

Collection items

Babylonian Talmud

[[Babylonian Talmud. (Accessed Apr. 19, 2023). Overview. British Library. Source: <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/babylonian-talmud> See also <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/babylonian-talmud-full-text>]



This is an exceptionally rare item: a treasured medieval Jewish text, known as the Talmud, that somehow escaped the public burnings suffered by most of the other Jewish law books at the time. Fortunately, it has survived un mutilated and uncensored.

During the Middle Ages, Jewish communities were frequently subject to anti-Semitic attacks, in which property was destroyed and people murdered. The Talmud was constantly condemned and censored by the Christian Church, who claimed the book was offensive and blasphemous. This led to regular public book burnings, the first in Paris in 1242.

What is the Talmud?

The Talmud, meaning 'teaching' is an ancient text containing Jewish sayings, ideas and stories. It includes the Mishnah (oral law) and the Gemara ('Completion'). The Mishnah is a large collection of sayings, arguments and counter-arguments that touch on virtually all areas of life. The Gemara is known as a 'sea' of learning, a collection of stories about biblical characters, sober legal arguments and fanciful imaginings of the world of old and the world to come.

Why is this a 'Babylonian' Talmud?

The Talmud developed in two major centres of Jewish scholarship: Babylonia and Palestine. The Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud was completed c.350, and the Babylonian Talmud (the more complete and authoritative) was written down c. 500, but was further edited for another two centuries. The Talmud served as the basis for all codes of rabbinic law.

From the Palestinian tradition of Jewish worship came the Ashkenazi rite used in Western and Eastern Europe and Russia. From the Babylonian tradition came the Sephardi rite followed in Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East. Both rites, as well as some others, are still practised in Orthodox Jewish communities worldwide.

In genealogical discussions, people often use the term Ashkenazi and Sephardic to describe Jews who come from the respective regions.

What is the significance of the Talmud?

Getting to grips with a Talmudic text can be demanding. While it is possible to read a page of the Bible in a matter of minutes, depending on the difficulty, a page of Talmud may take an hour or considerably more to go through with understanding. Traditionally it is studied with a partner or 'friend' in order to recreate the internal arguments and make sure that the subject in question, whether marriage, business ethics, capital punishment, property law or dietary

regulations, has been examined from every conceivable angle. This kind of study leads to sharpness of mind, but also creates an intense community of shared ideas and visions.

Along with its companion literature, the Midrash (multiple collections of interpretations of the Bible, much like the interpretations and sermons on their own Scriptures by Christians and Muslims), the Talmud ensured that male Jews, who engaged in this study their whole lives, and their womenfolk, who were taught the stories (but not the legal material) in more popular form, were armoured against an often unfriendly outside world by their own internal world of values.

Why is this manuscript so rare?

During the Middle Ages the Talmud was the target of relentless condemnation, vilification and censorship by the Christian Church. Vicious hostility to its allegedly offensive and blasphemous contents led to frequent public burnings, the first in Paris in 1242.

As a result, very few complete manuscripts of the Talmud have survived, and the remaining fragmentary ones are also rather scarce.

What do these pages show?

This manuscript (in square Ashkenazi hand) is an exceptionally rare specimen, which, fortunately, has not been censored or mutilated.

It shows the end of tractate Arakhin ('Valuations'), which deals with issues relating to the upkeep of the sanctuary, and the start of tractate Keritot ('Excisions'), which discusses sins that incur divine punishment.

Browse through the [entire manuscript](#) on the [Digitised Manuscripts](#) website.

Full title:	Babylonian Talmud (fragments)
Created:	1290–1309
Format:	Manuscript
Language:	Hebrew
Usage terms	The British Library has decided to make the images of pre-1800 collection items available on this website. For more information please refer to the following guidance .
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Shelfmark:	Add MS 25717

Related works

Sacred texts: Judaism

The Hebrew Bible contains the Torah, or Five Books of Moses, the Nevi'im comprising the books of the Prophets, and the Ketuvim, or additional writings. Originally the Bible was copied onto scrolls, but from about the 7th century the text was also copied into books. Masorah, a grammatical system of vowels, accents, and marginal notes, was developed to preserve the correct transmission and recitation of the text. To this day Torah scrolls for use in services are without vowels. The earliest Jewish prayer-book dates from the end of the 9th century. The Haggadah, or service book for Passover Eve, was originally part of the prayer-book but became an independent book some time in the 13th century. It...

Add MS 25717

Date	1200-1299
Title	Babylonian Talmud (fragments).
Content	Fragments of the Babylonian Talmud.Fols 1r-102vTitle: Talmud bavli.Title: תלמוד בבלי.Note: The Mishnah of each chapter is given in its entirety before Gemara begins, as in Harley MS 5508 and Or 5530. The manuscript is, unlike Harley MS 5508, exceedingly well written. The marginal notes, in a later cursive hand, represent an attempt at comparing the printed edition with the manuscript. According to Margoliouth, it was written in "a good square character of the Greek style, verging a little towards the Rabbinic hand", and he dates it to the end of the 13th - beginning of the 14th century.Filiation: Cf. London, British Library, Harley MS 5508 and Or 5530, George Margoliouth, Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum, 4 vols (London: British Museum, 1899-1935; vols I-III repr. 1965); IV, Introduction, Indexes, ed. by Jacob Leveen (London: British Museum, 1977), nos. 399 and 400.Fols 1r-44rTitle: Bekhorot.Note: From 8b to 61b. The greater portion of the first chapter is missing.Fols 44v-72vTitle: 'Arakhin.Note: From 2a to 11b, from 12b to 26b, and from 28b to 34a. The two missing leaves after folio 66 contained a small portion of the 7th chapter and a larger portion of the 8th.Fols 72v-102vTitle: Keritot.Note: These folios are not included into the Sussmann catalogue.

View: bindings

223 images available

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Languages	Jewish Babylonian Aramaic Hebrew
Physical Description	Parchment codex of the 13th century. 102 folios. Dimensions (leaf): 305 x 255 mm. Dimensions (written): 235 x 185 mm. Foliation: 102 folios (+ 3 modern paper flyleaves at the beginning and 4 at the end). Collation: Ff. 1-101: 13 quires of originally 8 leaves each. One leaf is missing after f. 52, and two leaves are wanting after folio 66. F. 102 begins a new quire, the subsequent leaves of which are currently missing. About 1 quire is missing at the beginning. Condition: Defective at the beginning and at the end. Layout: Columns: 1 to 2. Ruled lines: 31. Written lines: 30. Each page on ff. 1-88 is divided into 2 columns of 30 lines each; on ff. 89-102 the page consists of a single column of 30 lines. Visible pricking and hard-point regular ruling. Flesh side and hair side distinguishable. Many marginal notes supplied by a later cursive hand. Binding: Post-1600. Blind-tooled brown leather. Modern BL box. Spine title: Tractatus Talmudici. Tres. Hebr. Mus. Brit. Iure Empt. 25, 717'. Scripts: Hebrew. Script (summary): Ashkenazi square script of the end of the 13th century.

Ownership

Acquisition: Joseph Leves (owner) purchased from him by the British Museum on 09 July 1864: inscribed, back flyleaf (i)v Date: 1864-07-09. Place of origin: Germany?. Date of origin: 1200-1299 CE.

Bibliography

George Margoliouth, Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts in the British Museum, 4 vols (London: British Museum, 1899-1935; vols I-III repr. 1965); IV, Introduction, Indexes, ed. by Jacob Leveen (London: British Museum, 1977), no. 402.

Hachi Garsinan Project (<https://bavli.genizah.org/>).

Th. Hirth, Der Mischnatraktat 'Keritot' nach Handschriften und Erstdrucken heraugegeben, übersetzt und kommentiert, Karl Eberhard Universität, Tübingen 1973 (Dissertation).

זוסמן, יעקבן. אוצר כתבי־היד התלמודיים. ירושלים : יד יצחק בן־צבי, 2011-2012. ע' 124, 1061

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