Introduction

Typeset by the Romm Printing House in the city of Vilna, Lithuania, the Vilna Shas is by far the most common edition of the Babylonian Talmud still in use today. This biographical analysis of a typical page of Talmud was designed to help both beginner and more advanced learners to familiarize themselves with the origin and function of the various commentators printed on the margins of the classic Vilna Shas.

Besides the primary commentaries of Rashi and Tosafos, the Romm printers made use of a variety of other important, but less well known commentaries in the outer margins of the text. The publishing house employed scholars to search for these manuscripts in libraries and private collections across Europe, including that of the Vatican. After studying these lost manuscripts, the scholars were able to copy them and bring them to the Romm publishers who included them, even though they did not cover every tractate. In this biography the only one of these commentaries mentioned is Rabbeinu Chananel whose manuscripts were found for most of Shas. Furthermore, the Sefer HaAruch (written by Rabbi Nosson ben Yecheiel) indicates that Rabbeinu Chananel’s commentary originally covered every tractate, although many have now been lost.

Different tractates contain other commentaries in the margins of the Gemara. The additional commentaries not included in this work include the following: Rabbi Nissim Gaon 4750 – 4822 (990 – 1062 CE), Perush Rabbeinu Gershom, referred to as the Meor HaGolah, 4720 – 4788 (960 – 1028 CE), Hagahos HaRi Landau by Rabbi Yechezkel Landau 5473 – 5553 (1713 – 1793 CE) also known as the Noda B’Yehuda and Rabbi Yeshaya of Trani I HaZaken, known as Tosafos Rid, 4940 – 5020 (1180 – 1260 CE).

The ‘Tzuras HaDaf’ layout is designed to facilitate the visual learner and is based on the original printing of the Vilna Talmud. This edition was first printed between 5640 and 5646 (1880 and 1886 CE), although it has now been reproduced and reprinted with innovative features and changes that organize the commentaries on the outside columns differently. No mention has been made of new versions in this pamphlet.

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I also wish to thank my wife for her enduring encouragement and support, without which this project would have been impossible.

Future projects

I will be continuing this project and beginning work on the other commentaries at the back of the Vilna Shas before starting new projects on other ספרי קדש. Please contact me at vilnabiography@gmail.com for any comments you may have and to order more copies.
The word Tosafos (תרשד) means additions and serves as an analysis to Rashi and an analysis of apparent contradictions in the text of the Mishna and Gemara based on Mishnayos and Gemaros elsewhere in Shas.

**Tosafos** is printed on the opposite side to Rashi farthest from the binding and is printed in Rashi script. There were a number of Rabbi Tosafos in different yeshivas throughout the 12th and 13th centuries and it probably began as notes made by the talmidim on discussions and shuirim:

Some of the most prolific Baalei Tosafos include Rabbi Yaakov ben Meir (Rabbeinu Tam, רבי בר אבנו תם) from Ramerupt in France who lived from 4860 – 4931 (1100 – 1171 CE). He was the grandson of Rashi. Rabbi Shimuel ben Meir (Rashbash, רבי שבתאי מאיר), who lived from 4845 – 4934 (1085 – 1174 CE). Rabbi Yitzchak of Damspiere (רי״ף, רבי ישעיהו ז״א) 4880 – 4960 (1120 – 1200 CE), lived in France during the 12th century. The nephew of Rabbi Bein Tam and the Rashbash he was one of the most prolific of the Baalei Tosafos. Rabbi Shimuel 4840 – 4918 (1080 – 1158 CE) was the brother of Rabbeinu Tam. Rabbi Shmishon ben Avraham of Shantz (Tosafos Shantz) lived in France during the latter 12th and early 13th century and was the most important disciple of the Rashbash.

In addition to his Tosafos he composed a two orders of the Mishna for which no Babylonian Talmud was written. Another Baal Tosafos was Rabbi Meir ben Baruch of Rothenberg who was born in Worms, Germany, 4985 – 5053 (1225 – 1293 CE). The compilation of the various Tosafos was carried out primarily by French Rabbis. The majority of the Tosafos printed in the standard Talmud editions were collected by Rabbi Eliezer ben Sliomo of Touques:

**Rashi** was the only child to his parents, Yitzchak and Leah. He traced his lineage through his father’s side back to Rabbi Akiva. Yehudah Ha-Nasi who in turn was a direct descendant of King David. Rashi’s commentary was originally written within the text of the Mishna and Gemara. Later, the printers of the Talmud placed his commentary around the side of the text, on the inner margin by the binding. The type face used is called Rashi script which takes its name from its use in Rashi’s commentaries; Rashi did not write in Rashi script. It developed as a printed version of the semi-cursive way that Hebrew was written by Jews in Italy during the 14th and 15th centuries. Each entry begins with a heading called the ‘dibbur hamaschil’ (דיבורים מסכילים). In new editions of the Talmud these are printed in bold: The commentary has many functions. Rashi helps us understand the simple meaning of the Mishna and Gemara, focusing on specific issues while resolving difficulties in the text. Often, this is achieved by completing passages in the text that have apparently been truncated by the Mishna or Gemara. He occasionally brings different versions of the text. Some entries of Rashi are meant to be read independently from other entries or as a continuation and are called ‘run-on Tosafos’. The commentary commentary commentary commentary was written by Rabbi Eliezer Ediger (Rabbi Rashi’s students) copied his commentary into book form called Kuntrasim (кусנתרים) and often Rashi is referred to by Tosafos as ‘Kuntras’.

The period of the Gemara began after the return from the Babylonian exile. The Gemara provides a detailed analysis of the Mishna, raising difficulties and questions:

The text of the Mishna is broken up into segments also known as individual mishnaos (משניות). In Mishnaic plural of יסוע, accordingly, each segment is called a Mishna. The Mishna quoted in the text of the Talmud and introduced in the text of the Talmud by the word פירוש = פירושีย, meaning ‘Our Mishna’, can be one segment, a part of a segment or consecutive segments joined together. A number of mishnaos (משניות) make up a perek (פרק chapter), a number of the perek, while other entries are meant to be read as a continuation and are called ‘run-on Rashi’.

The collection of the various Tosafos was carried out primarily by French Rabbis. The majority of the Tosafos printed in the standard Talmud editions were collected by Rabbi Eliezer ben Sliomo of Touques:

The Gemara Shirah was written by Rabbi Eliezer Ediger who lived in Worms, Prussia between 5332 and 5380 (1184 – 1137 CE). His notes reference relevant passages in Shas and other commentaries. The Gemara Shiras is noted by a Friedman.
The Babylonian Talmud is therefore dispersed throughout the scholars of the Romm printers passages in the Talmud enclosed in square 1799 CE). These are Rabbi Yeshaya Berlin by the Rabbi of Breslau, by a Hebrew letter and references were added and references that are designated by an asterisk margin or at the bottom of the page. Later, additional notes and references were added by the Rabbi of Breslau, Rabbi Yeshaya Berlin by a Hebrew letter parallel to a list of references that are assembled together in the margins or at the bottom of the page.

There are some tractates where the text states that Rashi died before completing his commentary of perakim (ןְֵיֵיַ הַמָּשֶׁכֶּּ תַּאַבַּבַּת) chapters make up a maseches (מַכְּסֶּּחַ tractate) and a number of masechtos (מִשָּׁנְיוֹת tractates) meaning it is difficult to say. Another common question is which is usually answered by רבי and it seems. Additional questions are introduced by רבי or the Aramaic equivalent and 'further' or שאלות further 'there is to say' meaning 'it is possible to say'. Additional answers are often introduced by the words שאלות and it is possible to say further or שאלות 'if also' meaning 'alternatively'.

There are certain words in שומרי that Rashi died before completing his commentary. The Babylonian Talmud is therefore therefore found primarily on the Mishnayos in שומרי and שומרי and שומרי and שומרי and שומרי only have Gemara (from Babylonia) on the tractates Berachos (ברך) and Niddah (נידה). The Tannaim lived in a number of cities in Eretz Yisrael. During the time of the Mishna, the spiritual Jewish center was Yeerusaylim, but in 3380 (70 CE), after the destruction of the city of Yeerusaylim and the Second Temple, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakaki founded a new religious center in Yavne, while other centers of learning were established in Lod, Bnei Brak, the Galil and other small enclaves dispersed throughout Eretz Yisrael: ירושלים. During the early part of the 5th century CE, Ravina I and Rav Ashi led a group of Amoraím to compile the Babylonian Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud refers to the sections of Gemara written primarily in the Yeisivos of Sura, Pumbedisa and Mechiasia, which lay close to the Euphrates River in Babylon, now modern day Iraq. The last of these editors and compilers was Ravina II. After Ravina II died in 4325 (475 CE), no further additions were made to the Talmud, except for minimal editing by the Rabbanim Safavi 4326 – 4320 (476 – 560 CE). The debate often centers on specific questions. The Tannaim and Amoraím often used the thirteen principals of biblical exegesis to derive their positions on halachic issues from biblical sources. The Gemara may clarify the rationale behind particular non-Torah laws, or laws based on logic. Problematic words or language used in the Mishna are explained, as well as the context and practical application of the statements. Resolution are sought for difficulties found in the internal logic of the Mishna and contradictions based on תוספות and other Tannaitic sources elsewhere in ישרים, excluded from the Mishna (such as a Braisos, לוחות).