The Talmud Yerushalmi on Kodashim

Rabbi Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer, Editor, Or Shmuel, Rosh Kollel, Frumi Noble Night Kollel of Hebrew Theological College.

It seems clear from the Rishonim that they had access to the Talmud Yerushalmi on Seder Kodashim. In the introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, the Rambam states explicitly that on the first five sedarim, both the Talmud Bavli and Talmud Yerushalmi are extant. During the course of time, however, the Yerushalmi on the entire seder of Kodashim was lost, and for several hundred years no manuscript on this seder was known to exist. (See the introduction of Rabbi Mordechai Zev Segal of Lvov to the Zhitomer [1866] edition of the Talmud Yerushalmi.)

In the year 1907, however, a mysterious person suddenly appeared in Hungary, calling himself Rabbi Shlomo Yehuda Algazi-Friedlander. Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander published what he claimed to be the Yerushalmi on tractates Chullin and Bechoros, thus instigating a battle royal amongst the Gedolei Hadar. A personal account of this chapter in the history of the Talmud was written by Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Greenwald of Columbus, Ohio, and printed in the Sefer Hayovel of HaPardees (1953). Here is a synopsis of the story.

That year (1907), Rabbi Greenwald was learning in Chust, Hungary. One day a guest appeared in the Beis Hamidrash who made an immediate and strong impression. Yekusiel Yehuda — then a young bochur — inquired after the identity of the visitor. The whispered reply was, He is a Sephardic rabbi who speaks only Hebrew with a Sephardic accent and does not understand Yiddish. He wears two Tefillin on his head [a prevalent practice then amongst Sephardim] and his name is Yehuda Algazi-Friedlander. He has found the single extant manuscript of the Yerushalmi on Kodashim. Yekusiel Yehuda asked how he had accomplished this. He was told that Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander’s brother had acquired it on a business trip to Izmir, Turkey. There the brother had borrowed ancient sefarim from the
estate of Rabbi Yehoshua Beneviste, the author of a commentary on the Yerushalmi called the Sde Yehoshua. Amongst Rabbi Yehoshua's sefarim was one received from a Portuguese marrano named Avraham HaLevi. Rabbi HaLevi, who had returned to the fold in Constantinople, originally purchased the manuscript from a priest in Barcelona, Spain. Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander delighted in his brother's acquisition, which he identified as the long-lost Yerushalmi on Kodashim.

After davening, the visitor approached the Rosh Yeshiva (Rabbi Moshe Greenwald). With great flourish, he produced copies of the manuscript and letters of endorsement from Gedolei Yisrael. He brought special attention to that of Rabbi Shalom Mordechai HaKohen of Brezhoun, one of the foremost Talmidei Chachamim in Hungary. He then requested a haskama (approbation) from the Rosh Yeshiva. Upon reviewing the evidence the Rosh Yeshiva rejected the request, stating that this was not the genuine text. After great remonstrations, the Sephardi left the Beis HaMedrash with a great show of anger.

Despite the Rosh Yeshiva's rejection, the young bochur was much impressed by the visitor, and went to visit him at his lodging place. Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander befriended the impressionable youngster. This relationship afforded Yekusiel Yehuda an intimate opportunity to later judge the authenticity of the Yerushalmi on Kodashim.

A few months later Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander printed the volume in question (the first of two). The title page proudly extolled the work and an added attraction of a commentary by the respected Rabbi Shalom Mordechai. The editor of this major contribution to Talmudic literature identified himself thus:

In some editions the second page bore a similar inscription printed in German — with the added title of Doctor. There Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander also thanked Dr. Solomon Schechter of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Dr. Moses Goodman of Vienna, and Rabbi Shlomo Buber of Lvov for providing him with funding. Rabbi Buber (a pioneer in the publication of manuscripts) also wrote a preface, citing the Rishonim who mention the Yerushalmi on Kodashim. He also explained difficult passages and words. An impressive array of haskamos followed: Rabbi Shalom Mordechai;
Rabbi Leibush Horowitz of Stanislav; Rabbi Yehuda Greenwald of Satmar; Rabbi Eliezer Deutsch of Bankhard; Rabbi Yitzchok Leib Sofer of Drobischt; and Rabbi Avraham Biyamin Kluger of Brod. The text was bordered by Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander’s double commentary — Cheshek Shlomo — on the inner margin, a running commentary in the style of Rashi, and on the outer margin a work in the style of Tosafos.

Later that same year, Yekusiel Yehuda was visiting his parents in Sighet when suddenly Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander appeared. The Sephardic rabbi asked his young friend to arrange for him to speak in the local shuls. This request was somewhat surprising. Did not this Asian Chacham only speak Hebrew with a Sephardic accent? Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander explained that on his way from Asia to Hungary he had spent some time in Germany and had learned to speak German. Nevertheless, Yekusiel Yehuda found it somewhat peculiar that in Germany Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander had learned a German that was remarkably similar to the Lithuanian dialect of Yiddish. The glimmer of doubt that arose, however, did not seriously impact on their friendship.

In the year 1908 Rabbi Greenwald decided to continue his learning at the yeshiva in Satmar — the very city where Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander took up residence. Gradually Rabbi Greenwald became his confidant and personal secretary. He learned many shocking facts: 1) Rabbi Algazi-Friedlander was in reality a native of Beshenkovitz, Austria. His name was Zuske Rachel-Leah’s, and he had never even visited the Orient! 2) When the controversy had started to expand, Friedlander had written a letter to Professor Zev Bacher, the head of the Neolog Seminary in Budapest (the Hungarian branch of Reform Judaism), requesting Bacher’s assistance. He strengthened the request by proclaiming himself a Maskil, and sent as proof his book Tikkan. This book was written in his youth in the style of the Zohar, and contained more mockery than wisdom. This work demonstrated Algazi-Friedlander’s great skill at imitating others’ styles of writing. 3) The name Avraham Rosenberg, which appeared on many letters and essays written in defense of the long lost Yerushalmi and Friedlander, was, in fact, a pseudonym for Friedlander himself.

At first this Yerushalmi and a subsequent volume on other tractates in Kodashim were well received. In fact, the Chofetz Chaim’s son, Rabbi Aryeh Leib, in his brief biography on his father, relates that in his old age the Chofetz Chaim began wearing Tefillin written according

Some of the hashkamos on the Talmud Yerushalmi on Kodashim
of Ostrovitz requested that he produce evidence of the existence of the mysterious individuals, Tadkov Kubi — whom Friedlander had identified as his brother's partner in the search for the manuscript and Salemon Beneviast — the heir to the manuscript who supposedly loaned it (for a sizeable fee) to Friedlander's brother in Izmir. One rich individual offered a reward of ten thousand crowns to anyone who could discover the whereabouts of these mysterious people. Obviously pressure was mounting. What was the persecuted Friedlander to do?

Suddenly the word went out that Friedlander was in mourning. Yekusiel Yehuda visited him and asked him who had passed away. Friedlander replied that his brother Eliyahu, who had purchased the Yereshalmi, had died in Turkey. He asked Yekusiel Yehuda to write letters and publicize his sorrow and regret that, since his brother had died, it was now impossible for him to procure the information requested.

Despite the fact that Yekusiel Yehuda knew all this to be untrue, he still believed that Friedlander had actually found the bona fide Yereshalmi on Kodashım, if not in Izmir, then in some library in Germany, and that he created the exotic stories in order to embellish his find. As for those discrepancies in style found by the Gedolim, he rationalized that it was possible that the Yereshalmi on Kodashım was edited in a different yeshiva than the other sedarim. However, a newly published revelation would soon change his opinion.

II

As late as 1911, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehuda Greenwald still believed it possible that the Yereshalmi on Kodashım was a legitimate work. In his article Chullin in J. D. Eisenstein's encyclopedia Otzar Yisra'el, published that year, Rabbi Greenwald wrote: In our time, Rabbi Friedlander published Tractate Chullin of the Talmud Yereshalmi which he found in a manuscript. Some people dispute its authenticity. Friedlander complained vehemently. How could Rabbi Greenwald breach the covenant of their friendship and publicize the aspersions cast upon his monumental work? Greenwald apologized and their friendship was restored.

As we have noted, Rabbi Greenwald still believed that Friedlander's Yereshalmi was genuine; it was the tale of its history that he doubted, theorizing that he had actually found it in some obscure German
library, rather than in Izmir, Turkey. He attributed differences in style and phraseology to the editors — perhaps students of a different yeshiva than the editors of the other sedarim of the Yerushalmi.

A sudden shock, however, struck all of Friedlander's friends and supporters. *Tel Talmi* published a letter from Rabbi Yitzhak Horowitz of Hermanstadt, which cited an article from the rabbinical journal *HaMelech* published some twenty years earlier (1892). The article proved that Friedlander, then a teacher in Klausenburg, had peddled an amulet purportedly written by the great Rabbi Yonasan Eybeschutz, while in fact he himself had written it. Eyewitnesses had heard him then relate proudly to the Rabbi of Klausenburg, Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Glazer: *I admit without shame that I did not procure any [genuine] amulet. Rather, I myself produced it with great skill and art in order to demonstrate my skill in all fields of wisdom and craft.* Not only did he possess the knowledge of Kabbalah requisite to pass off an amulet as written by Rabbi Yonasan, he even had mastered the craft of aging paper, so that a document he had himself written recently seemed almost two hundred years old.

Friedlander was broken and dejected by this revelation. In a terrible state of despair, he came to Rabbi Greenwald to seek his counsel. Rabbi Greenwald suggested that he flee Hungary, having lost his reputation and reliability, who would now believe his claims? Friedlander then made his confession. He was loathe to leave Hungary with its innocent, simple, gullible Jews who believed the story of any charlatan and trickster. Where else could he be favourably received? As to the Yerushalmi: *True, I forged it. I did not find the manuscript, but all that I wrote are the words of Chazal which I quoted from various places.*

Good friend that he was, Rabbi Greenwald at first agreed to help Friedlander cover up and refrain from revealing his confession. Ironically, however, he shortly thereafter married the daughter of Rabbi Horowitz of Hermanstadt, whose letter had proven a turning point in the controversy. Therefore, when Friedlander published a derisive rejoinder, *HaMa'aneh*, Rabbi Greenwald sent him an ultimatum — either Friedlander would publish a retraction or all would be revealed.

Friedlander declined to do so, and so Rabbi Greenwald published an essay *LeMa'an HaEmes (For the Sake of Truth).* At the beginning of the piece he published letters from the authorities of Mulhouse,
Germany — where Friedlander had been a fish merchant for fourteen years — and other European cities, disproving his claim to a Sephardic background. Rabbi Greenwald then went on to expose specific examples of the forger’s act.

The obvious question was, how did Friedlander do it? How was he able to concoct a forgery convincing enough to fool so many Talmid Chachamim?

Let us examine the principles and rules Friedlander followed in his work as identified by Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Yanofsky of Kiev in his book Tseyyid Remayah (Deceitful Game) (Poltova, 1913), which Rabbi Greenwald quotes in his essay in HaPardes.2

1) In the back of each volume of the standard Vilna edition of Talmud Bavli is the work Yefeh Eynayim (by Rabbi Aryeh Leib Yellin of Bilisk) which cross-references the Talmudic literature relevant to each topic in the Gemara — the Midrashim of the Tanaim and Amoraim, and parallel discussions in the extant Yerushalmi. Friedlander used these sources, changed names, changed the order of discussion and otherwise altered the texts cited, to the point that the newly composed text retained enough similarity to the original to be regarded as authentic, yet different enough to be regarded as a hitherto unknown parallel sugyah.

2) Working backwards, Friedlander amassed a list of halachos in the Rambam and statements by other Rishonim which had no known source in the Talmud, and created those sources in his Yerushalmi.

3) When the wellsprings of the Yefeh Eynayim ran dry, and no parallel discussion to the one in the Bavli was to be found in the extant Yerushalmi, Friedlander would take the relevant discourse in the Bavli, change names and style, and put it in his Yerushalmi.

4) Finally, when all these methods did not yield enough material, Friedlander resorted to his old ways and his powers of creativity, and authored sugyos on his own.

Rabbi Greenwald lists examples of these principles in use. We reproduce here the first page of the Yerushalmi on Bechoros. This page is a perfect case in point. The first discussion — the question of which Tannah holds that partnership in a cow with a gentile prevents application of the laws of Bechoros to its firstborn calf — is taken from the Bavli (Bechoros 2a, 9b); only the names and setting of the discussion have been changed. The second segment is a re-edited pre-existing Yerushalmi (Pesachim 4:3):
It is worthwhile to note that according to an unverified legend related in the Yeshiva world, Friedlander’s creativity was flawed. The legend maintains that Rabbi Yosef Rosen (the Rogatchover), one of the greatest masters of Talmudic knowledge of all time, realized that the work was a forgery because he had noticed that each tractate in the Talmud contains the name of at least one Amora who is never mentioned anywhere else. In his care not to raise doubts as to the work’s legitimacy, it seems that Friedlander only used the names of known Am. aim.

Although Rabbi Greenwald left the field of battle over the Yerushalmi in 1912, when he was drafted into the Hungarian army, it seems that by that time the war had been more or less won. The publications we mentioned and others by renowned scholars and Gedolim had turned the tide against the beleaguered Friedlander. Eisenstein, in the last volume of Ozar Yisrael, published that year, in the entry on Talmud declares that it was conclusively proven that the Yerushalmi on Kodashim was just a compilation of various other sources concerning these tractates. (He — rather insolutely — compared it to the work of Rabbi Gershon Chanoch Leiner of Radzhin on the Mishnahyos Tabaros, who had compiled the extant Gemos on Keilim and Ohalos and had written a learned dual commentary on them. Some years earlier, that work — the Sidrei Tshurah — had stirred controversy when some Gedolim opposed the format in which it had been printed, that of the standard Talmud, lest it be mistaken for, and accorded the authority of, actual tractates of Gemara).

Yet, after all is said and done, Friedlander remains an enigma. He was a prolific writer and publisher, all of whose works are suspect. Yet he was obviously a Talmud Chacham of the first degree — to the extent that Gedolos Hador were amazingly expansive and emphatic in their praise of his scholarship and knowledge.

Little of his personal life is known. He was born in Beshnekovitz in 1860 and died in 1923 in Vienna. He probably learned in the great Yeshiva of Vilozhin in his youth, and then wandered from town to town. We have no notion of what drove him to commit these acts of forgery and deceit. Was it a quest for money or honor, was it jealousy, or was it a private campaign to mock other Talmidei Chashamim? (The third possibility is somewhat supported by his attacks on others, both in the introductions to his work and in the pamphlets he issued).

Even later, Friedlander still had his supporters. In 1930 his son Meir printed his Mavoh LaTosefa, an introduction to his magnum
opus, Cheshek Shlomo on the Tosetta. The sefer was adored by the haskamos of Rabbi David Friedman of Pinsk (the foremost scholar of pre-war Europe) given in 1912, Rabbi Shalom Mordechai HaKohen, given in 1901, and Rabbi Eliezer David Greenwald of Satmar's from 1924, who even mentioned the fame he attained in publishing the Yerushalmi on Kodashim. All three haskamos lavish praise and esteem despite the fact that by the time they were issued the controversy had been well-publicized and all the accusations made. Obviously, Friedlander was a man of intense magnetism with a powerful force of persuasion, leaving us to ponder even more so — why did he choose this strange path?

NOTES

1. In fact, the Chafetz Chaim actually quotes the Yerushalmi on Kodashim in his Likutei Halachos (a work on Seder Kodashim meant to parallel the Rif’s work on the other sedarim of the Talmud), in Mesechet Bechoros, chap. 6, in his commentary Ein Mishpat note 50 (page 40 in the standard editions). He explains that there are difficult passages in the Rambam based on a source which is found in the Yerushalmi on Kodashim.

2. Rabbi Yanofsky and Friedlander were old foes. In the years 1889-1893 Friedlander had published in Pressburg an edition of the Tosetta on the sedarim of Zeraim and Nashim with his commentary Cheshek Shlomo. In this work, he altered certain passages based on an ancient manuscript he claimed to have discovered. Rabbi Yanofsky published a pamphlet refuting these claims — to which Friedlander had replied with his own pamphlet Kasher Boydim (Plan of Traitors), a typical example of Friedlander’s style with little in the way of discussion of the issues, but laden with vitriolic attacks on his adversary’s person and wisdom.
Twenty years later, when Friedlander responded to Yanofsky and Rabbi Greenwald, he was true to form. The pamphlet *Leitz HaYayin (Drunken Fool)* viciously attacked both Rabbi Yanofsky and Rabbi Greenwald, whom he called a *newborn chick whose eyes were not yet open*.

3. The Rogatchover’s actual objections to the Yerushalmi on Kodashim are detailed in his responsa, *Tzafnas Paneach* (Jerusalem, 1979), chaps. 113-15. (Two of those responsa are addressed to Rabbi Meir Dan Plotisky, who had sent him the Yerushalmi for him to examine.)

4. He claimed to have written on all Bavli, Yerushalmi, Tosefta and the *Sheitlos D’Rav Achai Gaon*. Most of this is unsubstantiated but it is recorded that he published *Hatikkun* in 1881 (an attack on Chassidus), part of a commentary of Yerushalmi Yevamos in Frankfurt under the name Aryeh Leib Friedlander in 1885, the aforementioned Tosefta in 1889-1890, a complete edition of the commentary on Yevamos in 1905, two volumes of the Yerushalmi on Kodashim, 1907-1909, and the volume of *Cheshek Shiomo* published posthumously.

**ADDENDUM**

An original copy of the Yerushalmi on Kodashim is in the collection of the Rabbi Saul Silber Library of Hebrew Theological College.