

Earliest Printings of the Talmud

by MARVIN J. HELLER

“THIS EDITION is most becoming and beautiful. If the entire Talmud had been printed, it would have been the glory and most beautiful jewel of Israel. All the editions before and after would not have compared to it. However, ‘Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain on it’ (Psalms 127:1).”¹

Raphael Nathan Nata Rabbinovicz’s praise for the Sabbioneta *Kiddushin* (1554) can be contested only for his limiting it to the final Italian printing of a tractate from the Babylonian Talmud. The first editions of the Babylonian Talmud, and the individual tractates that preceded them as well, can almost uniformly be characterized as aesthetically pleasing and textually superior to later editions of the Talmud. The pioneer printers of early Hebrew books, engaged in *melekbet ha-kodesh* (holy work), were artisans and craftsman—often scholars—whose handiwork reflected their skill and the pride that they took in their labors.

The first printed tractate of the Talmud was *Berakhot*, excluding possible Spanish treatises, the first work to be issued from the new press established by Joshua Solomon Soncino in 1483. To appreciate the accomplishments of Joshua Solomon Soncino, Gershom Soncino, Daniel Bomberg, and other early printers of the Talmud, it is worth considering the appearance of the talmudic page prior to the invention of printing with moveable type. The talmudic text of the Babylonian Talmud, consisting of approximately two million words in sixty-three tractates, was customarily written in codices without accompanying commentaries, which were considered separate books.²

Scribes were not constrained by the need to adhere to either preset foliation or page composition. The physical placement of identical text manuscript tractates is inconsistent, so that the same passage in two codices of a tractate more often than not had a different number of lines to a page and words to a line, with the text beginning and ending at different positions on the page, resulting in varying number of leaves for two copies of the same tractate. The advent of printing forever changed the face of books in general and the Talmud in particular. Indeed, the Talmud was physically transformed by printing. One of the most significant modifications from the codex to the printed book is standardization. In the case of the Talmud the replacement of unique editions of tractates with a standard format, fixed foliation and *tzurat ha-daf* (page composition), begins with tractate *Berakhot*, printed in the northern Italian town of Soncino by Joshua Solomon Soncino.

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1. Raphael Nathan Nata Rabbinovicz, *Maamar al Hadpasat ha-Talmud with additions*, ed. A. M. Habermann (Jerusalem, 1952), p. 59. Recognizing the importance of historiography and the widespread influence of the published scholarship on the history of Hebrew printing, a number of secondary sources are cited in this essay alongside citations from the primary evidence drawn from colophons, contemporary

texts, and other sources.

2. There are instances where Rashi and *Tosafot* both appear on the page with the text. E. E. Urbach, *The Tosafists: Their History, Writings and Methods* (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 29 [Hebrew], lists several such fragments, and their locations, for example: *Yevamot* with Rashi, *Tosafot*, and *Sefer Mordekbai* (Oxford); *Yevamot* and *Kiddushin* with *Tosafot* (Vatican); *Gittin* with Rashi and *Tosafot* (Paris); *Shabbat* with Rashi and *Tosafot* (Gratz); *Bava Metzia* with Rashi and *Tosafot* (Augsburg); and *Ketubbot* with *Tosafot* (Melk). These occasions, however, are the exception rather than the rule.

The Soncino family traced its ancestry to the thirteenth-century tosafist, R. Moses of Speyer. At some time in the following centuries, though no later than 1453, the date of the general expulsion of the Jews from Speyer, the family resettled in Bavaria. Moses Mentzlan (Mentschlein = mannikin), a name reflecting his diminutive stature, was a fifth-generation descendant of Moses of Speyer. He is remembered for his opposition to the itinerant anti-Semitic friar John of Capistrano (1386–1456) in the city of Fürth. Moses' sons, Samuel and Simon, fled Bavaria for Italy. When Duke Francesco Sforza permitted Samuel to settle in Soncino in the Duchy of Milan in 1454, Samuel and his family, the only Jews in Soncino, exercised the privilege granted them to open a bank and engage in moneylending. Israel Nathan Soncino, Samuel's son, practiced medicine and assisted his father in the banking business. When a *monte di pieta* (public loan office) was opened in Soncino, however, the family was compelled to find another occupation. In 1480, through Israel Nathan's influence, the family turned to printing. Under the direction and management of Joshua Solomon Soncino,

3. David Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy* (Philadelphia, 1909; reprint London, 1963), pp. 51–57.

4. Mordechai Glatzer, "Early Hebrew Printing," in *A Sign and a Witness* (New York, 1988), pp. 80–91.

5. Although there are no exceptions to the four-line convention in *Berakhot*, examples of occasional variances in other incunabula Soncino tractates include the last chapter of *Betzab*, where there are instances of Rashi and *Tosafot* covering the text for 11 and 12 lines, and one instance where Rashi covers the text for seven lines. In *Bava Metzia* there are five instances of *Tosafot*, three of Rashi, and one of Rashi and *Tosafot* exceeding four lines. *Ketubbot* has a Rashi of five lines, as well as an instance of a one-line Rashi covering the text. The practice of allowing *Tosafot* to occupy the first four lines of the page is understood homiletically as a reminder that one should not assume to understand the text without first reviewing it at least four times (ref. *Eruvin* 54b).

Israel Nathan's son, the Soncino press printed its first title, which was, as noted above, excluding possible Spanish imprints, the first printed tractate of the Talmud.³

The unfoliated Soncino *Berakhot* is comprised of one hundred-seventeen leaves, one hundred of which contain the text, the remaining of which consist of *Piskei Tosafot*, *Sefer Mordekhai*, and Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah. [Current foliation for *Berakhot*, based on the second Bomberg Talmud, is 64 leaves.] The format and commentaries chosen by Joshua Solomon Soncino were, with rare exceptions, continued or at least acknowledged in all subsequent editions of the Talmud. A smaller cursive script, known as Rashi (or rabbinic) script, was employed for Rashi and *Tosafot*, to distinguish between the glosses and the text, which is in square letters. It is from these tractates, together with the Soncino Bibles and the Bomberg Talmud, that the printing tradition of using semi-cursive letters to distinguish the commentaries from the talmudic text originated, and from this usage that the term "Rashi script" originates.⁴ Furthermore, throughout the volume, Rashi and *Tosafot* begin at the top of the page; the text begins four lines below. While there are instances where Rashi and *Tosafot* occupy more than four lines above the text in individual Soncino and Bomberg tractates (first edition only), this arrangement too has become part of the standard rules of composition of the Talmud (except where it is not possible due to the absence or limited commentary for a particular text).⁵ Another feature of incunabula is the absence of foliation, which first appears, though not consistently, in Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* (Constantinople, 1509). Each tractate begins at 2a. In the absence of a title page, the first leaf (1a-b) is a blank page preceding the text, still extant in some copies.

There are two colophons, the first from Joshua Solomon, and the second from the corrector, R. Gabriel of Strasbourg. Joshua Solomon writes, “I have joined these desirable commentaries together to be a comely work, for all who know our way, know that no other books are necessary besides these for this tractate . . . and it was completed here, in the city of Soncino, today, the twentieth of the month of Tevet, גמר"א [(5)244=December 19, 1483].” R. Gabriel writes that many:

“seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it” (Amos 8:12), for they are unable to acquire the necessary books and thus could not enter the portal to the hall of wisdom. And to this end the heart of this wise man [Israel Nathan] arose and said, “how can I sit in a house of cedars and the Ark” (cf. II Samuel 7:2) of the Covenant lies in the corner, with none seeking its judgments. And [Israel Nathan] called to his son, “a man in whom rests the spirit of God” (Genesis 41:38), R. Joshua Solomon, who resides in the city of Soncino, which is in Lombardy, and he commanded him saying, build our everlasting structure, raise the horns of wisdom. Print books, so that they would provide two well-known benefits; first, that a large number can be made, until the world would be full of knowledge; and second, that their price will not be as high as the price of copies written with quills, iron pens or lead. And those who lacked the means to acquire those expensive copies will be able to purchase these cheaply, [and] in place of gold they will bring silver. . . .

As many as sixteen tractates were printed by Joshua Solomon Soncino and his nephew Gershom Soncino. The attribution of several of these tractates is not definite. We know with certainty that Joshua Solomon printed *Berakhot* (1483/84), *Betzab* (1484), and *Megillah* (1485), and that Gershom Soncino printed *Sanhedrin* (Barco, 1497). The identity of the Soncino who printed the remaining incunabula tractates is in question, although it is likely that Joshua Solomon printed the majority.⁶

In addition to the features noted above, these tractates share other characteristics. Excluding *Betzab*, which is printed with the same commentaries as *Berakhot* but in a different order, the other incunabula tractates, and not all of them, have *Piskei Tosefot*, but not the *Mordekhai* or Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah. The Soncinos, with rare exceptions, chose to represent the Tetragrammaton with a *heb* followed by an apostrophe (׳ה), the convention of the Roman presses. This is in contrast to the representation of the Tetragrammaton in the Iberian titles, including tractates and early Italian incunabula, which continued Hebrew scribal practices of using various forms of several *yodin*. The *heb* (׳ה) has become the standard representation of the Tetragrammaton to the present day.

The Soncinos, as did other Renaissance printers, enhanced the attractiveness of their books, including the tractates, through the use of artistic borders and frames. In *Berakhot* and *Betzab* the opening words are in large ornamental letters, surrounded by a frame composed of an attractive floral arrangement. Although the same frame was used in both treatises, the top and bottom sides of the frame, with

6. The remaining incunabula tractates are *Shabbat*, *Eruvin*, *Ketubbot*, *Gittin*, *Hagigah*, *Bava Kamma*, *Bava Metzia*, *Kiddushin*, *Hullin*, *Niddah*, *Bava Batra*, and *Avodah Zarab*. Erroneously, almost all bibliographic sources include a second printing of *Betzab* (1493). Concerning the source of the error see, Marvin J. Heller, *Printing the Talmud: A History of the Earliest Printed Editions of the Talmud* (Brooklyn, 1992), pp. 87–95 (hereafter *Earliest Printed Editions*).

their distinctive floral arrangements, were transposed. Furthermore, since the first word of *Berakhot* is longer than the first word of *Betzab* the space in the latter treatise was filled by a hare illustration at each end of the word.

These full-page frames had originally been commissioned by and prepared for non-Jewish printers who, when they were done with them, sold them to Jewish printers. One example is the splendid white-on-black engraved border appearing on the first page of *Niddab* and of *Hullin*; it depicts naked and winged putti deporting themselves on an intricate floral background. First employed by Francesco Del Tупpo in his 1485 edition of *Aesop's Fables*, it was used repeatedly by the Soncino family beginning in 1487. Its transfer from an Italian to a Hebrew book presented a problem where the outer margin should be wider than the inner margin to retain the balance of the page. Among the various solutions employed, evident in *Niddab* and *Hullin*, was to cut the block into four sections and interchange the panels.⁷

Sanhedrin is an exception to the use of artistic borders and frames. Rather than printing a page similar to *Hullin* and *Niddab*, where the initial word is ornamented and framed, the first three words of the tractate are simply in large letters above the text. The same first three words in Rashi and *Tosafot*, as well as the chapter name at the top of the page, are in small square letters. Among the tractate's distinguishing features are instances in which all of the *Mishnayot* are printed at the beginning of the chapter. There is no discernable pattern for the placement of the *Mishnayot* in other chapters; in some instances the *Mishnayot* are joined, while in others, they are separated in a manner that varies from current editions of *Sanhedrin*.

David Amram suggests that Gershom resorted to a degree of self-censorship while editing *Sanhedrin*, removing or replacing passages that might have offended his Christian contemporaries. Rabbinovicz, however, does not believe that Gershom censored tractate *Sanhedrin*. He argues that the textual omissions that suggest censorship resulted from following Spanish manuscripts that contained omissions by royal command. Rabbinovicz does contend, however, that Gershom submitted to self-censorship in Pesaro, where official censorship of Hebrew books did not yet exist.⁸ *Sanhedrin* may have been Gershom's last printing in the fifteenth century. As Amram writes, Gershom "apparently himself became a victim to the stress and strife of his time, and for five years from 1497 to 1502 his press was silent."⁹ *Sanhedrin's* colophon itself states, "with the help of the Master of all, and may He, blessed be He, in His compassion, give us solace from our misery and our grief, completed 21 Kislev, [5]258 [November 16, 1497] by the humblest of printers Gershom ben Moses called Mentzelen Soncin."

Sanhedrin was the last of the incunabula tractates in Italy. Joshua Solomon Soncino, who had printed in Soncino, Casalmaggiore, and Naples, from 1484 to 1492, died in 1493 due to an outbreak of plague in Naples. Gershom Soncino, who would be the greatest of the pioneers of Hebrew printing and would print tractates in several locations in the sixteenth century was also inactive. Before addressing Gershom's later accomplishments, however, we turn first to the incunabula tractates printed in the Iberian peninsula.

The Spanish Hebrew presses flourished for a brief period only, beginning with Juan de Lucena's press in Montalban, near Toledo, and ending with the expulsion of the

7. A. M. Habermann, "The Jewish Art of the Printed Book," in *Jewish Art, an Illustrated History* (Tel Aviv, 1961), pp. 163–166.

8. Amram, pp. 82–83; Rabbinovicz, p. 28.

9. Amram, p. 85.

Jews in 1492.¹⁰ The earliest Spanish printing of a talmudic tractate, which may, if he is correct, predate the Soncino *Berakhot*, was described by Daniel Chwolson. It is a copy of *Yevamot* that he saw in the library of a private collector: “In London I saw, by a private collector, *Yevamot* with Rashi and without *Tosafot*. The name of the place [of publication] was not given, and only by the form of the letters and the rows, which are unruled, was I able to identify, almost to a surety, that the tractate was printed in Guadalajara in 1482.”¹¹

The earliest extant Hebrew imprints come from the Guadalajara press of R. Solomon ben Moses ha-Levi ibn Alkabetz. Solomon, descended from a distinguished Sephardic family, was assisted by his two sons, Joshua and Moses. After the expulsion from Spain, Moses served in the rabbinate in Adrianople, Salonika, and Aleppo. Moses’ son, the kabbalist R. Solomon Alkabetz, was the author of the Sabbath hymn, *Lekhab Dodi*. The elder Solomon Alkabetz printed the oldest surviving Spanish Hebrew imprint, Rashi’s Torah commentary, dated 16 Elul, 5236 (September 5, 1476), and may have printed as many as twenty titles, among them between six and ten tractates.¹² He is generally credited with the first Spanish printing of a volume of the Talmud. The Spanish tractates have a number of distinguishing features. They are, with one notable exception, printed with Rashi but not *Tosafot*, the former most often in the outer margin, with the text toward the center. In *Berakhot*, however, which may have been the earliest printed Guadalajara tractate, Rashi was printed along the inner margin of the page, suggesting that it was printed before the format of the later tractates in which Rashi surrounded the text. The omission of *Tosafot* may be attributed, Haim Dimitrovsky surmises, to the fact that the Spanish and Portuguese *yeshivot* studied *Hiddushei ha-Ramban* instead of *Tosafot*.¹³ We find an earlier statement of this position by Messer David ben Judah Leone (1470/2–1526?) in his *Kevod Hakhmamim*:

I entered within the boundaries of the Sephardic scholars, to debate the novellae of Nahmanides, although it is not our custom in the German and Italian *yeshivot*, for all of our debates are on [the words of] *Tosafot*. . . . And as their debates are on [Nahmanides’] novellae, so we do so on *Tosafot*, and just as they are not occupied with *Tosafot* so we are not occupied with their novellae. But, even so, I concern myself very much with the novellae of Nahmanides, whether on Torah or Talmud, because it is very sharp.¹⁴

In the Guadalajara tractates the text is in square letters and Rashi is printed in a cursive Sephardic script. The representation of the Tetragrammaton varies from three *yodin* to an L crossed by a line with three strokes corresponding to the three *yodin*, both manuscript representations. The most important distinction, however, between the Spanish (and Portuguese) tractates and current editions are textual variations. Citing several examples, Jacob Spiegel notes that Sephardic sages, aware of the differences, sought Spanish editions and studied them carefully when available.¹⁵

10. Concerning the press of Juan de Lucena, see Joshua Bloch, “Early Hebrew printing in Spain and Portugal,” pp. 3–56, in *Hebrew Printing and Bibliography* (New York, 1976), pp. 9–16.

11. Daniel Chwolson, *Reshit Maaseh ha-Defus be-Yisrael* (Warsaw, 1897), p. 22.

12. C. B. Friedberg, *History of Hebrew Typography in Italy, Spain-Portugal, and Turkey* (Tel Aviv, 1956), pp. 91–92 [Hebrew]; Herrman M.Z. Meyer, *A Short-title Catalogue of the Hebrew Incunabules and other Books Illustrated in the “Thesaurus,”* appended to Aron Freimann [and Moses Marx], eds., *Thesaurus Typographiae Saeculi XV Hebrew Printing During the Fifteenth Century* (Berlin, 1924–1931; reprint Jerusalem, 1967–1969).

13. Haim Z. Dimitrovsky, *S’ridei Bavli: An Historical and Bibliographical Introduction* (New York, 1979), p. 17 [Hebrew].

14. *Kevod Hakhmamim*, ed. by S. Bernfeld (Berlin, 1899), pp. 129–130. Quoted in Simḥa Assaf, *me-Korot le-Toldot ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael* (Tel Aviv, 1928), pp. 33–34 [Hebrew].

15. Jacob Spiegel, “The tractate *Hagigab*: Citations from a Spanish printing before the expulsion,” *Kiryat Sefer (KS)* LVII (Jerusalem, 1982), p. 725 [Hebrew]; idem, *Chapters in the History of the Jewish Book. Scholars and their Annotations* (Ramat-Gan, 1996), pp. 83–95 [Hebrew].

16. Alexander Marx, "The Choice of books by the Printers of Hebrew Incunabilia," pp. 154–173, in *To Doctor R.: Essays here collected and published in honor of the seventieth birthday of Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach, July 22, 1946*, comp. by Percy E. Lawler (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 160; idem, "Some Jewish Book Collectors," pp. 198–237, in *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York, 1944), p. 199.

17. A small number of other tractates have been printed without commentaries. Among them are *Niddab* (Prague, c. 1608), concerning this tractate see my "Observations on a Little Known Edition of Tractate *Niddab* (Prague, c. 1608) and its Relationship to the Talmudic Methodology of the Maharal of Prague," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* VIII (New York, 1998–99), pp. 134–150; an edition of *Bava Metzia*, apparently printed in conjunction with but not part of the 1616–1620 Cracow Talmud; and a miniature edition of *Sukkah*, dated 1722, but without the name of the printer or place of printing, concerning this tractate see my *Printing the Talmud: A History of the Individual Treatises Printed from 1700 to 1750* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 191–196 (hereafter *Individual Treatises*).

18. Concerning fragments from works attributed to this unknown press see, Dimitrovsky, pp. 77–78; J. Teicher, "Fragments of unknown Hebrew incunables," *Journal of Jewish Studies* I (London, 1948), pp. 105–110; Avraham Yaari, "Early Hebrew Books," *KS* XXII (1945–1946), p. 223–239; and idem, "Studies in Hebrew Incunables," *KS* XXIV (1947), p. 153–159.

Alexander Marx, too, comments on the source and value of Spanish tractates in two articles. In one article, Marx writes that Ḥasdai ibn Shaprut, the great Spanish mae-cenas, acquired copies for the *yeshivab* in Cordoba during a period after Saadiah Gaon's death when the famous academy at Sura was closed. In another article Marx observes that:

Spanish Talmud texts differ considerably from those in France and Italy which served as a basis to the Italian editions. The medieval Talmudists often expressed their predilection for Spanish Talmud texts. These were probably brought there from the Babylonian academies during the Geonic period and are closer to the original text.¹⁶

A unique Iberian printing of the tractate *Hullin*, from an unidentified press, is set in large square letters and does not include either Rashi or *Tosafot*. The Tetragrammaton is represented in *Hullin* by two *yodin*, rare for a tractate of the Talmud. An early date is ascribed to this edition, due to its similarity to codex tractates.¹⁷ Other works, including R. Isaac Alfasi on *Berakhot* and *Shabbat*, a *Mishnayot*, *Orhot Hayyim*, and Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* share the same fonts, despite minor variations, leading several bibliographers to conclude that the same press issued all of these titles. Fragments of these works have been found in both the Cairo Genizah and in Yemen, perhaps brought by exiles from Spain.¹⁸

Hebrew printing in Portugal, introduced into that country in 1486–87 from Spain, preceded Latin and vernacular printing, which began in 1494 and 1495, respectively. Eleven of the first twenty-four incunabula printed in Portugal were Hebrew titles, beginning with a Pentateuch printed in Faro c. 1486 by Samuel Gacon. Gacon was assisted by Samuel Porteira and his son David, the latter serving as proofreader. David Porteira would later be associated with Gershom Soncino in Pesaro. That Jews introduced printing into Portugal was grudgingly acknowledged by King Manuel II:

At the end of the fifteenth century, printing was introduced into Portugal, possibly by the Jews, and through it the deeds of our heroes, as narrated by our authors, were gradually made known. . . . The Renaissance found Portugal ready to receive its impetus, partly by the learned Jews, and partly by the religious Orders. . . .

Even if we must bow to the evidence of the priority of Hebrew presses in Portugal, hypotheses are permissible, suggested by doubts as to whether the Jews really did introduce the art of printing into Portugal. . . . We fully realize that

we lack proofs to substantiate these hypotheses, though they have in some measure, been expressed; but there are nevertheless a few arguments in their favor.¹⁹

Talmudic treatises are known to have come from the Portuguese press established in the small town of Faro in the province of Algarve and from other, still unidentified, Portuguese presses. These treatises are similar to but are not identical with their Spanish counterparts. They, too, lack *Tosafot* and have variant texts, but are printed with distinct fonts. Both the text and Rashi are in square letters, the latter smaller so as to distinguish it from the text. The number of tractates printed in Faro is uncertain. A. M. Habermann estimates that approximately twenty or more tractates were printed in Faro from 1487 to 1492. C. B. Friedberg lists twenty-two tractates that he attributes to the Faro press. Other bibliographers who have examined the extant fragments, however, are considerably more conservative in the number of tractates they attribute to Faro.²⁰ These numbers notwithstanding, two tractates, *Gittin*, whose colophon gives the place of printing, and *Berakhot*, are almost typographically identical and certainly Faro imprints. Among their distinctive features is the representation of the Tetragrammaton in *Berakhot* as two close *yodin* followed by an inverted *gimel* and in *Gittin* as three horizontal *yodin* followed by an inverted *gimel*. Abbreviation marks are above the final letter. Stop marks are a dot above and two horizontal dots.

Two additional fragments often identified as Faro imprints are *Shevuot* and *Bava Metzia*. It is the opinion of Dimitrovsky and Teicher, however, that those two tractates were not printed at the same press as *Berakhot* and *Gittin*. The letters are larger in *Berakhot* and *Gittin* than in *Shevuot* and *Bava Metzia*, and the composition of the pages is different. The representation of the Tetragrammaton is dissimilar, being represented in *Shevuot* by two raised *yodin* on their sides with a line curved inward. Both *Bava Metzia* and *Shevuot* lack catchwords and, unlike the other Iberian tractates including *Berakhot* and *Gittin*, the repetition of the last word on a page at the top of the following page. The arrangements of, and references to, *Mishnayot* within these tractates are also unlike the other tractates. These features, in addition to the omission of *Tosafot*, clearly indicate a tractate of Sephardic origin. It is the opinion of Dimitrovsky and Teicher that these tractates were printed by an unidentified press prior to the expulsion.²¹

If the expulsion ended Jewish life in the Iberian peninsula, an unexpected effect was the spreading of Sephardic culture, including the printing press, throughout the Mediterranean littoral. Spanish and Portuguese refugees founded Hebrew presses and printed talmudic tractates in such diverse locations as Constantinople, Salonika, and Fez.

The first press in any language founded in the Ottoman Empire (predating Turkish language printing by 234 years) was the Hebrew print shop established in Constantinople of David and Samuel ibn Nahmias. They had learned their craft prior to the expulsion and brought much of their typographical equipment with them. They began printing in 1493, soon after their arrival in Constantinople, with the *Arbaab*

19. H. M. Manuel, King of Portugal, *Early Portuguese Books 1489-1600 in the Library of His Majesty the King of Portugal*, 3 volumes (London, 1932, 1935), pp. xlvii-xlviii, 30-31.

20. Friedberg (see above, n. 12), p. 101; A. M. Habermann, *The History of the Hebrew Book* (Jerusalem, 1968), p. 99 [Hebrew].

21. Dimitrovsky, p. 75; Teicher, "Fragments" (see n. 18 above), pp. 108-109. A dissenting opinion concerning *Bava Metzia* and *Shevuot* is expressed by the renowned incunabulist, A. K. Offenberg, who omits these tractates from his *Hebrew Incunabula in Public Collections* (Nieuwkoop, 1990). In a private communication, Dr. Offenberg informed me that it was his opinion that these tractates were not printed in Portugal nor were they incunabula.

Turim. After a hiatus of more than a decade, printing resumed, and at least four tractates, *Eruvin*, *Pesaḥim*, *Yoma* and *Rosh ha-Shanah*, are now known to have been issued by their press. Although certainly Sephardic tractates, with variant readings and foliation, the Constantinople tractates are unusual for early Sephardic treatises in that they include both Rashi and *Tosafot*. As noted above, *Tosafot* was not included in Spanish printed tractates because it was not traditionally learned. Its inclusion here, and in subsequent tractates published in Sephardic centers, reflects the influence of the Soncino incunabula treatises and the Naḥmias brothers' recognition of the marketing advantages of printing *Tosafot* with tractates. A characteristic of the *Tosafot* in Sephardic tractates is that they often vary from the standard *Tosafot*. The Tetragrammaton is represented in a Sephardic manner in *Pesaḥim* by two *yodin* followed by a quarter-circle line curved back over the *yodin* and in *Gittin* by three *yodin* in the form of an inverted *segol*, followed by an inverted *zayin*.

Salonika, the second city of the Ottoman Empire, a great metropolis in its own right, was uncommon in that a majority of its residents were Jewish. Printing began there too with a Hebrew press, in this instance that of Don Judah Gedaliah. Originally from Lisbon, Gedaliah learned the printer's trade as an apprentice of Eliezer Toledano. He founded the press in Salonika in c. 1512–1513 with fonts originally cast in Lisbon, assisted by his son, Moses, and his daughter, who, due to Don Judah's advanced age, played an important role in the press' activities. Gedaliah also seems to have printed some tractates with a Sephardic text and Rashi only, but those initially attributed to Salonika were later determined to have been printed in Fez, the confusion resulting from the likeness of the fonts of the respective presses, both having been brought from or cast in the style employed earlier in Lisbon.

Gedaliah printed talmudic tractates, beginning in the second decade of the sixteenth century, concurrently with Daniel Bomberg. Israel Mehlman suggests that perhaps Don Judah Gedaliah was unaware of the Venetian printer's activities, or perhaps he felt there was sufficient demand for two simultaneous editions of the Talmud. Moreover, perhaps the Jewish refugee mistrusted the text of a Talmud printed by a non-Jew.²² Among the tractates attributed to Salonika are *Eruvin*, *Yoma*, and *Hullin*. The last two tractates exist as fragments only, and *Eruvin*, with its many textual variations, was originally extant in a complete copy of 125 leaves. According to the colophon, the work was completed Sunday, 10 Kislev, 5281 (November 20, 1520). The complete tractate was in the Stadtbibliothek, Frankfurt-am-Main. According to the Library's director, it, along with the majority of the Library's other Hebrew titles, was destroyed during the war. Whether *Eruvin* is a Salonika imprint or should be credited to Fez is not completely settled, although Dimitrovsky impressively argues for its Fez origin. He compares fonts, notes a distinctive mark between sections of the text and within Rashi, an unusual form of abbreviation and of the Tetragrammaton, and asks, "how could Don Judah print attractive editions of other titles, while printing talmudic tractates with an inferior and

22. Israel Mehlman, "Hebrew Printing Houses in Salonika," pp. 43–102, in *Genuzot Sefarim* (Jerusalem, 1976), [Hebrew].

23. Dimitrovsky, pp. 44–45.

blurry type, that is almost impossible to learn from?"²³

The first print shop in Africa was established by Samuel ben Isaac Nedivot in Fez. Nedivot, who had learned the printing trade in Lisbon from Eliezer Toledano, printed, together with his son Isaac, between seven and fifteen titles from c. 1516 to 1524. Among them, an *Abudarham*, *Azharot*, *Hilkhot Rav Alfás*, *Arbaah Turim*

Yoreh De'ab, and several talmudic tractates.²⁴ The *Abudarham* is indicative of the printing trade. Initially published in Lisbon in 1489 by Eliezer Toledano, the Nedivot *Abudarham* is an exact copy of the Toledano edition; in the beginning and ending of both the pages and the lines on the page, except that in the middle of a long colophon— and it is the only book printed in Fez with a colophon that unquestionably confirms it is a Fez imprint— Nedivot substitutes his and his son Isaac's name, the place of publication and the date, Kislev in the year עזרה (5277=1516), for the information supplied by Toledano. Nedivot brought typographical equipment with him from Lisbon to Fez, accounting not only for the likeness in layout but also for the similarity in the fonts, making the two editions almost indistinguishable.

Among the tractates printed by Nedivot are *Rosh ha-Shanah*, *Hagigah*, *Hullin*, and probably the *Eruvin* noted above. *Rosh ha-Shanah* is a unique tractate, printed with both the text and Rashi in semi-cursive Sephardic letters. The only square letters in the volume are initial letters indicating, for example, the beginning of a Mishnah or Gemara. The use of rabbinic letters for the text and Rashi was apparently due to a lack of small square letters at the time the press was founded. *Rosh ha-Shanah*, lacking both a title page and a colophon, was most likely the first work printed in Fez. *Eruvin*, printed later, has the text in square letters. The representation of the Tetragrammaton in *Rosh ha-Shanah* is two *yodin* followed by a line that extends upward and turns back without curving over the *yodin*. That differs slightly from the form used in *Eruvin*, which consists of two *yodin* followed by a quarter-circle line curved back over the *yodin*. Signatures here are in Rashi letters and abbreviations are represented by a dot above the word rather than the customary line. The square letters used in *Eruvin* for the text, although smaller, are the same as the initial square letters in *Rosh ha-Shanah* and the *Abudarham*, and were clearly cast by the same person. Also, the Rashi script is the same in all three titles. Consistent with Sephardic practice, the text is accompanied by Rashi but not *Tosafot*.

The Nedivot press closed when it could no longer acquire paper due to a Spanish prohibition of selling paper to the press. The scarcity of paper was felt even during the press' early days. It has even been suggested that Nedivot printed the *Abudarham* without a title page because of his concern that he would not have an adequate supply of paper.²⁵

For all the fascination and attraction of the Sephardic tractates, it is the Italian treatises that are the basis of modern editions of the Talmud. We return to Italy, Gershom Soncino, and the development of our printed editions of the Talmud.

Gershom ben Moses Soncino was the most prominent, innovative, and productive member of the renowned Soncino family. He can be credited with many firsts, both in style and content, among them: the first illustrated Hebrew book, the *Mashal ha-Kadmoni* (Brescia, c. 1491); the first one-page Hebrew wall calendar (Barco, 1496); the first Hebrew book with a title page, *Sefer ha-Rokeah* (Fano, 1505); the first book in non-Hebrew letters, *Abselmii Laurentii, Vita Epaminudae* (1502), by a Jewish printer; and the first Judeo-German book, the *Bove-Bukh* (1518), an adaptation by Elijah Levita of the English romance, *Sir Bevis of Hampton* (1518). Gershom printed in the Italian cities of Soncino, Brescia, Barco, Fano, Pesaro, Ortona, Rimini, and Ancona, as well as in Salonika and Constantinople. Due to these frequent changes of location he often signed his name as גר-שם, a temporary sojourner. He is credited

24. Joseph Tedghi, *ha-Sefer ve-ha-Defus ha-Ivri be-Fes* (Jerusalem, 1994), pp. 76–83.

25. Meir Mordekhai Marziano, *Benei Melakhim* (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 35.

with printing almost one hundred Hebrew titles, covering the entire gamut of Hebrew literature. However, he also printed an equal number of Latin titles during a printing career that spanned more than fifty years. Moses Marx estimates that from 1502 to 1526, Gershom Soncino printed approximately sixty-six Hebrew books, as well as about ninety-five Latin, Italian, and Greek books in Italy. In his non-Hebrew titles Gershom is referred to as Hieronymi Soncini.²⁶

Gershom was the last Hebrew printer in Italy in the fifteenth century and, when he resumed printing, he was the first Hebrew printer in that land in the sixteenth century. During this hiatus Gershom traveled extensively, as he writes in an autobiographical title page for R. David Kimḥi's *Mikhlol* (Constantinople, 1532–1534):

I toiled and found books that were previously closed and sealed, and brought them forth to the light of the sun, to shine as the firmament, like the *Tosafot* from Touques of R. Isaac and of Rabbenu Tam. I traveled to France, Chambéry, and Geneva, to the places of their origin, so that the public might benefit from them, for in Spain, Italy, and in other lands they have only heard of [the *Tosafot*] of Sens, R. Peretz, and R. Samson, and their colleagues. I have printed books without end on our holy Torah, besides the twenty-three tractates of the Talmud with Rashi and *Tosafot* that are customarily [studied] in *yeshivot*.

Gershom's many accomplishments are insignificant when compared to the importance of his, and previously Joshua Solomon Soncino's, selection of the *Tosafot* to be printed with the Talmud, which have generally been retained to the present. R. Ḥayyim Joseph David Azulai (Ḥida) comments in his *Shem ha-Gedolim*, "and the *Tosafot* that we now have are the *Tosafot* of Touques. . . . And R. Gershom brought the *Tosafot* of Touques from Chambéry . . . and printed them. The Venetian printers reprinted them; for prior to this the *Tosafot* of Touques were entirely unknown. . . ."²⁷

The *Tosafot* printed in the Talmud are referred to as "our *Tosafot*" to differentiate them from other versions of *Tosafot* still in manuscripts or printed separately, later, from manuscripts. The initial selections of *Tosafot* to be placed alongside the Talmud text were made by the Soncinos, uncle and nephew. Joshua Solomon chose the first *Tosafot* to be printed with his edition of *Berakhot* in 1484. Gershom continued his uncle's practice of printing *Tosafot* with all of his tractates. Since Gershom printed a significant number of the treatises comprising a complete Talmud edition, he not only selected the *Tosafot* for the tractates that he printed, but also determined which *Tosafot* would

be printed in future editions of the Talmud. E. E. Urbach, author of *The Tosafists*, notes that in general "the Venetian printers copied from the Soncino editions, except that they also utilized manuscripts to edit, amend, and add, including *Tosafot*. Since then, the *Tosafot* have been printed in numerous printed editions of the Talmud without serious modification."²⁸

Gershom's period of inactivity came to an end in Fano, in 1501, when he received permission from the Duke of Romagna, Cesare Borgia, the son of Pope Alexander VI, to settle in Fano and to operate a press there. His first title was a quarto book of eighteen Latin poems, appearing April 10, 1502. Although Gershom resumed print-

26. Moses Marx, "Among Recent Acquisitions," *Studies in Bibliography and Booklore* II (Cincinnati, 1956), p. 182.

27. Ḥayyim Yosef David Azulai, *Shem ha-Gedolim*, (Tel Aviv, n.d.), *Maarekhet Soferim*, p. 20.

28. Urbach, *The Tosafists* (n. 2 above), pp. 29–30.

ing with Latin titles, he did so in order that he might be able to eventually resume printing Hebrew books. He did so in January, 1503, printing a Roman rite *siddur* entitled, *Meab Berakhot*. Gershom left Fano in 1507 for Pesaro, after printing more than a score of works in Hebrew, Latin, and even Italian. He departed, apparently to establish his printing press in a city more important than the small town of Fano. Nevertheless, Gershom continued to have good relations with the citizenry of Fano, returning there to print additional titles over the years.

One other Latin work must be mentioned, due to the appearance of its attractive frame on the title page of many Pesaro tractates. It is the *Decachordum Christianum* by Cardinal Marco Vigerio, Bishop of Sinigaglia in Rome, and published at the expense of Urbano Vigerio, governor of the city of Fano, who paid Gershom 296 ducats for the work in 1507.²⁹ Although the *Decachordum* has ten woodcuts surrounded by ornamental borders, in addition to the title page, there are essentially only two frames. Here, in contrast to the incunabula frames, the border cuts are of equal width, so that the purpose of cutting them was not to adjust them to Hebrew titles. Rather, each frame is comprised of identical left and right margins, and upper and lower portions. These pieces are combined within the book in various combinations. The purpose of cutting the borders of the frames in this manner was either to accommodate the insertion of different woodcut portions for the top or bottom of the frame, depending on the length of the enclosed text and the size of the woodcuts, or for aesthetic reasons, to give the appearance of variation when reusing the different parts of the border. The ornamental frames were not only used on the title pages of many Pesaro tractates, but also with other books printed by the Soncinos in Pesaro, elsewhere in Italy, Salonika, and Constantinople. The final use of a *Decachordum* frame was by Moses Parnas on the title page of Solomon ibn Melekh's *Mikhlol Yofi* (Constantinople, 1548–1549).

In Pesaro, Gershom printed tractates from 1508 through 1519. Among them are tractates not printed previously, as well as others that had been printed by his uncle, Joshua Solomon. He also published *Berakhot*, and possibly *Betzab*, twice in Pesaro. Gershom did not, apparently, intend to print a complete edition of the Talmud. The tractates are not uniform, but instead are characterized by differences, indicating that they were not meant to be combined into a set. L. Goldschmidt summarizes several of the variations in the Pesaro tractates in the postscript to his *Hebrew Incunables*:

Of these some have column headings with smaller, and others with larger type. Some have signatures, and others not. In the case of some, the sheets are numbered on top with Arabic numerals and others not. In some the width of the lines of the commentary is wider, and in others narrower. From these variations, which indicate improvements during the course of printing, the year of appearance of the undated tractates can be established. . . .³⁰

The volumes vary in size; some are small folios while others are large folios. Of the tractates with extant title pages, a majority have ornamental borders, though four of them, *Betzab*, *Taanit*, *Hagigah*, and *Bava Batra*, lack ornamental frames on the title page. While the frames vary between tractates, four tractates share the same, or parts of the same, ornamental border. For example, the left and right border in

29. Moses Marx, "Gershom Soncino's Wander Years," *Hebrew Union College Annual* XII (Cincinnati, 1936), pp. 427–501.

30. Lazarus Goldschmidt, *Hebrew Incunables, A Bibliographical Essay* (Oxford, 1948), p. 84, n. 81.

tractates *Moed Katan*, *Berakbot*, and *Hullin* are identical. However, the top and bottom portions vary: *Moed Katan* and *Berakbot* share the same top border, while the upper portion of the frame in *Hullin* is the same as the lower frame in *Berakbot*. The lower border is missing from the copy of *Hullin* examined. *Erwin* and *Rosh ha-Shanah* have identical borders. All of these frames come from the *Decachordum*. In two instances, *Bava Kamma* and *Bava Metzia*, this border appears on the first page of the text in a manner reminiscent of the incunabula editions of *Hullin* and *Niddah*.

On some title pages the name *Benei Soncino* appears. Various interpretations have been suggested as to whether this refers to Gershom himself or to other members of the family. Marx concludes, however, that it really made no difference who Gershom's associates were, for Gershom continued to be the principal figure in the press. None of his associates are even named in any of the books.³¹ The commentaries printed with the Pesaro tractates vary. Most, but not all, include *Piskei Tosafot*, three tractates include Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah (*Yevamot*, *Berakbot*, and *Betzah*), and two include the *Mordekhai* (*Berakbot* and *Betzah*).

After leaving Pesaro, Gershom printed in several other cities in Italy, but, except for his last tractates, which were either published in Pesaro or on the road, he ceased to publish talmudic treatises. *Hullin*, printed in 1519, was his last. Why did he cease printing the Talmud? Marx concludes that competition from Daniel Bomberg, who began printing his first Talmud edition in Venice in 1519–1520, was the primary reason. According to Marx, the Bomberg editions were:

also more beautiful than that of Soncino, contained a greater number of commentaries, and, above all, Bomberg had no doubt produced editions large enough to supply completely the existing demand. Gershom's editions may in general have been smaller, since often enough he probably loaded the nearly-finished editions of his books upon his carts in order to complete them in other cities.³²

Not everyone would agree to either the aesthetic or to the academic superiority of the Bomberg tractates. Nevertheless, they were printed as a complete edition, were uniform, were likely printed in greater numbers, emanated from Venice, a center of book distribution, and were printed legally with approval from the Pope and the Venetian Senate. Moreover, Bomberg began to print with:

a tractate that was never printed before, which had to be prepared anew from manuscripts, together with the amazing speed of ten tractates in the first year, which accelerated even more in the following years, proved to Gershom Soncino that he should give up. Indeed, he did not return to print tractates, not even after he settled in Turkey,

31. Marx, "Wander Years," pp. 494–495.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 483, n. 107.

33. Avraham Rosenthal, "Daniel Bomberg and his Talmud Editions," pp. 375–416, in *Gli Ebrei e Venezia* (Milan, 1987), ed. Gaetano Cozi.

apparently because Bomberg's tractates met the demand not only in Italy, but also in other countries with which Venice traded.³³

While Marx details competitive advantages retained by Soncino, the entrepreneur, as opposed to the more corporate executive Bomberg, the fact remains that Gershom ceased to print talmudic tractates. The next phase in printing the Talmud, and in the establishment of the printed Talmud, belongs to Daniel Bomberg.

Daniel Bomberg, the son of the Antwerp merchant Cornelius Van Bombergen and Agnes Vranex, was born c. 1483. Although he had previous experience with typography, Bomberg came to Venice because of the family business. In Venice, he associated with Felice da Prato, an apostate who had become an Augustinian friar and who is credited with influencing him to engage in Hebrew printing. Bomberg, a non-Jew, would eventually become one of the most prominent, if not the foremost, Hebrew printer. Joseph ha-Kohen (1496–1575) writes, “. . . he brought forth from darkness unto light many books in the holy tongue. Constantly there went in and out of his house many learned men and he never withdrew his hand from giving unto all in accordance with their demands and to the extent of the means with which God had endowed him. The said Daniel was born a Christian; neither in his parents nor in his forebears was there a drop of Jewish blood.”³⁴ Bloch lavishly praises Bomberg, writing:

His press may be credited with the most tremendous and important accomplishment in the whole history of Hebrew publishing. . . . His great contemporaries did him honor; his fellow printers acknowledged without question his supremacy as a master artist-printer. No one can again contribute so much to the external and internal advancement of the Hebrew book. As a pioneer in Hebrew printing in Venice he established so high a standard that no one has surpassed his work, even with the aid of modern mechanical improvements, and it is a question whether any Hebrew printing has yet equaled the quality and taste shown in the productions of the Bomberg press.³⁵

Among Bomberg’s many accomplishments was the printing of the *editio princeps* of the Babylonian Talmud (1519/20–1523). He followed this with two—and according to some bibliographers, three—additional editions of the Babylonian Talmud, as well as individual tractates. Bomberg also printed the first Jerusalem Talmud (1522–1523), the first *Mikraot Gedolot*, a four-volume Rabbinic Bible with commentaries (1515–1517), and the first printed Karaite book, a four-volume prayer book for the Karaite communities in the eastern Mediterranean and the Crimean Peninsula (1528–1529). In addition, Bomberg was the first printer of Hebrew books in Venice and the first non-Jewish printer of Hebrew titles.³⁶

When Bomberg was forced to reapply to the Venetian Senate to renew his privilege to print in Venice in 1518, he took the opportunity to petition for the exclusive right to print the Talmud. The Senate approved, possibly because of the need to raise funds for the wars against the Ottoman Empire. Pope Leo X officially endorsed the project and granted Bomberg a license. With permission secured, Daniel Bomberg, with R. Hiyya Meir ben David as editor and the Adelkinds as printers, began publishing the first full edition of the Talmud.

The first complete edition of the Babylonian Talmud, the *editio princeps*, was printed from 1519/20–23.³⁷ The Bomberg Talmud became a standard for the editions that followed, almost all subsequent editions adhered to his layout and folia-

34. *Divrei ha-Yamim le-Malkei Zarefat u-le-Malkei Beit Ottoman ha-Togar* (Sabbioneta, 1554); a translation appears in Amram, pp. 183–184.

35. Joshua Bloch, “Venetian Printers of Hebrew Books,” pp. 65–88, in *Hebrew Printing and Bibliography* (New York, 1976), ed. Charles Berlin.

36. The argument for a fourth Bomberg edition of the Talmud, and my reasons for not concurring, can be found in my *Earliest Printed Editions*, p. 171.

37. The edition was printed in the following order: 1519—*Pesahim*; 1520—*Bera-khot*, *Shabbat*, *Yoma*, *Kid-dushin*, *Sotah*, *Sanhedrin*, *Makkot*, *Avodah Zarah*, *Niddah*; 1521—*Betzah*, *Hagigah*, *Moed Katan*, *Rosh ha-Shanah*, *Sukkah*, *Taanit*, *Megillah*, *Ketubbot*, *Gittin*, *Bava Kamma*, *Bava Metziah*, *Bava Batra*, *Shevuot*, *Horayot*, *Eduyyot*, *Avot*, and *Hullin*; 1522—*Shekalim*, *Eruvin*, *Yevamot*, *Nedarim*, *Nazir*, *Menahot*, *Temurah*, *Zevahim*, *Keritot*, *Bekhorot*, *Arakbin*, and *Seder Zeraim*, *Kodashim*, *Tobrot*, and *Halakhot Ketanot*; 1523—*Meilah*, *Kinnim*, *Tamid*, *Middot*, *Sema-hot*, *Kalah*, and *Soferim*.

tion. The sole exception is *Berakhot* with 66 leaves, which instead today follows Bomberg's second edition with 64 leaves. The title pages are simple, devoid of ornamentation, family crests, or printers' marks. This has been attributed to Bomberg's love of simplicity and dislike of ornaments on title pages. In contrast to the simplicity of the title page, the first page of each tractate begins with the first word of the text enlarged within a floral woodcut. The word is above and over the text, but not the adjoining commentaries.

A page in the Bomberg Talmud consists of the Gemara text, surrounded by Rashi along the inner margin and *Tosafot* along the outer margin, as in the Soncino treatises. At the end of the tractate, after the text, is *Piskei Tosafot*, Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah, and Rabbenu Asher, in that order. Unlike the first Soncino editions, only the first line of a Mishnah was printed with Maimonides' commentary, though Bomberg referenced its page number in the volume.

The preparation of the text was to some extent based on the Soncino tractates. Gershom Soncino had complained in his edition of *Mikhlol* that the Venetian printers copied his editions. According to Rabbinovicz, Gershom was correct; why should Bomberg's editors trouble themselves by editing many manuscripts when corrected and arranged treatises complete with commentaries were available? Additional support for Gershom's complaint, moreover, can be found in the fact that the Bomberg Talmud includes the same errors as the Soncino edition. If Bomberg had printed directly from manuscripts, rather than from the Soncino tractates, these errors surely would not have been repeated. Additionally, there are a number of instances where the text reflects the censorship that occurred in the Pesaro editions. These incidences of censorship would not have been found in the Bomberg Talmud, which is otherwise uncensored, if Bomberg had printed solely from manuscripts. Bomberg's use of the Soncino tractates may also be indicated by the absence of diagrams. In *Sukkah*, for example, pages 4a, 6b, 7a, 7b, 8a, and 8b have spaces left blank for the insertion of diagrams in the text and Rashi. The diagrams can be found in Gershom's Pesaro edition of *Sukkah* at the same places in the text where the blank spaces occur in the Bomberg *Sukkah*.³⁸ These diagrams, incidentally, have been reprinted in current editions of the Talmud.

Although Bomberg's editors utilized the Soncino tractates, they supplemented them with additional manuscripts that the Soncinos had not seen when preparing their tractates. Also, the Soncinos had not printed most of the Talmud, so much of the work was entirely new. The first Bomberg edition of the Talmud became the standard for subsequent editions. Its foliation and layout are still

38. Rabbinovicz (n. 1 above), pp. 38-41.

39. Although apparently only one copy of the first edition was printed on vellum, see A. Marx, *Bibliographical Studies and Notes on Rare Books and Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary*, ed. M. H. Schmelzer (New York, 1977), p. 88.

adhered to today. Its unexpurgated text, in contrast to the censored editions that followed, remained a standard for centuries. The Bomberg Talmud editions were printed on fine paper with clear type and good ink.

Besides the standard edition, printed on fine paper, several treatises, and possibly entire sets of the Bomberg Talmud, were printed on colored paper. There were also deluxe sets printed on vellum.³⁹ This was consistent with the practice of the period, in which special editions of Hebrew and non-Hebrew titles were printed on distinctive materials to distinguish them from the remainder of the run. This was generally done with a major work, or an expensive title, and restricted to a small number of copies. These deluxe editions might be printed on larger or finer paper, colored paper,

or another material such as silk, linen, or vellum, although most frequently on vellum. These copies were then sold or used for presentation purposes.

Furthermore, and probably most important of all, the correctness of the text has been praised by many bibliographers and historians. Within three years the editors edited and corrected manuscripts for the Talmud, Rashi, *Tosafot*, the Rosh, and Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah. It was an awesome task to prepare all of this material for printing within three years, particularly when so much of the work had not been previously printed. In 1523, in a long colophon to *Soferim*, Cornelius Adelkind writes:

Praise and thanksgiving to He who is the Creator . . . He roused the spirit of our lord Daniel Bomberg to print the Babylonian Talmud with Rashi's commentary, *Tosafot*, *Piskei Tosafot*, and Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah, and the novellae of the strong hammer, the Asheri (Rosh). And he gathered and assembled the entire Talmud and these commentaries, which had been scattered in every land both distant and near and joined to them many other books. And [so] he accomplished more than his predecessors. He expended his fortune and his wealth and sent couriers, riding swift steeds, to call the finest craftsman that could be found in all these regions to do this awesome work. He designated me, one of the brothers, the sons of Barukh Adelkind, and said to me, "Arise, gird now your loins as a man, and allot, apportion, and divide all these commentaries throughout the Talmud according to the light of your intelligence and they will be consolidated in your hands." I responded, "My lord behold I am ready and prepared to do your command and to carry out your will as you desire and as I perceive it." And as I saw that one should not refuse and turn away empty handed a person of excellence and nobility, I bestirred myself as God had graced me. When he saw that I had not turned him away empty handed, immediately all in the house was before me and the Talmud was set arranged before me. I placed my hand on the plumb line, and my right hand supported the compass, that is tractate *Hagigah*. I separated and established the two great spheres, the prince Rashi and the *Tosafot* to illuminate the eyes of the readers and shield bearers [Sages— cf. *Berakhot* 27b] who wage an obligatory war to shield and protect them from the arrows, swords, and spears of [negative] argumentation and dialectics. In order to teach the children of Judah to use the bow [to be skilled in the war of Torah]. . . .

The Bomberg Talmud was widely distributed. It reached England, where a copy once belonging to Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) is now in the British Library, and another, which belonged to the library of the Westminster Abbey, is now part of the Valmadonna Trust. Testimony as to how rapidly news of the Bomberg Talmud spread in Europe:

I want to return to Venice as it is reported that in that very place a rich Christian and Jew have put together a considerable [sum] of money between them, as we heard, and [they are] printing now a new [edition] of the Hebrew Bible and Talmud of which I shall deliver some [copies] to the Jews around Prague.⁴⁰

40. *Ein gesprech auff das kurtzt zwuschen einem Christen und Juden, auch einem Wyrthe sampt seinem Haussknecht, den Ecksteinn Christum betreffend, so noch Goetlicher schrift abkuentereft ist, wie albie beygedrueckt figur aussweyset*, printed by Michel Buchfürer (Erfurt, 1524), copy seen in The Library of The Jewish Theological Seminary.

After completing the Babylonian Talmud, Bomberg printed the *editio princeps* of the Jerusalem (Palestinian) Talmud. Printed as a large folio (34 cm), there is a general title page and, beginning with *Moed*, title pages for each part, all with a copper plate of a pillared frame. The text of these pages contains supplications in Aramaic, the first to begin and complete the *Talmud de-Benei Maarava*. The initial letter is in a floral border that covers the width of the page. This Talmud is undated. It is possible, however, to estimate its dates, as Bomberg began work on it after completing the Babylonian Talmud and completed it prior to Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, making the start date after 2 Kislev, 5283 (November 21, 1522) and the completion date several months before 25 Tammuz, 5284 (June 26, 1524). It is printed without commentaries, reflecting the fact that the Jerusalem Talmud was not as intensively studied as the Babylonian Talmud.⁴¹

The first Bomberg edition of the Talmud was well received and sold out quickly, necessitating a second edition, which was printed from approximately 1526 to 1539. These editions are very much alike, with only minor variations between most tractates. Title pages are simple, the basic text stating, "printed for the second time with great care by Daniel Bomberg." Some treatises were reprinted from the *editio princeps*, with only the most minor errors corrected, while other tractates vary considerably from the prior edition, material having been removed, added, and modified on the basis of manuscripts and the judgments of the editors.

Although very much alike, it is possible to distinguish between the two editions. In the second edition (and the third edition as well) the name of the tractate is to the right and the page number is next to it on the left at the top of the page, as in later and more recent editions. This is in contrast to the first edition, where the treatise's name either does not appear, or is to the left while the page number is to the right.⁴² There are other variants between title pages and tractates in the second edition that has led to considerable confusion in dating and identifying the tractates. It now appears that for a short period, the Bomberg press backdated tractates to this period, or more correctly printed them with pseudo-title pages, due to a fear of censorship, a fear that did not materialize during the life of the Bomberg press.⁴³ *Hokhmat Shelomo*, the emendations to the Talmud of R. Solomon Luria (Maharshal, 1510–1573), are based on the second edition. Nevertheless, it is the first, rather than the second Bomberg Talmud that was most influential.

Between 1543 and 1549, the Bomberg press printed its third and final edition of the Babylonian

41. Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus*, I (Leiden, 2004), pp. 148–149 (hereafter *Sixteenth Century*).

42. Rabbinovicz, pp. 43–47.

43. For a summary of the confusion and resolution of the problem, see *Earliest Printed Editions*, pp. 164–165, 175–176. For a detailed discussion of the problem see Rosenthal, pp. 375–415.

Talmud. Cornelius Adelkind may have been managing the press at this time, Bomberg not yet having returned to Venice from a trip to Antwerp. There is speculation that Bomberg, a Calvinist, remained in Antwerp due to the restrictive atmosphere in Venice resulting from the Counter-Reformation. This edition is generally similar to the second Bomberg Talmud. Several tractates, however, printed shortly after Marco Antonio Giustiniani began publishing his edition of the Talmud (see below), incorporate some of the improvements initiated by Giustiniani. *Berakhot*, for example, includes the changes of the Giustiniani 1546 edition that were not in the previous Bomberg editions. However, Rabbinovicz adds that *Masoret ha-Talmud* and source references (indices) from the *poskim* were not printed because Bomberg did not wish to acknowledge that he had printed from another edition, as it was an embarrass-

ment to him to print from an edition that came after his.⁴⁴ This edition is slightly inferior in appearance to the second edition.

Three features identified by Avraham Rosenthal distinguish the third edition from its predecessors. First, the signatures have a dot above the letter “i” marking the leaf number within the quire (for example, 2 iii). The dot is not found in any Bomberg imprint prior to 1544, with the exception of the Latin edition of *Mikneh Avram* (1523), the only book printed at the Bomberg press in Latin letters. Secondly, when Adelkind’s name appears, on the title page or in the colophon, it is, in contrast to previous editions, his non-Hebraic name, Cornelius. The last feature is the forged or backdated title pages noted above. It is estimated that as many as twenty tractates are misdated.⁴⁵

Complete editions of the Bomberg Talmud are very rare. This can be attributed to several factors. Among them, the fact that in most cases treatises were sold individually (and in a disbound state), not as sets. As a result most sets are assembled from more than one Bomberg Talmud.⁴⁶ A brief census of these sets is provided by Milton McC. Gatch and Bruce E. Nielsen at the beginning of their detailed description of each tractate in the Wittenberg copy of the Bomberg Talmud.⁴⁷ That Talmud passed into the possession of the Union Theological Seminary in New York City in the nineteenth century, and is the center piece of this exhibit.

In 1545, Marco Antonio Giustiniani, the wealthy son of Niccolo Giustiniani, scion of a patrician family that traced its descent to the tribunes who governed Venice before the election of the first Doge in 697, opened a Hebrew publishing firm on the Calle delli Cinque alla Giustizia Vecchia, close to the Bridge of the Rialto.⁴⁸ He began printing that year with Cornelius Adelkind, available during a period when the Bomberg press was idle, as his master printer. From 1546 through 1551 the Giustiniani press issued a particularly fine edition of the Babylonian Talmud with indices that have become part of the standard talmudic page, reprinted in all subsequent editions to this day. On the title pages is Giustiniani’s pressmark, a representation of the Temple with a banner furled over it with the verse, “The glory of this latter House shall be greater than that of the former one, said the Lord of Hosts” (Haggai 2:9). The intent of the verse is that the Giustiniani press would overshadow that of his great rival, Daniel Bomberg. Giustiniani’s press did not surpass Bomberg’s in either quality or number of books issued, but the high quality of many of Giustiniani’s books, particularly his edition of the Talmud, was sufficient to secure his reputation as a printer.⁴⁹

The indices, prepared by R. Joshua Boaz ben Simon Barukh, whose family came from Catalonia, accompany the text. *Ein Mishpat* supplies the location of a topic in the text in standard halakhic sources; *Ner Mitzvah* numbers (in Hebrew letters) the halakhic decisions listed in the text. *Ein Mishpat* is located parallel to the subject in the text along the outer margin of the page, while *Ner Mitzvah* is located next to the subject in the margin between the text and *Tosafot*. These indices are distinct here, but the eighteenth-century Amsterdam and Frankfurt-am-Main editions of the Talmud expanded and combined the two into one index. *Torah Or*, meanwhile, gives the source (by biblical work and chapter) for biblical quotes in the text and is located

44. Rabbinovicz, pp. 53–55. Not all exemplars of these tractates have these additions. I have seen tractates where they had been added by hand.

45. Rosenthal, pp. 391–393.

46. Milton McC. Gatch and Bruce E. Nielsen, “The Wittenberg Copy of the Bomberg Talmud,” *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (Mainz, 2003), pp. 296–326.

47. McC. Gatch and Nielsen, pp. 296–300.

48. Amram, p. 252.

49. Giustiniani’s device was sufficiently popular that later printers in several locations copied it. Concerning this usage see my, “The Cover Design, ‘The Printer’s Mark of Marc Antonio Giustiniani and the Printing Houses that Utilized It,’” *Library Quarterly* 71:3 (Chicago, July, 2001), pp. 383–389.

next to the line that it references between the text and Rashi. The title of this index, however, did not appear until the 1578 Basle edition of the Talmud. The third reference, *Masoret ha-Talmud* (now called *Masoret ha-Shas*), references comparable passages elsewhere in the Talmud and is located along the inner border of the page. The Giustiniani Talmud was so highly regarded that the printers of later editions wrote on the title pages of their editions, “as printed in Venice by Giustiniani,” although, more often than not, their model was from a different edition.⁵⁰

The last printing of a tractate from the Babylonian Talmud in Italy was in Sabbioneta, in the Duchy of Mantua, at the press of R. Tobias ben Eliezer Foa. The editor was Joshua Boaz; Cornelius Adelkind, who joined Foa after the Hebrew print shops in Venice closed, was director of the press. Printing of *Kiddushin* began in 1553, the same year that the Talmud was being burned elsewhere in Italy. The title page of *Kiddushin* has an unusually long text, repeating the information stated on the title pages of the Giustiniani Talmud and announcing new features to be found in the edition. The talmudic page in this tractate is similar to its predecessors in that it includes the same page format, the foliation established by Bomberg, and the indices added by Boaz to the Giustiniani Talmud.

Still, it is in some ways dissimilar to previous and subsequent editions of the Talmud. In addition to the text, Rashi, *Tosafot*, and the indices, it includes the commentaries of R. Yom Tov ibn Abraham Ishbili (c. 1250–1330) and the *Tosafot* of R. Isaiah di Trani, printed along the margin in small letters. Within the text, every reference to the Mishnah is in enlarged, boldfaced letters, a practice restricted in other Talmud editions to the beginning of a new Mishnah or Gemara. Furthermore, the letters in the Mishnah are accented, a practice followed in some manuscript editions.⁵¹ It is to this tractate that Rabbinovicz was referring when he wrote, “This edition is most becoming and beautiful. If the entire Talmud had been printed, it would have been the glory and most beautiful jewel of Israel.”

50. Heller, *Earliest Printed Editions*, pp. 183–91; idem, *Sixteenth Century*, pp. 326–327; Rabbinovicz, pp. 47–53.

51. Heller, *Earliest Printed Editions*, pp. 195–199; idem, *Sixteenth Century*, pp. 400–401; Rabbinovicz, pp. 55–59.

The Church, which had overlooked the Soncino tractates and approved Bomberg’s printing of the Talmud, was now actively pursuing and burning the Talmud. It was too late, however, for the physical shape of the modern Talmud was complete and would be reproduced in Constantinople and Salonika, Lublin and Cracow, and Amsterdam, Frankfurt-am-Main and Frankfurt-am-Oder, continuing the work begun in Italy that is still ongoing today.



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הכל שחטן כעוב בהלכות ארץ ישראל דנשים לא שחטו מפני שדעתן קלות ואין טראה דאשילו במוקדשין שחטו לבתחילה כדאמרינן שרין כל הפסולים כל הפסולים שחטו דיעבד און לבתחילה לא רמיטיה ואח"כ מלמד שהפחיתה כשרים כו' ומפני און הרין דאשילו לבתחילה לא נמשך דבני למיתני עונא במוקדשין דלבתחילה לא תבא עניו שחטו ולא קראו משום דבני למיתני נמי דתנא

הכל שחטן

הכל שחטן

למיתני נשים משום דבמאיר צבחות נשים פסולות אשילו כהמות : שבת יקלקלו כו' בגמרא דייק מרקיני שמה יקלקלו ולא קתני שמה קלקלו שמה מינה און מוסרין להם חולין לבתחילה ושי בקל אשילו אחרים תראים איתן וקא לשי' הוא משיפא שומעין לה וכולן שחטו ואחרים תראים איתם כו' דמאנא דיעבד דחוקא וליכא למימר דיעבד נקט משום עונא במוקדשין או און מומחין אבל חרס שונה וקטן אשילו לבתחילה שחטו בחדשים תראין איתן דהא רבא הוא דייק שמה קלקלו לא קתני ולרבא לא קאי וכולן שחטו אלא אחרים שונה וקטן כדאמרינן בגמרא דייק דבר לקצין רבה אבל רבא לא דייק בין קלקלו לקלקלו כי הכי דלא חייב בהא דלא קתני ואם שחטו מית מפרש דאון מוסרין להם חולין לבתחילה לשחטו אשילו כדי להשליך לכלבים דילמא איתן למיכל טיטו להשמיד שחטתן מתוך שיראו שמוסרין להן כדמסרינן לקצין שחטתן מביטין דילמא איתן למימר שחטתן מעלייתא היא ומהא היתנא רבאון אחרים תראין איתן עסקין כרישא תנא

ושחטתן כשרה חוץ מן מחרש שוטה וקטן שבת יקלקלו את שחטתן וכולן שחטו ואחריו רואי אתן שחטתן כשרה גמ הכל שחטן לבתחילה

כל הכא דתנינא הכל כולה מיימי במצבתא קמייתא דערבין משרש הכל לאתני מלאי וכל שחטן דמתני' סלינו בה אמונא בגל למר לאתני עונא בחולי ולמד לאתני כותי או משומד : וכולן בגמרא משרש מלאי וכולן



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Babylonian Talmud Tractate Hullin (Soncino, 1489), printed by Joshua Solomon Soncino (Goff H-109).