A Century and a Half of Dispute: The Long Struggle between Slavuta and Vilna

The dispute between the Hasidim and the Mitnagdim incited a considerable crisis in Jewish society in Eastern Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries. One of the last and somewhat hesitant echoes of this conflict was the economic dispute between two Jewish families who owned printing houses at the beginning of the 19th century in Eastern Europe: the Hasidic Shapira family in Slavuta and the Haskalah-influenced Romm family in Vilna.

Many scholars have discussed this conflict, including a recent article of my own that revealed some novel aspects of the historical events based on the archival sources at my disposal. This article does not seek to discuss the historical aspects of the conflict, but rather the reverberations of the dispute as expressed in hagiographic and Hasidic literature over the ensuing decades.

The juxtaposition of the economic dispute over copyright with the entanglement of the Shapira family in an anti-Semitic blood libel led contemporaries and many later authors of hagiographies and Hasidic tales, to link the events and derive educational and religious lessons from the historical events, as is customary in hagiographies. These writings are the basis for this study, which aims to understand the role of the Slavuta-Vilna dispute in the consciousness and education over the years in the Hasidic, and more broadly, the ultra-Orthodox communities.

A methodological question often asked in research on Hasidic literature focuses on whether a Hasidic tale can serve as a historical source from which something can be learned about the biographies of the characters mentioned in the story or about the societies in which they lived.[[1]](#footnote-1) The methodological approach I present here is the opposite: after establishing the historical narrative, I seek to examine how the historical events were incorporated into the Hasidic story and from there into Hasidic culture.

In this article, I point out an attempt to perpetuate the dispute between the Slavuta and Vilna presses in the Hasidic-Orthodox consciousness many decades after its conclusion, and to offer a sociological interpretation of these processes. I will begin by presenting the historical events in two separate sections: the economic-halakhic dispute, and the blood libel against the Shapira family, which was made shortly after the dispute. In the second part of the article, I will show how these events are reflected in hagiographies and Hasidic stories, analyzing the educational and social role of these tales to support my claim that this dispute remained in the public consciousness of the Hasidic and Haredi communities for a hundred and fifty years and served various, sometimes opposing, purposes.

# The History of the Romm and Shapira Publishing Houses

The founder of the Romm family’s printing house was Baruch ben Joseph Mass (his last name is an acronym – MS – for *mokher sefarim*, i.e., bookseller), who began his professional life with a small manual press in the town of Ozery, near Grodno, in 1789. Gradually, the business grew, and in 1799, he opened another printing house in Vilna while maintaining business ties with his partner, Simḥa Ziml Nakhimovich’, in Grodno.[[2]](#footnote-2) When Reuven Mass passed away in 1803, his son, Menachem Man, inherited his father’s business and significantly expanded the volume of printing, which included, in addition to religious Jewish literature, also Haskalah books, Christian prayer books, and more.[[3]](#footnote-3) For eleven years, starting from 1836, the Romm and Nakhimovich printing house enjoyed exclusivity in Russia, being the only Jewish printing house. After the Romm family became the sole owners, it was half of a duopoly for an additional fifteen years. Over the years, the printing house’s status was established as the largest and most important of the Jewish printing houses in Eastern Europe.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Shapira family[[5]](#footnote-5) established their printing house in Slavuta in 1792. The patriarch of the family and the press’s founder, Mosheh Shapira,[[6]](#footnote-6) was the rabbi of Slavuta, son of Rabbi Pinḥas of Korets, and grandson of Avraham Abba Shapira. Both his father and grandfather had been very close to the founder of the Hasidic movement, Rabbi Yisr’ael ben Eli‘ezer—the Ba‘al Shem Tov.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The fact that Rabbi Moshe Shapira and his sons, who were his business partners, were descendants of members of the circle closest to the Ba‘al Shem Tov, branded their printing house as a clearly Hasidic one.[[8]](#footnote-8) Rabbi Moshe Shapira refused to make a living from the rabbinate and therefore opened the printing house as a source of livelihood. Unlike the Romm press, the Shapira family did not print any Haskalah books. A meticulous examination of their publication list reveals that they generally printed books of Jewish religious study,[[9]](#footnote-9) and they were the ones to print the first Hasidic books.[[10]](#footnote-10) During their active period in Slavuta, the Shapira family printed slightly more than 300 titles that are known to us today.

# The Printing of the Babylonian Talmud in the Two Presses (1834-1836)

The Babylonian Talmud is the most fundamental and important work in the world of traditional Jewish study.[[11]](#footnote-11) The Talmud is comprised of a large number of volumes, and its printing was technically complex and required significant economic means. Many commentaries on the Talmud were added by the printers to their editions of the Talmud, making its printing increasingly expensive and complex. It’s important to note that over a third of the titles printed over the years by the Shapira family were various tractates of the Talmud, teaching us how important the printing of the Talmud was for the economic survival of the printing house.[[12]](#footnote-12) The Shapira family’s printing house began printing editions of the Talmud from the very outset of its operation (beginning in 1800). These efforts were economically supported by the Rebbe of Ḥabad, Rabbi Shneur Zalman ben Baruch of Liadi.[[13]](#footnote-13)

After selling all the copies of the first printing, Moshe Shapira received the printing rights for the edition[[14]](#footnote-14) from the Rebbe, and between the years 1808 to 1813, the Shapira family’s printing house published another, more lavish, edition of the Talmud. There were two printings of this edition, one immediately after the other (first printing 1808-1813, second printing 1816-1822).

Before the Shapira printing house printed their edition, they made sure to collect approbations from various rabbis as a sort of copyright. The rabbinic approbations (*hasqamot,* sing. *hasqamah*) prohibited other Jewish printers to print another edition of the Talmud for twenty-five years, generating something like a halakhic copyright. In this case, they relied on the great *tzaddikim* of contemporary Hasidic groups foremost Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Ḥabad Hasidism.[[15]](#footnote-15)

One might think that no one had a copyright on the Talmud, as none of the 19th-century printers we are dealing with created or purchased the printing rights to it. However, it appears that no one questioned the existence of halakhic restrictions on printing the Talmud, based on clear precedents for limitations and bans on printers not to print, or not to distribute, in areas where the Talmud was already being printed and distributed by others.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Most of the responsa that address this debate are not halakhic responsa in the familiar style but rather specific practical responses to the dispute.[[17]](#footnote-17) It was entirely clear to both sides that some sort of intellectual property right existed and should be respected; the argument concerned the interpretation regarding the duration of the right: does the copyright exist for twenty or fifteen years or this is the reasonable maximum time to sell all copies of the edition for which the *hasqamot* were received, and once those specific editions were sold out, the *hasqamot* were no longer valid.

Let me therefore lay out the system as it concerned the printing of the Talmud by the Shapira press: In the first edition, some of the most important Hasidic rabbis granted exclusivity to the Shapira press. The validity of this exclusivity is open to interpretation: until 1826 or until the end of the sale of the edition. When the printers set out to print a second edition, other rabbis gave them exclusivity for an additional fifteen years from the end of the printing, which, as mentioned, ended in 1816. In other words – until 1837 or, according to the other understanding, until the sale of both prints of the second edition was completed. However, in 1834, a little before the end of the exclusivity period, the Shapira press began to prepare for another printing of their edition of the Talmud. At the same time, it turned out that the Romm family press, in Vilna, had also begun preparing an edition of the Talmud under the assumption that Shapira’s exclusivity had ended since the Talmud could not be found on the market. The Romm family wrote in the preface to tractate *Berakhot* in their edition that their decision to print the entire Talmud was driven by market forces: the old editions had run out and it was not possible to obtain a Talmud. They went on to write:

You, the famous sages, the eyes of the community, the sages of Lithuania, Zamut, Reisen, Poland, and Ashkenaz. You clearly know that our work is an honor to those who perform it…and you therefore, you have stood up to help us. To fence off other printers for a period of fifteen years from the day the printing of the Talmud is completed...[[18]](#footnote-18)

That is, the printers of Vilna and Grodno also made sure that they had *hasqamot* constraining other printers. In November 1835, a separate booklet was printed in Vilna containing the *hasqamot*.[[19]](#footnote-19) From it, it can be learned that the printers Menachem Mann and Simcha Ziml turned to the head of the Vilna *beit din* (rabbinical court), Rabbi Abraham Abele Posvoler already at the end of March 1834 and informed him that they were planning to print their own edition of the Babylonian Talmud. Rabbi Posvoler gave them a *hasqamah* in which he granted them exclusivity, his central justification being that it had been impossible to obtain copies of the Talmud for a long period because the Slavuta edition was sold out.[[20]](#footnote-20) However, at the very same time, as mentioned, the Shapira press, which was at that time run by Shmuel Avraham Shapira, the son of the founder of the printing house, was preparing a new, fourth, printing of their edition of the Talmud (the second edition was printed twice). A great halakhic dispute broke out regarding the question: who had the rights to print the Talmud at this time? On the one hand, the Shapira family held the printing rights by virtue of the *hasqamot* of the two editions they had already printed, and the years allocated to them in the *hasqamot* by their father had not yet ended. On the other hand, the Romm family held the rights by virtue of the fact that the Shapira edition had disappeared from the market, and with the end of the sale of the edition, the rights to it also ended. We have noted that there were two different halakhic approaches to the extent of the “copyright” granted by the *hasqamot* and each side relied on one of the understandings, which contradict one another.

When the first tractate in the new Shapira edition was published in 1835, Shmuel Abba Shapira wrote (and this is authenticated by the censor’s signature) that he had renewed the printing license for the Talmud in June 1834, when according to his approach, he still had at least three more years of exclusivity due to the *hasqamot* on the second edition of the Talmud that his father had printed. In doing so he interpreted the number of years stipulated literally. Just before or just after he received the license he sent emissaries for the advance signing of potential buyers as part of the preparations for the new edition. These emissaries arrived, among other places, in Vilna and Grodno. He could thus claim that it was known in these Jewish communities that he was going to print another edition of the Talmud.[[21]](#footnote-21) It should be assumed that these things were written after Shmuel Abba saw Rabbi Posvoler’s first *hasqamah* in which he noted that if someone has *hasqamot*, he should have publicized them, and otherwise they are invalid.

The Shapira family sent Rabbi Avraham Ber, the head of the rabbinical court of Baranivka, as their representative to Vilna. His main claim against the Romm family’s printing house was that the Shapira family still had several copies of the Talmud, and as long as there are such copies, their rights stand under the previous *hasqamah*. To clarify the halakhic issue, each side chose an arbitrator and the two arbitrators jointly chose Rabbi Avraham Abele Posvoler,[[22]](#footnote-22) the head of the rabbinical court in Vilna, who was already involved in various *hasqamot*, as the third judge.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Rabbi Avraham Ber managed to convince the rabbinical court that his senders’ claim regarding the right to print was correct and on May 31, 1835, Rabbi Posvoler and Rabbi David of Novardok, the judge chosen by the Shapira family, wrote *hasqamot* for the Slavuta press. These *hasqamot* sided with the Shapira press, and were distributed, especially that of Rabbi Posvoler, in parallel to the signing of more and more rabbis on this *hasqamah*, alongside the registration of subscribers who committed to purchase the Talmud when it came out. However, a careful reading of the *hasqamot* shows that it was a compromise. The court permitted the Shapira family to print their edition of the Talmud, but, at the same time, did not forbid the Romm family from doing the same. Essentially, the court endorsed competition, albeit limited – between these two printing houses and not others – yet, still competition. From a halakhic perspective, the court sought to address both different interpretations of the issue of the duration of the copyright: Slavuta had the right if the years stipulated by the authors of the *hasqamah* were literal years, and Vilna had the right if the years stipulated by the were a general estimate of the reasonable time that printers could finish selling their edition.

The desire to resolve the issue in a way that would accommodate both halakhic views was seen as a sort of compromise, but the ensuing events proved that neither side in the debate accepted this compromise. Representatives of both printing houses began a campaign among rabbis, Hasidic rebbes, and rabbinical court judges to collect *hasqamot* that would give their side the exclusive rights to print the Talmud. In the words of Yaakov Lipschitz: “And both sides began to print the Talmud and emissaries from both sides went out to acquire subscribers and, along the way, also *hasqamot*.”[[24]](#footnote-24) In other words, there was a clear connection between the halakhic permissibility of printing the Talmud and the economic aspect, that is, obtaining subscriptions. Analysis of the list of rabbis who added their signatures to the debate reveals the socio-religious affiliation of the signatories. Many of the writers of the *hasqamot* who sided with the Shapira family were from Hasidic communities, while those who provided *hasqamot* for the Vilna-Grodno printers were mainly Mitnagdim.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The turning point in the dispute occurred when Rabbi Aqiva Eger,[[26]](#footnote-26) a leading figure among the Mitnagdim, wrote a *hasqamah* for the printers of Vilna-Grodno. In a letter dated October 23, 1835,[[27]](#footnote-27) Rabbi Eger forbade purchasing the Talmud that was printed by the printers in Slavuta, contrary to the ruling of the court. Furthermore, Rabbi Eger granted exclusive printing rights to the printers in Vilna, but in order to comply with all the halakhic opinions, they were required to purchase the remaining volumes in the possession of the Slavuta printers.[[28]](#footnote-28) In this way, they created the halakhic conditions required to nullify the previous *hasqamot*: the completion of the sale of the edition for which they were given.

Rabbi Aqiva Eger’s *hasqamah* thus played a significant role in “breaking the tie” in this dispute, as many rabbis relied on this *hasqamah*. At this stage of Rabbi Eger’s life, he was already a significant figure in the Jewish world. He was an older scholar (he died in 1837 at the age of seventy-five) to whom halakhic questions were addressed across Europe; his halakhic authority is evident from the list of those who added their signatures affirming his letter.[[29]](#footnote-29) The most important of these rabbis was Rabbi Abele Posvoler, who set aside his own opinion in deference to Rabbi Aqiva Eger’s and appealed to the Slavuta printers in a near-pleading tone to stop printing and to accept Rabbi Aqiva Eger’s ruling. This letter, which was printed with the Vilna printers’ *hasqamot*, was written on October 23, 1835, a year and a half after his first letter on the matter.

However, the issue did not fade away. Rumors spread that Rabbi Aqiva Eger’s approval had been influenced by his son, Rabbi Shlomo Eger, and the elder Eger was not actually familiar with the details of the issue, and that perhaps a bribe had even been accepted. In response, on December 25, 1835, Rabbi Aqiva Eger wrote that he did not forgive the Slavuta printers for the rumors they had spread regarding his integrity.[[30]](#footnote-30) This statement by Rabbi Aqiva Eger would become central to various religious interpretations given by various hagiographers when documenting the events discussed in this article.

The Shapira printers managed to print only four tractates; *Berakhot, Zera’im, Shabbat, and Eruvin*, until the print house was closed due to a blood libel against the Shapira family, which will be discussed in the next section of this article. Nearly two decades passed until the Vilna-Grodno printers completed the publication of their edition of the Talmud, with the exception of one tractate, *Kodashim*, which was not printed at all in this edition. Over these two decades, the paths of Menachem Mann and Nakhimovich diverged, and the entire printing house moved to Vilna and into the ownership of the Romm family.[[31]](#footnote-31)

According to the testimony of Raphael Nathan Nata Rabbinovitch, only the financial involvement of two of Vilna’s wealthiest men, Joseph Eliasberg and Matityahu Shtrashun, enabled the continued printing of the Talmud after a terrible fire damaged the press in 1840, causing the Vilna printers severe economic difficulties.[[32]](#footnote-32) During that period, at least three other editions of the Talmud were printed outside the Russian Empire. The printers of those editions did not feel obligated to the same *hasqamot* that had sparked the conflict between the two printing houses and therefore were tough economic competition for the Romm family’s printing house.[[33]](#footnote-33)

# The Blood Libel and the Legal Difficulties of the Shapira Brothers (1836-1855)

The legal entanglement of Moshe Shapira’s two sons, Shmuel Abba and Pineḥas, with the authorities after a blood libel against them was first publicized in 1947 in a series of articles in the *Ha-Ṣofeh* newspaper. These were essentially a Hebrew translation of a previously unpublished work written by the historian Saul Ginsburg (1866-1940).[[34]](#footnote-34)

This is not the place to go into the details of the plot against the Shapira family,[[35]](#footnote-35) but some mention is necessary because the connection made by contemporaries between the dispute with Vilna and the plot against the Shapira family plays a significant role in shaping the story in the historical consciousness of the Hasidim, which we will address later.

In June 1835, a worker from the Shapira family’s printing house was found hanged. All the evidence suggested it was a suicide, but a local antisemitic priest sought to exploit the event and falsely accused the Shapira brothers of murder. According to the accusers, the Shapira family’s motivation was that the printing house worker had handed over to the censors a book printed in their printing house without permission.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In March 1836, the two Shapira brothers, along with other prisoners accused of involvement in the murder or bribery, were taken to prison in Kiev. The trial, which lasted for a long time, focused, among other things, on the Hasidic identity of the Shapira brothers, using it as a basis for convicting them of consciously creating social chaos and undermining the authority of the government.[[37]](#footnote-37) In June-July 1839, the verdict was signed by Tsar Nicholas I,[[38]](#footnote-38) and the sentence was executed: the two Shapira brothers were each flogged a thousand times by soldiers in the prison yard. Such punishment usually resulted in the death of the condemned, but the Shapira brothers managed to survive the punishment and were hospitalized for a long time. Afterward, they were sentenced to exile in Siberia, but with the help of a large bribe, they managed to stay in Moscow during their entire imprisonment.[[39]](#footnote-39)

Not long after the accession of Tsar Alexander II to the throne in 1855,[[40]](#footnote-40) the two brothers were pardoned and allowed to return to Slavuta. In the following years, the remaining people involved in the case who were still alive were gradually released from Siberia. Rabbi Moshe Shapira, who was also sentenced to flogging and exile, died during the trial.[[41]](#footnote-41)

On October 27, 1836, Tsar Nicholas I issued a decree prohibiting the existence of Jewish printing houses throughout the empire, except in two places: Vilna and Kiev. The descendants of Menachem Mann and his partner Nakhimovich were the victors in the struggle for the right to own a printing house in Vilna.[[42]](#footnote-42) The same printing house that fought for the right to print an edition of the Talmud during the period when the Shapira family had exclusive rights became, thanks to the blood libel and the legal difficulties of the Shapira family, a monopoly on printing Jewish literature throughout the Russian Empire for eleven years. Another Jewish printing house in Kiev, where Jews were prohibited from residing at that time, was not established at all.

The descendants of the Shapira family later re-established their printing house in the city of Zhytomyr, and the two printing houses became a duopoly in the field of Jewish literature in the empire. However, while the Romm press continuously expanded, the descendants of the Shapira family, for various reasons beyond the scope of this article, failed to hold onto the printing house, which was purchased by Yitzhak Baksht, a teacher at the city’s rabbinical seminary, although it continued to be operated by the Shapira family. In 1879, as part of the Romm press’s preparations for printing the Vilna Shas (= Talmud), the most important edition of the Babylonian Talmud ever printed, Devorah Romm bought the printing house from Baksht and merged it with her own printing house in Vilna.[[43]](#footnote-43)

# The Legend of the Shapira Family

The libel story and its connection to the dispute over copyrights in the printing of the Talmud between Slavuta and Vilna took on mythological significance. Already in the testimonies of contemporaries, connections were drawn between the dispute over the printing rights and the libel with the latter understood as divine punishment for the conduct of the Shapira family. Thus, Hillel Noah Steinschneider, a Vilna biographer and one of the most reliable reporters of the Jewish atmosphere in Vilna in those years, attributes the blood libel to a heavenly punishment for the insult to Rabbi Aqiva Eger and his rulings. Raphael Nathan Neta Rabinowitz writes similarly.[[44]](#footnote-44) Later, this would be the basis for various interpretations of the Shapira family’s entanglement in Hasidic writing and hagiographies.

The Hasidic hagiographies told this story over and over, emphasizing, as one would expect in the genre of hagiography, the educational point of the duty to listen to the rabbis and obey them.[[45]](#footnote-45)

Stories are an important genre for Hasidism. The Hasidic story usually is focused on an adored exemplary figure and the telling of his deeds is meant to direct the listener or reader toward Hasidic values.[[46]](#footnote-46) Yosef Dan marks the year 1865 as the year when Hasidic storytelling literature became mainstream, following the formative stages that had already begun with the storytelling culture of the Baal Shem Tov and his disciples.[[47]](#footnote-47) This means that close to the events discussed in this article, the Hasidic story was already a distinct genre, and the story about the Shapira family, situated in Hasidic hagiographies at a very early stage of the events, was very significant, given the importance of the story in Hasidism.

The printed versions of the Hasidic story claiming to document the story of the Shapira family reveal a conflict: the righteousness of the Shapira family, which is evident from their entanglement with the authorities against the background of their Hasidic orientation, is in tension with their resistance to Rabbi Aqiva Eger’s ruling, which was perceived as disrespect for a Torah scholar. This conflict should be examined when we discuss different examples of the evolution of the story.

The earliest text I found that describes in a Hasidic spirit the legal entanglement of the Shapira family was written in a non-Hasidic context. Ḥava Shapira,[[48]](#footnote-48) an author and Haskalah figure who was a descendant of the Shapira family, wrote in *HaShiloaḥ* in the year 1914 an account of what she claims to have heard at home. In other words, this is the first documentation of an oral tradition. Ḥava Shapira sets the story of the blood libel not in the context of the dispute with Vilna but states rather that the days are “the time is the time of Haskalah in the country. The ruling emperor is Nicholas I, who grants “Haskalah” with a strong hand. Among the Jews, the Hasidic movement, with Rabbi Pineḥas of Koritz, one of its leaders and founders, prevailed. This movement... was hated by the first Haskalah figures.”[[49]](#footnote-49) In Ḥava’s version, the blood libel originated with Haskalah figures and has a mentally ill daughter of Rabbi Moshe Shapira prophesy that her brothers will be imprisoned to atone for the sins of the generation. The economic dispute is completely missing in this version. Its entire focus is on the struggle of the Mitnagdim against Hasidim. The story is a Hasidic story in which the prisoners accept their fate with love, knowing that their punishment atones for the Jews, saving them from a worse fate. In Rachel Shapira’s version, there is also a story that would later find its way to the writings of Y.L. Peretz, about how one of the brothers turned back during the punishment to lift his fallen yarmulke, and then continued to walk between the lines of people beating him.[[50]](#footnote-50) This story is also the background of a Hasidic tune called “Slavuta Tune” which according to Hasidic legend was composed by the brothers during the punishment: in this context, it is also mentioned that the brother went back to pick up his yarmulke, even though it involved being beaten more.[[51]](#footnote-51) This motif is absent from the historical documentation, perhaps because it is historically insignificant, but was added in the oral tradition and became more significant over the years, attributing to the Shapira brothers a dimension of self-sacrifice.

In 2019, in an audio disk of stories accompanied by a comics booklet intended for the ultra-Orthodox public, “The Group of 613”,[[52]](#footnote-52) the heroes of the story narrate the story of the Shapira brothers to each other. This account focuses on the story of the fallen yarmulke: a drunk worker is killed in an unfortunate accident at the printing house, the brothers are accused of murder, and during the punishment, Rabbi Pineḥas’s yarmulke falls, he stops and picks it up, and thus the brothers become a symbol of the fear of heaven.

It should be noted that in the modern version of the story, suicide is not mentioned, only death in an accident, and the visual image is entirely of ultra-Orthodox people in modern attire against the background of communist soldiers. It is a story whose purpose is educational, and the title is clear: “Not Without a Yarmulke.” The historical context is barely represented, but the story is presented as true.

The aforementioned comic is part of a serial about a group of children who save the Jewish community from a different enemy each time. Throughout their adventures are interspersed miraculous stories of rabbis from past generations. There is a clear distinction between the story of the children, which is entirely fictional, and the stories within the story, which are presented as true stories. Nearly all of them share similar characteristics: a clear and one-dimensional message against a backdrop of dubious historical reality.

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Fishman Maimon,[[53]](#footnote-53) one of the leaders of the Mizrahi movement, also wrote books on modern Jewish thought, Hasidism, and religious-Zionist ideology. In an article about Rabbi Aqiva Eger, Rabbi Maimon refers to the controversy regarding the printing of the Talmud in a not very accurate historical manner, concluding: “And the time was the early days of the Haskalah in Russia and Poland: the ardently secular *maskilim*, in those days, saw Hasidism as a special danger to their project. They considered the printing house in Slavuta as a fortress of those who rejected the light and walked in the darkness. The Tzadikim (Hasidic leaders, literally righteous ones) as harmful, and the Hasidim as malicious, this was the expression of the foolish *maskilim* in that generation. They used all means, including slander, to discredit the reputation of the Slavuta printers in the eyes of the Russian government.”[[54]](#footnote-54) In the next sentence, he began to relate the story of the blood libel. In this account of the story, there is a significant innovation: this is one of the first printed sources that retrospectively connects the controversy to the blood libel, not as divine punishment as we have already seen among the contemporaries of the characters in the story, including Shteinshneider and Rabinovitz, but with an allusion that has no historical basis that the background to the libel against the Slavuta printers originated with the *maskilim* against the background of the controversy over the printing rights of the Talmud. Rabbi Maimon’s account resembles that of Shteinshneider in drawing a connection between the controversy and the libel while adopting Ḥava Shapira’s thesis that the connection was not a divine punishment but the work of *maskilim* in the context of the economic controversy.

In Rabbi Maimon’s version, Rabbi Aqiva Eger’s part is also found. The Hasidic stories are mostly one-dimensional: there are unequivocal good guys and bad guys. As mentioned above, this was a complex issue, as the Shapira brothers were Hasidim who were punished and thus were regarded as holy ones who sacrificed their bodies for the sanctification of God’s name. However, they were punished for disrespecting Rabbi Aqiva Eger, who was considered the greatest rabbi of the generation, casting doubt on their sanctity and righteousness. Rabbi Maimon found an interesting solution. After quoting Rabbi Aqiva Eger’s letter about not forgiving the Shapira brothers, Maimon wrote: “And these words were, according to legend, an error that proceeded from the mouth of the ruler (an allusion to Eccl. 10:5).” In other words, Rabbi Aqiva Eger did not really mean it. This tortuous formulation allows all the heroes of the story to remain “good” and leaves the “bad” side to the *maskilim* and the gentiles involved in the plot.

Sometimes the story is told from the end to the beginning: The book *Al Tadichenu* by Avraham Ben David Chanunu, like Maimon’s writings, is not history but rather ideological or philosophical writing. In the section entitled “The Disgrace of Torah Scholars,” the author writes that

Although there were several rabbis who justified the Slavuta printers, the words of the Gaon Rabbi Aqiva Eger tipped the scales in favor of the Vilna printers... and then [Rabbi Aqiva Eger] stood before the Holy Ark and said with sorrow and anguish: ‘Master of the Universe, I study Your Torah, and according to Your Torah I rule, even if I forgive my honor, You will not forgive the honor of Your Torah and it is like an error that proceeds from the ruler!’”

Immediately after that, the description begins about how “in those days a terrible thing happened...”[[55]](#footnote-55) and the story of the Shapira brothers unfolds. In this way the historical story changes and adapts to the message the writer seeks to teach his readers. In the case of Rabbi Maimon, the emphasis was on transferring responsibility to the *maskilim* as the source of the libel, and in the case of Avraham Ben David Hanunu, the goal was to learn about the honor of Torah scholars, claiming that one who disgraces Torah scholars, even if he was as righteous as the Shapira family, will be punished. Either way, there is a tortuous resolution of the portrayal of the brothers as a manifestation of the sanctification of God’s name and the presentation of the libel as a divine punishment because of Rabbi Aqiva Eger’s statement that he does not forgive them. As I mentioned above, the common denominator is the aspiration to preserve or create an ethical and educational consciousness rather than tell the historical story.

One unique tradition that adds another dimension I found in a version of the story that was recently published after being hidden for many years in the collection of Abraham Joshua Heschel. This collection contains hundreds of boxes of writings and stories that were collected for Heschel, all related to the world of Hasidism that he studied. Two Israeli researchers published a notebook they found in this collection, written by Rabbi Mordechai Landa (probably 1876-1963), containing dozens of Hasidic stories, mainly from the Hasidic traditions of Vizhnitz, Sadigura, and Ruzhin.[[56]](#footnote-56) Among the stories appears the story of the Shapira family. The story is told briefly and does not connect the libel to the spirit of the times or the Haskalah as we have seen so far, but only mentions that trouble came upon the heads of the family of Hasidic printers. In this version, the employee who committed suicide in the printing house was a non-Jew, which makes it easier to create the dichotomy between the good and the bad. The story of the yarmulke falling from Rabbi Pineḥas’ head is mentioned, thus characterizing him as a righteous victim. There are two additions I have not found elsewhere: the first was that Rabbi Moshe felt the pain of his children when was at home and they were being lashed in Kiev. The second and more significant addition is that the author writes that he heard from the Rebbe of Sadigura that the beatings came upon them because they did not want to become Hasidic rebbes themselves.[[57]](#footnote-57) Indeed, as I wrote in the historical section above, Rabbi Moshe Shapira refused to make a living from the rabbinate, and so did his descendants who refused to accept any rabbinical role. This tradition of Sadigura Hasidism entirely disconnects the libel from its historical context turning it into an internal Hasidic issue, thus emphasizing the religious significance given to the idea that the righteous were punished by God.

In his book *Lights from the World of Kabbalah and Hasidism*, Yitzhak Alfasi, a Hasidic writer, collected many miracle stories about Rebbes and Hasidim, in the spirit of the Hasidic story. He has several pages about Rabbi Moshe Shapira of Slavuta, and toward the end, he writes:

How beautiful is the story that the amazing righteous Rabbi Aharon Rata from Berehove/Jerusalem, the author of Shomrei Emunim recounts... that one should accustom himself to study from a book printed by God-fearing people like it was the case with one of the Tzadikim who came to a place and it was during the days of *Seliḥot* (penitential prayers said before the High Holidays) and they gave him a *Seliḥah* and he said he could not see the letters and so they gave him several *Seliḥot* and he could not see the letters until they gave him a *Seliḥah* printed by God-fearing people (apparently a *Seliḥah* printed by the Slavuta printing house...).[[58]](#footnote-58)

Here we have a popular story, decades after the historical events, with a clear message: one should pay attention not only to what is printed but also to who prints it, and to be careful to learn (or in our case to pray) from a Seliḥot book that was printed specifically by those who are considered God-fearing and not *maskilim*. There is no account here of the dispute over the printing rights, but there is evidence for the preference for Slavuta’s printing house. There were other printing houses owned by Hasidim, but Slavuta became a brand associated with the sanctification of God’s name, and therefore their Selichot were considered worthy of being prayed from, while other editions were not.

This message was extremely important, especially when it comes to the Talmud, since in the case of the Talmud’s printing, two principles apply: the characteristics of the printers and the preservation of the controversy. For example, in one of the memoirs of the Jerusalem Old Yishuv, Yehuda Aharon Weiss writes about Rabbi Moshe Joshua Yehuda Leib Diskin (the Maharil Diskin),[[59]](#footnote-59) one of the most important rabbis of Jerusalem in the second half of the 19th century:

His close associates told me that he was very careful to study only books that he knew for sure were printed by printers whose owners were Torah scholars and were careful about both minor and major matters [of halakhic observance]. Therefore, he would study using a Talmud that was printed by the Slavuta press, because those printers were known to be great God-fearing people. When he was the head of the rabbinic court in Shklov, he borrowed the Talmud printed by the Slavuta press from Rabbi Shlomo Luria, and after he moved to serve as the head of the rabbinic court in Brisk, Lithuania, he took it with him there. Even after he went up to Jerusalem, he brought the aforementioned Talmud with him. The Talmud was filled with the novel insights of the Rabbi from Brisk [as Rabbi Diskin was known] all over its margins, and when Rabbi Shlomo Luria, of blessed memory, came to Jerusalem, Rabbi Diskin returned the Talmud to him. After Rabbi Luria’s death, they searched for the Talmud but could not find it. The Talmud disappeared and remains a mystery to this day.[[60]](#footnote-60)

This is an important testimony from someone who was a young man when the controversy took place and was at the peak of his public activity when the Vilna Talmud was first printed and was very well received. The lore about this rabbi included this story that he studied using a borrowed Talmud in order to use the Slavuta edition due to its printers, even though it was no longer available to be bought.

This story has two meanings: first, there is a connection between a product and its creators, and therefore one should study from an edition whose creators are considered righteous. By implication: Slavuta because of its Hasidic creators, and not Vilna whose creators were *maskilim*. Secondly, as part of the construction of ultra-Orthodox hagiography, it was possible to create a myth about studying a Talmud that was not the Vilna Talmud at a time when the Vilna Talmud was the most common and accessible one.

In the same way, in a memoir about the Rebbe of Kozhnitz, Rabbi Aharon Yechiel Hepstein, who died from typhus in the Zelichov ghetto in September 1941, his students wrote:

The Rebbe used only sacred books printed by the Slavuta press, as the holiness and abstinence of the press owners are known. He would try to acquire even the prayer books for the High Holy Days and other books specifically from the Slavuta press, and in every place the Rebbe went, if he asked for a Gemara, the young men knew that it doesn’t matter which tractate it was, the main thing was that it was from the Slavuta press.[[61]](#footnote-61)

This is evidence from before the interwar period that among Hasidim the belief that one should pay attention to the identity of the printers was maintained and that there was value in trying to learn specifically from the books of Slavuta, which had not been printed for decades, and were very difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, it was part of their religious identity as it was for their students who recorded it. The hagiographical-educational aspect is also expressed here in the creation and preservation of a clear myth that presents the Slavuta printers as righteous.

The most significant figure in this practice of preferring the Slavuta Talmud at a time when the Vilna Talmud was the accepted and common edition was Rabbi Meir Shapira.[[62]](#footnote-62) He conceived the idea of *Daf Yomi* (studying a page of Talmud daily) for Agudat Yisrael (1923) and founded the Yeshivat *Ḥachmei* Lublin (1930). Rabbi Meir Shapira was born in the city of Shatz in Romania in March 1887 to a family that traced its lineage to Rabbi Pineḥas of Koritz, the father of Moshe Shapira, the founder of the Slavuta printing house.[[63]](#footnote-63) Rabbi Shapira served as a rabbi in several communities and became a central figure in the rabbinical leadership of Polish Jewry and even served as a representative of Agudat Yisrael in the Polish Sejm. When the first conference of Agudat Yisrael convened in Vienna in August 1923, Rabbi Meir Shapira was one of the speakers at the opening ceremony, and after a long process of political and religious discussions, to which Rabbi Shapira was a full partner,[[64]](#footnote-64) he was also the last speaker to close the three days of discussion.[[65]](#footnote-65) In his last speech, according to the internal documentation of the historians of Agudat Yisrael, he summed up the discussions of the committee which he chaired, and presented to the plenum the plan they had developed. At the end of his official speech, he asked to propose a personal resolution and then raised the idea of *Daf Yomi*.

*Daf Yomi* was mainly a political statement: the formation of a collective ultra-Orthodox identity around a unified daily study. In Agudat Yisrael historiography, Rabbi Shapira’s comment about that conference is cited:

I wondered how it could be that Rabbi Chaim from Brisk, who aspires to see all Jews within the four cubits of the halacha, would converse with Rabbi Yaakov Rosenheim from Frankfurt am Main, whose views are completely different regarding the strengthening of Judaism, and how could an American Jew agree to the views of an extremist Jew from Safed, or an Orthodox Jew from Holland cooperate with an Orthodox Jew from Poland? Until I opened tractate Berakhot... and I looked at the commentators, and suddenly my eyes were opened: the Mishnah was composed in the Land of Israel, the Gemara in Babylon, Rashi in Ashkenaz [Germany-France]... and I understood: this is the secret of Agudat Yisrael - the Torah unites us all.[[66]](#footnote-66)

To establish Agudat Yisrael, representatives from three main currents in Jewish society conjoined: Hasidim, mainly from Galicia and Poland, Minagdim, mainly from Lithuania and its surroundings, and Neo-Orthodox, mainly from Germany. In the decades preceding the establishment of Agudat Yisrael, there was a lot of tension between these three groups. Historical accounts that document these struggles abound and this is not the place to elaborate.[[67]](#footnote-67) For our purposes, it is enough to mention that the establishment of Agudat Yisrael was a significant political-religious event that marked the end of a period characterized by power struggles between different religious groups and the beginning of internal Orthodox political cooperation. In order to consolidate and stabilize this process, it was necessary to create a common denominator that would connect the various factions into a cohesive party, while being aware of the many differences between the groups. The idea of *Daf Yomi* was the most obvious implementation of this process. It created a common ethos, acceptable to all, that allowed every Jew everywhere to feel a part of something bigger.

After the announcement, Rabbi Meir Shapira created a daily study schedule in order to practically consolidate the unity of study. The schedule, personally signed by Rabbi Meir Shapira, indicates what the daily page to be studied is on each day.

The distribution of the pages in the Talmud, as well as the iconic structure of the Talmud text in the center of the page, and to its right and left Rashi and Tosafot, was done already in the first printing of the Talmud, Venice (1520-1523). Since then, all printers have maintained the same division of pages, with almost no exceptions.[[68]](#footnote-68) This is not the place to elaborate on the different manuscripts and the development of the Talmudic text until the 19th-century printed editions.[[69]](#footnote-69) I will focus on one tractate: tractate*Shekalim* from the Order of *Moed*. This tractate is missing in the Babylonian Talmud and exists only in the Palestinian Talmud, in several different versions.[[70]](#footnote-70) Over the years, printers began to print tractate *Shekalim* from the Palestinian Talmud in the Babylonian Talmud to complete the missing tractate of the Order. However, there was no established tradition, both regarding the correct text or the division of pages of this tractate, and two different page divisions were created for this tractate. The Slavuta printing house printed tractate *Shekalim* on fourteen pages, and the Vilna edition divided it into twenty-two pages. This change is the only change in the layout of the Talmud pages between the editions.

Rabbi Meir Shapira, in 1923, chose to allocate only 14 days to tractate *Shekalim* in *Daf Yomi*. This was during the period when (known to us today) more than twenty editions of tractate *Pesachim* from the Vilna Talmud were in print. More than forty years after the printing presses ceased functioning in Zhytomyr, ninety years from the outbreak of the dispute between the printing houses – Rabbi Meir Shapira sought to create social, political, and religious unity around joint study but chose that the study would be according to the less common edition, which, in his opinion, had special value – the Slavuta edition.

This decision seems illogical on the surface. Logic says that if the goal is social cohesion, the choice should be the most accessible edition for the general public. However, Rabbi Shapira was willing to risk the most significant component of his program in order to emphasize which edition he deems worthy of being studied. Similarly, memoirs of Yeshivat Ḥachmei Lublin mention a story about how on a *Simḥat Torah* in which they arranged *haqafot* [processions and dancing with the Torah scrolls] in the *Beit Midrash* [study hall]. After Rabbi Meir Shapira said the liturgical poem that marks the beginning of the *haqafot*, and the community dignitaries circled the *bimah* [table on which the Torah is read] with the Torah scrolls, as was customary, Rabbi Shapira asked the yeshiva students to circle the *bimah* while holding volumes from the Slavuta edition, to connect the Written Torah with the Oral Torah.[[71]](#footnote-71) Of course, we have no documentation of whether this event took place as described or not, but again, the power of the story is in understanding its purpose and message: the representation of the Oral Torah is specifically in the volumes from the Slavuta edition. This was not just any volume of Talmud, since when Yeshivat *Ḥachmei* Lublin existed, the Slavuta edition was certainly not the most common edition. We have no way of determining which editions were on the shelves of Yeshivat *Ḥachmei* Lublin’s library since the yeshiva and its library were burned during the Nazi occupation, but the many printings of the Vilna Shas in the forty years following the closure of the Shapira printing house were very numerous, and there is no doubt that they were more available. The emphasis of the story on dancing specifically with the Slavuta edition testifies to the fact that a “regular” volume of the Talmud in the yeshiva was not this edition.

Over the seven cycles of *Daf Yomi* study that followed Rabbi Shapira’s inauguration of it, *Daf Yomi* became more and more established among the members of Agudat Yisrael. More and more celebratory events for the completion of tractates in the *Daf Yomi* are reported in various ultra-Orthodox publications over the years, and study schedules continue to be printed. Cycle after cycle, no one has changed what Rabbi Meir Shapira instituted. The schedules continue to allocate 14 days to *Shekalim* as a tractate that contains only fourteen pages.

On January 28, 1975, about half a year before the end of the seventh cycle of *Daf Yomi* study, the front page of the newspaper *Ha-Modia*, the daily bulletin of Agudat Yisrael in Israel, published a small unsigned report saying:

To the learnersof *Daf Yomi*, following the request of the Gaon Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt”l, *Daf Yomi* learners are requested to study tractate *Shekalim* in the approaching eighth cycle according to the division of twenty-two pages (the Vilna edition and most of the Talmuds in our day). We are publishing this now so that the *Daf Yomi* schedule organizers will know to set up the upcoming schedules to accord tractate *Shekalim* twenty-two pages.[[72]](#footnote-72)

Various legends have been associated with the request of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, one of the leading rabbis of American Jewry at the time, to change *Daf Yomi*.[[73]](#footnote-73) The only contemporary documentation is a letter sent by Rabbi Feinstein to the Gerer Rebbe in which he says that he will withdraw his proposal to change the *Daf Yomi* schedule if it arouses any dispute, but in his halakhic opinion, there is no problem with the change.[[74]](#footnote-74) The only reason not to change that arises between the lines is the honor of Rabbi Meir Shapira. In all the sources available to us, from the collections of letters of the relevant rabbis through the newspapers of the time, I found no discussion whatsoever about the change itself. The change would certainly make it easier for the learners who found it difficult to study the denser pages of tractate *Shekalim* but the discussion was entirely about the honor of Rabbi Meir Shapira and whether a change would damage the unity of the study.

# Conclusion

This article draws connections between seemingly technical decisions and ideology around the issue of Talmud printing over one hundred and fifty years. A seemingly economic dispute from the 1830s turned into a dispute between Hasidim and Mitnagdim almost at once, but only in the context of halakhic technicalities. None of the contemporaries disqualified the Vilna edition due to claims of problematic content or presented the Romm family’s edition as problematic. The dispute was entirely about printing rights. However, due to events that were not at all related to the printing of the Talmud and were connected to the dispute only by their temporal proximity, the dispute took on a mythical-Hasidic dimension. The self-sacrifice of the Slavuta brothers is woven, to this day, into Hasidic stories, each according to the message that the writers seek to relate, regardless of historical reality.

The Shapira family’s descendants along with other Hasidic rabbis who were not from the Shapira family made a point to use the Slavuta edition of the Talmud. This insistence made this edition religiously significant. Preferring the Slavuta edition to the Vilna Shas became a statement that preserved and gave value to the Shapira family’s religious devotion that was deemed important to be remembered. The study of the Shapira edition became a matter of principle. Accordingly, both the story of the controversy and the preference for this edition over the more widespread and accessible one, even after the Shapira family no longer owned the printing house, became a mythological Hasidic story.

When Rabbi Meir Shapira in the 1920s chose to affiliate himself with the pagination of an edition that had been impossible to obtain on the market for over sixty years, he knew that learners would not study the Slavuta edition because of this, but he sought to make an ethical statement about the illegitimacy of the most common Talmud at that time. This was a challenge, almost an act of subversion, to the entire society that managed to keep the Slavuta edition symbolically alive in the cultural-educational space without the book itself physically existing.

The printers and the rabbis of Agudat Yisrael who led *Daf Yomi* study dared finally adopt the Vilna Shas as the dominant edition in the Jewish learning world only a half-century later, after a period of terrible distress for the Jewish people in which countless books printed before the twentieth century were lost. The discussion of the change did not relate to Slavuta and Vilna at all, but to preserving the honor of the founder of *Daf Yomi*, Rabbi Meir Shapira. In this, there was a complete victory for the Vilna edition – even when there is room for debate, no one remembers anymore what its origin and meaning are: many editions were printed, Rabbi Meir Shapira chose one, and we have another. And that was enough.

1. For example, see Ada Rapoport-Albert, “Hagiography with Footnotes: Edifying Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidim.” *History and Theory* 27 (1988):119-159. Glenn Dynner, “The Hasidic Tale as a Historical Source: Historiography and Methodology,” *Religion Compass* 3 no. 4 (2009):655–675. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In a study of Jewish presses in the Russian Empire, Heinrich Agranovski calls Simḥa Ziml Nakhimovich’ the “father of Jewish book printing in Lithuania.” See Генрих Аграновский, Становление еврейского книгопечатания в Литве, Москва: 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shemuel Feigenzohn, “Le-Toldot Defus Romm,” ed. Haim Bar Dayan, in *Yahadut Lita*, eds. Natan Goren et al., vol. 1 (Tel Aviv: Am HaSefer, 1959); see also Agranovskii, *Stanovlenie evreiskogo knigopechatania*, s. 30-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dmitri Eliashevich punctuates the number 100,000 rubles to indicate the value of the amount of printing of Jewish books in the empire per year, when he attributes most of it to the two printing houses discussed here. See: D. A. El'iashevich, Pravitel'stvennaia politika i evreiskaia pechat' v Rossii, 1797-1917 [Government policy and the Jewish press in Russia, 1797-1917, Bridges of Culture] (St. Petersburg, Jerusalem: Mosty kultury, 1999). El'iashevich, Pravitel'stvennaia politika. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. David Asaf, “Shapira Family,” in The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe: https: //yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Shapira\_Family (accessed 30 June 2021). This printing house has yet to receive comprehensive scholarly attention, a lacuna I intend to correct as part of my current research on Jewish presses in Eastern Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In the first editions printed in Slavuta, the printers’ names are listed as Dov Ber ben Yisra’el Segal and Ya‘akov ben Mosheh. Marvin J. Heller argues, however, that the actual founder of the press—and the man responsible for substantial decisions about decisions of business and style—was Mosheh Shapira himself. For the purposes of this article, I have accepted this contention. See Marvin J. Heller, “On the Identity of the First Printers in Slavuta,” Gutenberg-Jahrbuch 86, 17–18 (2011): 269–281. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Mosheh Shapira was the second son of Rabbi Pinḥas of Korets. For further information on his father’s experiences and the latter’s complex relationship with the Hasidic movement after the death of the Ba‘al Shem Tov, see Abraham J. Heschel, *The Circle of the Baal Shem Tov* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 1–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Haim Dov Friedberg, *Toldot ha-Defus ha-‘Ivri be-Polanya me-Reishit Hivasdo bi-Shnat Rṣ”d ve-Hitpatḥuto ‘ad Zemaneinu* [The History of Hebrew Printing in Poland from its Beginnings in the Year 5604 and its Development unitil Today] (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1950), 59; Feigenzohn, "Le-Toldot Defus Romm,” 272; Ya‘akov Halevi Lipschitz, *Toledot Yiṣḥaq* (Warsaw, 1897), 59; Rachel Bayvel, “Closed Down by Two Tsars: A Short Note from a Family Archive,” *Jewish Culture and History* 5(2) (2002), 116-118. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ḥava Shapira, “‘Ha-Aḥim me-Slavuta’ Ma‘aseh she-Haya,” *Ha-Shiloaḥ* 30 (Tevet-Sivan, 1914): 542; Avraham Abele Posvoler, Be’er Avraham (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 2003), 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In this context, it is worth noting that in 1796, the first master of Lubavitch Hasidism, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, granted the printing rights of his book Tanya to none other than Mosheh Shapira. This first edition was followed by almost thirty additional ones in various printing houses. It was only in 1872, that the Romm press first printed the Tanya, after obtaining exclusive and perpetual printing rights (as displayed on the title page). See e.g., Shneur Zalman ben Barukh, *Liqutei Amarim* (Vilna, 1899), 2. In 1909, the Romm family sold these rights, but continued to print on behalf of the new right holders: the Lubavitch Yeshiva in Vilna, Tomkhei Temimim. See Shneur Zalman ben Barukh, *Liqutei Amarim* (Vilna, 1909), 3. But the book of the *Tanya* in particular, and Ḥabad in general, is exceptional in this matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Sergey Dolgopolski, *What is Talmud? – The Art of Disagreement*, (Fordham, Fordham University Press, 2009) <https://doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823229345.001.0001>; Jay M. Harris, “Talmud Study,” *The Yivo Encyclopedia,* https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Talmud\_Study. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See the digital library at the Vinograd-Rosenfeld book trading house. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Shneur Zalman of Liady, *Igrot Kodesh* (Brooklyn: Karnei Hod Torah, 2012), 249–252. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 351–357. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For a lengthy discussion of the *hasqamot* appended to the first editions of the Slavuta Talmud, see Heller, “On the Identity.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For a discussion of the concept of copyright as it applies to the printing of early Jewish literature, see: Nahum Rakover, *Zekhut ha-yoṣrim ba-meqorit ha-yehudiyim* [Creator’s rights in the Jewish sources] (Jerusalem, Israel Ministry of Justice, 1991). See also Neil Weinstock Netanel, *From Maimonides to Microsoft – The Jewish Law of Copyright Since the Birth of Print*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), 168-193; Daniel Unger, “Copyright Enforcement by Praise and Curse: The Colourful Development of Jewish Intellectual Property,” *Intellectual Property Quarterly* 1 (2011): 86-107. Both discuss the term copyright and in doing so, address the dispute discussed in this article. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For an expanded discussion, see Ada Gebel, “Slavuta, Zhytomyr, and Vilna: The Intersecting Stories of the Romm and Shapira Publishing Houses,” *European Journal of Jewish Studies*. In print. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. BT *Berakhot*, Vilna-Grodno: 1835. Unnumbered back of title page. And again, in the same spirit, also in BT *Shabbat*, Vilna-Grodno: 1836. Unnumbered, behind the title page.. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *Likutei Haskamot le-Hadpasat ha-Shas* (Vilna, 1835). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. BT *Berakhot* (Slavuta, 1835), *hasqamot*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The mechanism by which each side picks a judge of their own and these two judges select a third as a method for resolving disputes is already attested to in the mishnaic period. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. According to a note in Rabbi Dov-Berish Ashkenazi’s book of responsa, the three judges all knew each other and used to engage in halakhic exchanges prior to this specific case. See Dov-Berish Ashkenazi, *Shu”t Noda‘ ba-She‘arim* (Warsaw: Orgelbrand, 1853), 31b. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Lipschitz, *Toldot Yiṣḥaq*, 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Idem, *Ir Vilna* (Vilna: Romm Press, 1900), vol. 1, 24–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Though a comprehensive, scholarly biography of Rabbi Aqiva Eger has yet to be written, hagiographies abound. A partial list includes Jacob H. Sinason, *Gaon of Posen: A Portrait of Rabbi Akiva Guens-Eger* (New York: Feldheim, 1990); Hillel Albert, *Ga‘on ha-Dorot* (Tel Aviv: Pe’er Press, 1984); Shimon Hirshler, *Me’oran shel Yisra’el* (Brooklyn: Makhon Shem Mishmu’el, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Liqutei Haskamot*, 4. Another version of the letter appears in the collection *Igrot Rabbi Aqiva Eger* (Jerusalem: Makhon Da‘at Hasofer, 1994), 158. There are some small differences between the two versions, but the contemporary version of the letter, produced by the very press to whom it was addressed, is a preferable source. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The Slavuta printers had a previous experience with such a compromise when in 1816, the Kaposzt family’s printing house was obligated by the Shklov community court to purchase the last remaining copies held by the Shapira family from the previous edition of the Talmud as a condition for their consent to the Kaposzt family’s Talmud edition. See: Nahum Rakover, *Zekhut ha-yoṣrim*, 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Shteinshneider, *Ir Vilna*, 24–26; *Teshuvot Rabbi Aqiva Eger* in three volumes, printed in more than ten editions starting from Wroclaw 1855, until Bnei Brak 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. ’*Iggrot Rabbi Akiva* *Eger*, (Jerusalem:1994), 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Only four tractates were printed with the place of publication as Vilna-Grodno, while all other tractates mention Vilna alone. On the separation process between the descendants of the founders, see: Аграновский, книгопечатания, Стр, 28-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Rabinovich, *Ma’amar ‘al Hadpasat ha-Talmud*, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Feigenzohn “Le-Toledot Defus Romm,” 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The essay was published in the *Ha-Ṣofeh* newspaper in installments between September and December 1947. Ginzburg's sources for the essay are located in the National Library of Israel, Saul Ginzburg Collection, ARC 1281A \*4, 18/1-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The scholars who dealt with the case all relied on Ginzburg's article, for example Dmitri Eliashevitz, Michael Stanislavsky, and others. See Michael Stanislawski, “The ‘Vilna Shas’ and East European Jewry,” Sharon Liberman Mintz and Gabriel M. Goldstein (editors) *Printing the Talmud* (New York, PUBLISHER: 2005), 98. Ельяшевич Дмитрий, Правительственная политика и еврейская печать в России, 1797-1917, Мосты культуры: 1999. C. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ginsburg, The Drama, 43-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The Russian government’s notion that the Hasidic movement undermined social stability, leading ultimately to anarchy, was evident already in the early days of Hasidism, as seen prominently from the imprisonment of Rabbi Shneur Zalman from Liady. See Shimon Dubnow, *Toldot ha-Ḥasidut* (Tel Aviv: Dvir Publishing House, 1975), 242–278; David Assaf, *Derekh Malkhut: R. Yisra’el me-Ruzhin* (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 1986), 163–175. Parallel to the trial of the Shapira family, another murder trial was taking place. Among others, Rabbi Yisra’el of Ruzhin, one of the Hasidic masters of the time, was accused of involvement in the murder of an informer in his community. See Saul Ginzburg, "Mayse Ushits: A Finstere Bletl Yidishe Geshikhte,” *Di Tsukunft* (October 1926): 621–624; David Assaf, *Derekh Malkhut*, 163–175. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Tsar Nicholas I was an autocrat who was personally involved in all levels of political administration. See W. Bruce Lincoln, *Nicholas I Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). Accordingly, he was directly involved in the finer details of the empire’s treatment of Jews. See Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia 1825–1855* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ginsburg, The Drama, 107-138. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. For the change in attitude towards the Jews that began with Alexander II’s rise to power, see Salo W. Baron, *The Russian Jew under Tsars and Soviets* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 46–50. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ginsburg, The Drama, 139-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. On the struggle between the nine printings houses active in Vilna at that time, see: Agranovskii, *Stanovlenie*, 13–21. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ada Gebel, Slavuta, Zhytomyr, and Vilna: The Intersecting Stories of the Romm and Shapira Publishing Houses, European Journal of Jewish Studies. In print. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Shteinshneider, *Ir Vilna*, 24-26. Raphael Nathan Neta Rabinowitz, *Ma'amar 'al Hadpasat ha-Talmud - Toldot Hadpasat ha-Talmud* [A. M. Berman edition] (Jerusalem PUBLISHER: 1965) 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Scholars have dealt extensively with the Hasidic story and Jewish hagiographies and the place of both of them in Hasidism. See, for example, Joseph Dan, *The Hasidic Story* (Jerusalem, Keter Publishing: 1975); Gedaliah Nigal, *Hasidic Literature – Its History and Themes*, Jerusalem, Marcus Publishing: 1981); Zeev Kitzes, “Hagiographic Literature in Hasidism - From Its Beginnings Until World War II: Periods, Canonization, and Consolidation Processes” (Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 2015). Uriel Gellman, “Stories,” in Marcin Wodzinski (Editor), *Studying Hasidism: Sources, Methods, Perspectives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press: 2019), 60-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Nigal, *Hasidic Literature*, 81-82/ [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Dan, *The Hasidic Story*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. For more on the character of Ḥava Shapira, see: Carole B. Balin and Wendy I. Zierler (editors), *To Tread on New Ground: Selected Writings of Hava Shapira* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press: 2014) 1-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ḥava Shapira, “The Brothers from Slavuta (A Story That Happened)”, *Ha-Shiloaḥ* 40 (Tevet-Sivan 1924): 541-554. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. A version of this legend reached one of Y.L. Peretz’s works. See Y.L. Peretz, *Mi-Pi Ha-‘Am* [From the Mouth of the People] (Tel Avi, Dvir: 1950) 34-36. For a discussion of Peretz's Hasidic sources for his stories, see Zeev Fridan, “Parodiah ve-Geografiah: Sippurim Ḥasidiyim Ke-ve-Yakhol shel Y.L. Peretz” [Parody and Geography: so-called Hasidic Stories by Y.L. Peretz] *Ḥulyot* 7 (Autumn 2002): 45-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See the “*Heikhal Ha-Neginah*” website, which contains Hasidic melodies: http://www20.chassidus.com/audio/nigun/02-12-Niggun-MiSlavuta-The-Shapiro-Brothers-Heichal-Neginah.htm (accessed June 30, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ḥayyim Valder, *Ḥavurat Tarya”g,* season 3, chapter 19 (Bnei Berak, Berman Halpert: 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Geulah Bat-Yehudah, *Rabbi Maimon in his Generations*, (Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook: 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Yehuda Leib HaKohen Maimon, *Midei Ḥodesh be-Ḥodesho 6* (Jerusalem:PUBLISHER: 1960) 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Avraham Ben David Ḥanunu, *Sefer Al Tadiḥeni* (Lakewood, PUBLISHER: 2012) 160-161. Exactly the same version appears in Rafael Yitzhak Levi, *Sefer ‘Enei Yitṣhak on Exodus* (Tel Aviv, PUBLISHER: 2012) 63-65. In an adaptation for children but in a very similar way, see Avraham Israel, *Sefer Avot Yisrael on Pirkei Avot*, Chapters 4-6, (no place mentioned: 2010) 117-119. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ḥen Mendel ’Edre’i and Yehuda Dov Ber Zirkin, “Sketching the Literary History of Hasidic Aesthetics: The Lost Collection of Stories by Rabbi Mordechai of Landa and its Transformation in Historiographical Derash Writing,” *Kabbalah - Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 53 (2022): 251-306. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid., 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Yitṣḥak Alfasi, *Lights from the World of Kabbalah and Hasidism* (Jerusalem, PUBLISHER: 1964) 515-516. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. No academic biography has yet been written about him, but there are many hagiographies. For example: Menahem Gets, *Pillar of Fire: Episodes in the Life of the Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin* (New York, Mesorah Publications: 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Gamliel Rabinowitz, *Mah Tovu’Ohalekha Ya‘aqov* (11 Sivan 2020) 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. No author listed, *Ha-’Ari Be-Mistarim – Toledot Ḥayyav U-Qeṣot Darko Ba-Qodesh U-Mif‘alav shel Ha-’Ari, Rabi ’Aharon Yeḥiel Hapstein mi-Konznitz* (London:2019) 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. An academic biography of Rabbi Meir Shapira has not yet been published and deserves to be. Hagiographic sources describe him and his activities. For example, Yehoshua Baumol, *A Blaze in the Darkening Gloom: the Life of Rav Meir Shapiro* (Jerusalem: Feldheim: 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. He was the descendant of Rabbi Yehuda Meir from Shpitovka, Rabbi Mosheh Shapira’s brother. See David Halaḥmi, *Yeshivat Ḥakhmei Lublin U-Meḥolelo* (Bnei Brak: 1995) 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Gershon C. Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition – Agudat Yisrael in Poland, 1916-1939* (Jerusalem, Magnes: 1996) 78-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Moshe Aqiva Druk, *Sefer Ha-Kenessiah Ha-Gedolah Ha-Shishit Bi-Yerushalyim* (Jerusalem: Tevet 1980) 29-42.

    17. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid., 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Jacob Katz, *The Unhealed Breach: The Secession of Orthodox Jews from the General Community in Hungary and Germany* (Jerusalem, Zalman Shazar:1995); Robert Leberles, *Religious Conflict in Social Context: The Resurgence of Orthodox Judaism in Frankfurt Am Main, 1838-1877* (London PUBLISHER: 1985); Ada Gebel, *Agudat Yisrael Workers Movement in Eretz Israel 1933-1939* (Jerusalem, Yad Ben Zvi:2017) 15-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See David Stern, “The Topography of the Talmudic Page,” Marcia Kupfer, Adam S. Cohen, J.H. Chajes (eds.), *The Visualization of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout, Belgium, Brepols: 2020) 137-162. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. On the transition of the Palestinian Talmud from manuscript to print, see Yaakov Z. Mayer*, Editio Princeps:*

    *The 1523 Venice Edition of the Palestinian Talmud and the Beginning of Hebrew Printing* (Jerusalem, Magnes: 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. On the differences in the text of tractate *Sheqalim*, see Yaakov Sussman, “On the Scholarly Tradition and the Tradition of the Text of the Yerushalmi,” [Hebrew] in Yakov Romm (ed.) *Studies in the Talmudic Literature: In Honor of Saul Lieberman’s 80th Birthday* (Jerusalem, 1983) 12-76. For the incorporation of PT *Sheqalim* into the Babylonian Talmud, see Saul Lieberman, “Something on the Old Commentators of the Jerusalem Talmud,” [Hebrew] in *Alexander Marx Jubilee Volume II* (New York: JTS, 1950), 287-315. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. David Avraham Mendelboim, *Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin 2* (Bnei Brak:1994) 315-316. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. *Ha-Modia* 28/1/1975, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See, for example, “Daf Parashat Ha-Shavua Me’orort Ha-Daf Ha-Yomi” 367 (8th Sivan 5766). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Pineḥas Menaḥem Alter, *Oṣar Mikhtavim 2* (Jerusalem and Bnei Berak, Penei Menahem: 2013) 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)