**The Printing of the Babylonian Talmud at Two Printing Houses (1834-1836)**

The Babylonian Talmud is the most fundamental and important Jewish work in the world of traditional Jewish study.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Talmud is made up of multiple volumes and its printing requires extensive and complex economic and technological means. Over the years, many commentaries were added to the text, with printers adding them to editions of the Talmud, as a result of which the printing process became increasingly expensive and complicated. It is important to note that more than one-third of the titles that were printed over the years by the Shapira family were tractates of the Talmud, thus teaching us how important the printing of the Talmud was for the maintenance of the printing house.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Shapira family already began publishing the Talmud during its first few years of activity (starting from 1800). This print run was supported financially by the Chabad Admor, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who accordingly took a majority of the profits, with only one-sixth going to the Shapira family.[[3]](#footnote-3)

After selling all the copies of the first print run, Moshe Shapira received the printing rights[[4]](#footnote-4) from the Admor, and between 1808 and 1813 the Shapira family’s printing house produced another edition of the Talmud, more upmarket than its predecessor, which was published twice in quick succession (the first print run was between 1808 and 1813, and the second from 1816 to 1822).

Prior to the printing of the Talmud at the Shapira printing house, the workers made sure to secure the approval of different rabbis in order to secure their copyright. The agreement meant that other Jewish printers were forbidden from printing another edition of the Talmud for 25 years. This was a kind of copyright of the traditional world, anchored in Jewish law, and in this case relying on the great Hasidic leaders of the period, with Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Hasidism, at their head.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Sergey Dolgopolski, *What is Talmud? – The Art of Disagreement* (Fordham, 2009). Jay M. Harris, Talmud Study, The Yivo Encyclopedia, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Talmud_Study> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the digitalized book collection database compiled by Yeshayahu Winograd and Moshe Rosenfeld. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Holy Scriptures* (Brooklyn: 2012), Pages 249-252. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Name, Pages 351-357. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a lengthy discussion regarding agreements for printing the first editions of the Talmud at the Slavuta printing press: see Marwin Hiller in note 6 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)