**Printing of the Babylonian Talmud by Two Publishers (1836-1834)**

In traditional Jewish studies, The Babylonian Talmud is the foundational and most central document.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Since the Talmud comprises a great many volumes, its publication requires extensive financial and technological resources. In addition, over the years, numerous rabbinic commentaries have been added to the Talmud, and as printers added these to their editions, its printing became an even more complex and costly endeavor.

It is worth noting that over a third of the titles published over the years by the Shapira family were Talmudic tractates. This demonstrates the essential role that publication of the Talmud played in supporting the publisher’s ongoing operations.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Shapira family began publishing editions of the Talmud even within its first few years, starting in 1800. This initial publication was supported financially by the Chabad Rebbe (Grand Rabbi), Rabbi Shneur Zalman, son of Baruch of Liadi. Thus, most of the profits went directly to the Chabad Rebbe, with only a sixth of the profits going to the Shapira family.[[3]](#footnote-3)

After all copies of the first edition had been sold, Moshe Shapira acquired the publication rights from the Chabad Rebbe,[[4]](#footnote-4) and between 1808 and 1813, the Shapira family printing house published a more deluxe updated version of the Talmud. Two editions of this version were published back to back (first in 1808-1813 and then again in 1816-1822).

Before the Shapira family publishing company published these editions of the Talmud, its employees made sure to gather agreements from various rabbis, offering them a form of copyright protection. These agreements banned other Jewish publishers from printing any other edition of the Talmud for twenty-five years. This represented a form of protection for their intellectual property within the framework of traditional Jewish law, in this case relying for its enforcement on the support of the great Chassidic leaders of the time, particularly Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the Chabad Chassidic dynasty.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. Dolgopolski Sergey, 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 Winograd-Rosenfeld digital book database - https://otzarhasefer.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, *Igrot Kodesh*, Brooklyn (2012), pp. 249-252 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., pp. 351-357 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a lengthy discussion of agreements granted for the first editions of the Talmud for the Slavuta [SOME VERSIONS SAY SLAVITA], see Marvin Heller, above (comment 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)