

# The Talmud Editions of Daniel Bomberg

A comprehensive collection of all tractates of the four editions by Bomberg, Venice 1520-1549 on microfiche



Editor: A. Rosenthal, Jerusalem

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The Talmud is one of the two most important sources of Jewish heritage and culture, a vast volume of information on all aspects of Jewish thought and life.

Unlike the Bible, only one complete manuscript of the Talmud remains in existence and a few partial manuscripts survived repeated persecutions. The early printed editions of the Talmud are therefore of great importance. Those printed by Daniel Bomberg are of special significance.

Bomberg's printing-shop (Venice 1516-1549) was the largest and most productive of the early Hebrew book printers and the only one mentioned in the chronicles of his contemporaries. Several monographs were devoted to describing his work, yet much is still unknown or unclear.

Between 1520-1523 the Bomberg house issued the first complete edition of the Talmud. For the convenience of printers and scholars, the make-up (i.e. page

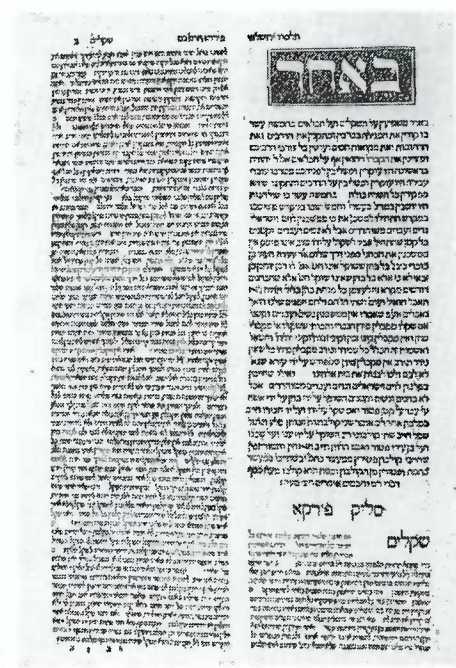
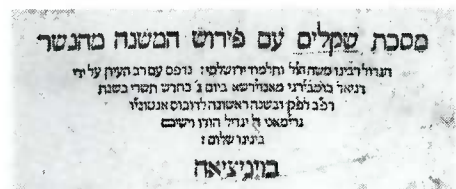
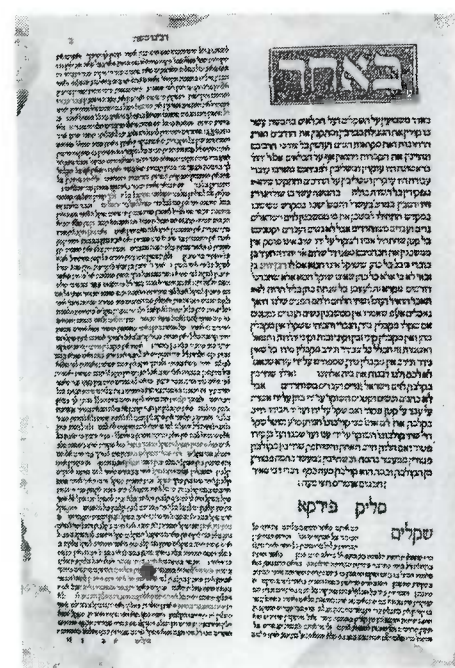
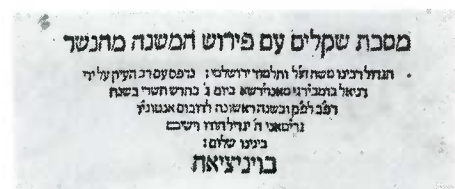
division) of Bomberg's edition has been retained, with minor variations, until the present day. As a standard edition for reference and quotation and a model for printers' imitation, the Bomberg edition became the *textus receptus*, a common basis for all subsequent editions of the Talmud, vital for its critical edition.

The appearance of a *textus receptus* marked a turning point in the history of Talmudic text. Until then, every new copy, whether printed or handwritten, had its own source or copytext. As usually happens with a *textus receptus*, the text of Bomberg's edition has been subjected to extensive amendments through the years, intended to make the standard version, also the most authoritative one. These amendments shaped the text of the Talmud as it is in use today. The details of this process and the relation of the first Bomberg edition to earlier editions and manuscripts are of considerable academic and practical interest. Their study will now be made easier and more accurate.

Because the Bomberg edition has been imitated by successive generations of printers, the various editions of the Talmud are superficially very similar. Only an experienced bibliographer, versed in the differences between the fonts used by different printers, could ascertain to which edition a titleless tractate belongs. Distinguishing between the four editions printed at Bomberg's own printing shop is even more difficult. Yet, only when it was discovered that many tractates of Bomberg's last edition had the date of an earlier edition on the title page did it become clear why even the best bibliographers and talmudic philologists had been baffled by the maze of the Bomberg tractates.

In recent years, identification criteria have been put forward to help distinguish between the different Bomberg editions, revealing many unknown tractates. However, in some cases those criteria do not apply or have proved difficult to apply. A practical solution was called for.

The present microfiche edition includes all Bomberg tractates, their different editions critically and properly identified. It presents Talmudic scholars and bibliographers with easy and safe access to those rare tractates, of which only a single copy has survived in some cases. The microfiche collection is accompanied by a guide, a list of the tractates printed in each edition and means of identification, enabling those interested in a tractate to find the edition they need and to confirm its identity to their own satisfaction.



Title- and first page of the original first edition of tractate Shekalim.

The same from the last edition of tractate Shekalim with a forged t.p. of the first edition.

Cover illustration from:  
The first version of the first book printed for  
D. Bomberg. *Psalms*, translated into Latin by  
F. Pratenis. [Venice, 1515].  
From a (unique?) copy, courtesy of the  
Valmadona Library, London.

