same event in a contemporaneous Polish source not yet exposed to scholarly inspection. The analysis reveals much similarity in the details of the event, suggesting that the account in *Shivhe ha-Besht* is highly credible. Furthermore, the way a story of chronicle nature is integrated into the special texture of the book offers a rare opportunity to peep into the author’s literary laboratory. The description of the siege in *Shivhe ha-Besht* appears as an organic part of a broader account of the Besht’s miraculous posthumous intervention in occurrences involving his fellow Jews, thus revealing the true meaning of a historical event in the author’s eyes. The inclusion of neutral and rather accurate chronicle evidence in the body of the broad story lends the account a hagiographic fictional nature—a process that may be captured in Hayden White’s concept of emplotment.

Examination of additional tales in *Shivhe ha-Besht* (about the destruction of the city of Balta, the ascent of the Besht’s soul to heaven on the eve of Yom Kippur, and a blood libel in Zhitomir-Pawliki) corroborate the assumption that a standard paradigmatic way of perceiving historical events is applied in *Shivhe ha-Besht.* This perception, defined in the article as hagiographic metahistory, is grounded in the use of chronicle narratives that evidently originate in the public discourse of Polish Jews in the mid-eighteenth century. These narratives, referencing some historical event, are woven by the author into the hagiographic tapestry and thus take on a conceptual dimension. The author’s metahistorical approach and his manipulative use of chronicle testimonies as do not necessarily derogate from the credibility of the facts described, whereas the active involvement of the Besht, attributed to all the events examined in the article, is portrayed as later commentary that proposes to reveal the transcendental inner meaning of the events. Accordingly, the historiographic element in *Shivhe ha-Besht* may be seen as a unique model of collective memory preservation in a traditional society.