**Printing the Babylonian Talmud in two publishing houses (1834-1836)**

The Babylonian Talmud is the most important and fundamental work in the world of traditional Jewish learning.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Talmud is comprised of many volumes, and printing this corpus requires a substantial financial investment and complicated technological know-how. Throughout the generations, many commentaries to the Talmud have been written, and printers have added these commentaries to the various editions of the Talmud. Because of this, printing the Talmud has turned into something increasingly expensive and complex. It is important to note that more than one-third of the titles printed by the Shapira family over the years were Talmudic tractates. This teaches us how important printing the Talmud was to the continued existence of the publishing house.[[2]](#footnote-2) Already in the first years of this printer's activities, the Shapira family published the Talmud (beginning in the year 1800). This edition was financially supported by the Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman (b. Baruch) of Liadi. Commensurate with that support, most of the profits went to the Rebbe, while the Shapira family only received one-sixth of the profits.[[3]](#footnote-3)

After they sold all copies of the first printing, Moshe Shapira received the rights to reprint from the Rebbe,[[4]](#footnote-4) and during the years 1808-1813, the Shapira family's printing house published another deluxe edition of the Talmud. This edition was published twice, in two conservative printing runs (the first print was during the years 1808-1813; and the second, 1816-1822).

Before the Shapira family publishing house printed the Talmud, the printers made sure to gather the approbations from various rabbis in order to ensure their creative rights to this product. The implications of such approbations were that they forbid other Jewish printers from publishing a competing edition of the Talmud for a span of twenty-five years. This was the traditional equivalent to copyright protection in Halacha (Jewish Law). In this specific case, contemporary Hassidic Masters — headed by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad Chassidut — granted their approbations to this publication.[[5]](#footnote-5)

1. D. Sergey, *What is Talmud? The Art of Disagreement* (Fordham, 2009); J. M. Harris, “Talmud Study,” *The Yivo Encyclopedia* (Available online at: <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Talmud_Study>). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the digital library at the Winnograd-Rosenfeld booksellers (ATTACH URL??) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. S. Z. Liadi, *Iggrot Kodesh* vol XX, (Brooklyn: Kohat Publishers, 2012), pp. 249–252. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Liadi, pp. 251–257. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a lengthy discussion about the rabbinic approbations given to the first editions of the Talmud published by the Shapira family in Salvita, see Heller (cited above fn. 6). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)